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The Politics of Female Friendship in Contemporary Speculative Fiction

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Résumé

Ce projet examine comment la politique et l'amitié sont actualisées dans la fiction spéculative du XXIe siècle à travers différents médias. Cette thèse aborde la manière dont ces relations interpersonnelles affectent la sphère sociale et le statu quo des mondes fictifs à l'étude. Pour orienter la discussion, j'utilise le concept d'autonomie relationnelle qui reconnaît l'interdépendance des individus autonomes et de la communauté en général et l'éthique du care qui environne la moralité comme étant relationnelle et contextualisée. L'utilisation conjointe de ces deux cadres me permet de discuter de la façon dont les amitiés sont propices à la participation politique. Le premier chapitre présente une discussion globale de *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985) de Margaret Atwood et notamment de son influence au sein du genre de la fiction spéculative féministe. Ensuite, dans une première section, je me concentre sur les notions d'autonomie par rapport à l'adaptation graphique du roman d'Atwood par Renée Nault (2019), que je compare avec la bande dessinée *Bitch Planet* de Kelly Sue DeConnick et Valentine de Landro (2013-2017). Dans une seconde section, je me concentre sur l'éthique du care en tant que processus pouvant favoriser des amitiés empreintes d'implications politiques en analysant l'adaptation télévisée de *The Handmaid's Tale*, produite par Hulu, et la série *Orphan Black*, produite par BBC America. La fiction spéculative permet d'expérimenter librement avec différentes idées politiques et de comprendre comment la société pourrait réagir dans des scénarios extrêmes. Ces expériences de pensée reflètent nos propres luttes et lacunes politiques et pourraient ultimement indiquer de meilleures façons de résoudre les problèmes actuels.

Abstract

This project examines how politics and friendship are actualized in speculative fiction across different media in the twenty-first century. This thesis discusses how these interpersonal relationships affect the social sphere and the status quo of the fictional worlds in question. To guide the discussion, I use the concept of relational autonomy, which recognizes the interconnectedness of both autonomous individuals and the community at large, and ethics of care, which understands morality as relational and contextualized. I use these two frameworks in tandem to discuss how friendships are conducive to political participation. The first chapter presents an overarching discussion of Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985) in its legacy to the feminist speculative fiction genre. Following, in the first section, I focus on notions of autonomy in relation to Renée Nault's graphic novel adaptation of Atwood's novel (2019) and contrast it with Kelly Sue DeConnick and Valentine de Landro's comic *Bitch Planet* (2013-2017). In the second section, I focus on the ethics of care as a process that can foster friendships with political implications by analyzing Hulu's TV adaptation of *The Handmaid's Tale* and BBC America's *Orphan Black*. SF offers the freedom to test different political ideas and to understand how society might react in extreme scenarios. These thought experiments reflect our own political struggles and shortcomings; ultimately, they might point at better ways to solve current problems.

Keywords: Friendship. Ethics of care. Relational Autonomy. Speculative fiction. *The Handmaid's Tale*. Margaret Atwood. Renée Nault. *Bitch Planet*. Kelly Sue DeConnick and Valentine De Landro. *Orphan Black*.

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List of Abbreviations

HT: The Handmaid's Tale

BP: Bitch Planet

OP: Orphan Black

SF: speculative fiction

To Olivia, who has been growing alongside this thesis.

Acknowledgements

Introduction

In her most recent book, *Staying with the Trouble* (2016), Donna Haraway poses the poignant question: "What happens when human exceptionalism and bounded individualism, those old saws of Western philosophy and political economics, become unthinkable in the best sciences, whether natural or social? Seriously unthinkable: not available to think with" (30). Haraway's answer to the question, like her title, is to stay with the trouble. For her, staying with the trouble starts with sympoiesis, which just means "making-with," standing in stark opposition to the neoliberal individual who sprung out of the ground like a mushroom, as Hobbes implied. Sympoiesis acknowledges that "[n]othing makes itself; nothing is really autopoietic or self-organizing," which is a "radical implication" (Haraway 58). Sympoiesis is radical because it destabilizes the myth of autonomy and individualism at the heart of neoliberal capitalism. It shakes our cultural narrative of the self-made, strong, independent, lone Man who ends up victorious by his virtue alone (such as Batman, John Wick, or any lone vigilante-type of hero). Sympoiesis forces us to acknowledge the women who birthed this man, the father who clothed him, the friends who played with him, the animal companions that provided comfort, the women who loved him, the nurse who helped him restore his health, the teachers who taught him, and all the other players involved in his life. According to Haraway, "Sympoiesis is a word proper to complex, dynamic, responsive, situated, historical systems. It is a word for worlding-with, in company" (58). Understanding the world through sympoiesis means fully recognizing that agents (humans and otherwise) are embedded in webs of connections through culture, history, ecosystems, and relationships.

In this web of sympoietic connections and making-with, there is a demand for response-ability. Response-ability, as Haraway explains it, is "the capacity to respond" (78), and it is the "praxis of care and response" (105), which means caring about and, to the best of one's capabilities, responding to the needs of others. Reframing responsibility as response-ability emphasizes the relational aspect of the word and, thus, of the agents. Additionally, responsibility reframed as an ability or capacity to respond to the needs of others shows that it can be learned and acquired. It also places responsibility in time, as our lives get connected with others and our environments change so do our response-abilities. Response-ability is an active engagement that arises and shifts from our being-with and making-with other agents in the world. In sum, Haraway argues that when neoliberal individualism and human exceptionalism are no longer viable lines of thought, we need to turn to sympoiesis, making-with, and response-ability to survive the troubles of the present.

This work is an attempt to demonstrate how Haraway's sympoiesis gets articulated by feminist speculative fictions. I analyze sympoiesis through the lens of friendships; thus, this thesis will examine how female friendships foster response-ability in speculative fiction across different media. Friendship is about making-with and becoming-with others and as such it relies on the logic of sympoiesis and not of individualism and exceptionalism. Friendship challenges the dominant individualistic narrative not only of our present but also of the speculative fictions I will analyze. The fictional worlds in question are not different from our own complicated present: rampant individualism, misogyny, racism, mass-extinctions, just to name a few of their (and our) troubles. My thesis will discuss how the response-abilities generated through friendships affect the social sphere and the status quo of the fictional worlds in question. Moreover, female friendship, when seen through a political lens, offers sites of resistance to the dominant powers in

the speculative societies in question. By focusing on feminist texts, my goal is to analyze the gender roles in the imaginary societies in question, which appear suspiciously like our own. I am interested in understanding how the hegemony of patriarchy affects women's ability to connect and bond with each other, particularly, how women overcome adversity to form friendships with each other that provide a way to challenge their circumstances. How can women stay with the trouble and make kin in the dystopian societies that they inhabit?

To answer this question, my corpus takes as a starting point Margaret Atwood's classic novel, *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985) and its contribution to the feminist dystopian genre. Atwood's classic novel continues to reverberate in contemporary fiction not only through its most recent adaptations, that compose part of my corpus, Renée Nault's graphic novel (2019), and Hulu's tv show (2017-present); but also by its undeniable influence in a wide-range of newer works. Thus, I also include in my corpus Kelly Sue DeConnick and Valentine de Landro's comic *Bitch Planet* (2014-2017), and BBC American's TV show *Orphan Black* (2013-2017), which share many of the themes and motifs present in Atwood's novel. I put these works into productive dialogue to interrogate our own troubled present. Even though my corpus presents a wide variety of texts in different media, they are similar in the way that they try to challenge and expose harmful gender stereotypes and norms. I also chose to work with a specific genre, speculative fiction (SF), because "the genre's aesthetic of world-building is ideal for rethinking social norms" (Vint, *Science Fiction* 113). The advantage of analyzing SF, then, is "that by imagining strange worlds we come to see our own conditions of life in a new and potentially revolutionary perspective" (Parrinder 4). In this case, the storyworlds I chose exaggerate already existing problems of our present, which force us to reconsider our own social norms.

The works in my corpus all have a wide range of female characters as protagonists. Their relationships are not always friendly or amicable. There are as many female heroes (Offred, Ofglen, and Janine in HT, Penny and Kam in BP, the Clone Club in OB) as there are female villains (Aunt Lydia and Serena Joy in HT, the AI in BP, and Rachel Duncan and Evie Cho in OB). Nonetheless, my focus is on the relationships of friendship rather than on the disputes or confrontations between these female characters. The reason for this choice is to provide a counter-narrative to the patriarchal myth that women can only bicker and compete with one another. Lizelle Bisschoff and Stefanie Van de Peer aptly describe that "representations of female friendships and relationships have often focused on jealousy and competition between women … [which] is evident in the patriarchal misogynist myth that women are each other's worst enemies" (90).[1] Examples of this inherent rivalry between women are easy to find in popular culture, from movies like *Mean Girls* (2004) to reality shows like *The Real Housewives of Beverly Hills* (2010-present). Another relatively easy trope to find in popular culture is that of the strong female protagonist who has no other significant female character to interact with in the plot. Again, examples of this are easy to find from Suzanne Collins's *The Hunger Games* trilogy (2008-2020) to *Star Wars* original trilogy (1977-1983).[2] Positive representations of female friendship are important to remediate the pervasive narrative that women are each other's worst enemy.[3] More importantly, my aim is to demonstrate that through these bonds of friendship women can find ways to oppose the oppressive societies in which they live.

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[1] For an analysis of African films focusing on female friendships, see Bisschof and Van de Peer.

[2] Katniss is essentially surrounded by men, most of her close intimate interactions are also two potential love interests, Peeta and Gale. For most of *Star Wars*, Leia seems to be almost the only woman in the whole galaxy. In the new trilogy, even though Rey has a much more prominent role than Leia had in the original, Rey is still surrounded by male friends: Finn, Poe and BB-8 (who despite being a robot is gendered as male).

[3] Alana Piper discusses the long history of the myth of women hating on each other and how it perpetuates patriarchy.

By focusing on feminist texts, my goal is to analyze the gender roles in the imaginary societies in question. I am interested in understanding the hegemony of patriarchy and its effect on women's ability to connect and bond with each other, particularly, how women overcome adversity to form friendships with each other that provide a way to challenge their circumstances. Moreover, the characters go through great lengths to form and maintain their friendships among women, pointing out ways of resisting the adverse environments in which they live. Ultimately, speculative fiction provides a fertile ground for testing ideas on the necessary steps for achieving the feminist project, as well as, glimpsing at a future without a dominant ideology based on gender inequality (V. Hollinger 128).

Speculative fiction (SF) and the feminist tradition

Any consideration of speculative fiction has to come to terms with the indefinability of the genres it comprises. Many critics have come to define literary genres, such as science fiction or fantasy, in radically different ways. The same can be said of writers of those same genres. As Sherryl Vint explains, "the term 'speculative fiction' attained currency as a replacement for 'science fiction,' which now seemed too narrow to describe the field of imaginative literature" (*Science Fiction* 75). I am deliberately using the generic terminology of speculative fiction because the hybridity or permeability of the boundaries between different genres seems to open more possibilities for analysis than clear and definitive limitations. This problem has been encountered time and again by critics dealing with science fiction, utopia fiction, fantasy, horror, and such. For instance, some contemporary critics choose to use science fictions in the plural to highlight the lack of unity present within this literary tradition (Merrick 2; Calvin 11). Some authors even decide to eschew science fiction in favour of speculative fiction, most notably

Margaret Atwood herself.[4] Speculative fiction, as the stories it creates, offers infinite creative possibilities, being present in a variety of media and having an undeniable impact on popular culture. Despite critics and authors' intense discussions on the boundaries and delimitations of genre literature, texts continuously merge and permeate the borders between these distinctions.

Mark Bould and Sherryl Vint in their book, *The Routledge Concise History of Science Fiction*, go as far as claiming that "there is no such thing as SF," because "[g]enres are best thought of as ongoing processes of negotiation rather than fixed entities that pre-exist their naming" (1). Thus, the very exercise of trying to create a monolithic definition to SF becomes a moot point, instead we should consider that there are "multiple and constantly shifting ways of producing, marketing, distributing, consuming and understanding texts as SF" (Bould and Vint 1). One only has to think about the ever-shifting attempts to classify the genre along different lines, for example, hard SF and soft SF, or Golden Age and New Wave. The stories that are told keep evolving and so the genre itself keeps having to expand its horizon to accommodate the new and creative turns that the texts take.

Once again, I turn to Haraway who, among other things, is also a SF scholar. Haraway's definition is the broadest I have come across and it uses SF as a versatile acronym that can signify multiple intersecting topics and genres. According to Haraway,

> SF is a sign for science fiction, speculative feminism, science fantasy, speculative fabulation, science fact, and also, string figures. Playing games of string figures is about

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[4] According to Marleen Barr, "Although science fiction is the most appropriate vehicle for literature and criticism for our time, writers and critics approach the term science fiction like troublesome nibbles fleeing a sinking starship" ("Textism" 431). Atwood's own reluctance to accept her work to be labeled science fiction demonstrates the contingency many authors feel with being associated with genre literature. Similarly, many critics inherently consider genre literature to be somewhat lessened. My own preference for speculative fiction as opposed to science fiction has more to do with the inclusivity of the term, than with a desire to eschew science fiction as "not literary enough," or not "serious enough."

giving and receiving patterns, dropping threads and failing but sometimes finding

something that works, something consequential and maybe even beautiful, that wasn't

there before, of relaying connections that matter, of telling stories in hand upon hand,

digit upon digit, attachment site upon attachment site, to craft conditions for finite

flourishing on terra, on earth. String figures require holding still in order to receive and

pass on. String figures can be played by many, on all sorts of limbs, as long as the rhythm

of accepting and giving is sustained. Scholarship and politics are like that too — passing

on in twists and skeins that require passion and action, holding still and moving,

anchoring and launching. (Haraway 10)

Haraway's broad definition is relevant for this thesis because SF for her is a cooperative play. SF,

politics, and scholarship, all areas of interest for this thesis, are seen as practices that require

interaction between agents. Raffaella Baccolini reminds us that feminist scholars should also be

wary of attempts to create a rigid demarcation between literary genres, writing: "as feminist

scholars, we might want to question the very notion of genre, boundaries, and exclusionary

politics and to investigate instead the intersection of gender and generic fiction and the ways in

which gender enters into and is constructed by the form of the genre and, in turn, helps to create

new texts" ("Gender and Genre" 14). SF has been significantly transformed by the female writers

that have used the genre to question assumptions about gender, sexuality and reproduction.

Ursula K. Le Guin, one of the most prominent women SF writers, has constantly

questioned why SF has not done more to challenge the current state of things, not only regarding

gender, but also political models, economic realities and so forth. Considering the subversive

potential of the genre, it is indeed surprising how many texts remain rather conservative:

The only social change presented by most SF has been towards authoritarianism, the

domination of ignorant masses by a powerful elite – sometimes presented as a warning,

but often quite complacently. Socialism is never considered as an alternative, and

democracy is quite forgotten. Military virtues are taken as ethical ones. Wealth is assumed

to be a righteous goal and a personal virtue. Competitive free-enterprise capitalism is the

economic destiny of the entire Galaxy. In general, American SF has assumed a permanent

hierarchy of superiors and inferiors, with rich, ambitious, aggressive males at the top, then

a great gap, and then at the bottom the poor, the uneducated, the faceless masses, and all

the women. … It is a perfect baboon patriarchy, with the Alpha Male on top, being

respectfully groomed, from time, to time, by his inferiors. Is this speculation? is this

imagination? is this extrapolation? I call it brainless regressivism. (Le Guin 210)

Hard SF, particularly those produced during the Golden Era of pulp magazines, are the texts Le

Guin so accurately describes as regressists. Writers from the so-called Golden Age are still

considered as pivotal to the success and popularization of SF, such as Isaac Asimov, Arthur C.

Clarke, or E. E. "Doc" Smith. Despite their undeniable success, Le Guin is correct in her

assessment of the conservative impulse behind these stories. On the other hand, claims Robin

Roberts, "[f]eminist science fiction can teach us to rethink traditional, patriarchal notions about

science, reproduction, and gender" (2). Inspired by the feminist movement, SF feminist writers

set out to question the status quo as a given and imagine how it could be otherwise.[5] These

feminist writers understand that SF is a powerful vehicle to explore alternatives modes of social

organization.[6]

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[5] Even a more traditional space-opera trilogy like Ann Leckie's *The Imperial Radch* (2013-2015) manages to
profoundly question gender while also exploding spaceships.
[6] This is a point that I will return to more fully in Chapter 1 while discussing Atwood's HT as an example of a
feminist dystopia.

Feminist SF tends to be similar in the way that they try to challenge gender stereotypes and norms, which usually are unquestioned by traditional SF, as the genre "has been slow to recognize the historical contingency and cultural conventionality of many of our ideas about sexual identity and desire, about gendered behaviour and about the 'natural' roles of women and men" (V. Hollinger 126). Veronica Hollinger explains that feminist theory is part of a conscious political agenda that aims at ending the hegemony of the patriarchy and SF feminists text reflect the desire to end or, at least, to expose the pervasiveness of patriarchy (126). Feminist SF is "a potent tool for feminist imaginative projects that are the necessary first steps in undertaking the cultural and social transformations that are the aims of the feminist political enterprise" (V. Hollinger 128); therefore, asserting a direct link between the politics, feminist activism and speculative fiction produced by and for women.

Like SF as a genre, feminism as a school of thought and political activism has no singular form or consensus. And like SF, it can be used in the plural to denote its abundant theories and approaches (Calvin 11). Feminism and speculative fiction intersect in multiple ways given the potentiality of the fiction to create and reinvent social structures. As such, there has been a consistent and rich history of feminist criticism of speculative fiction, in particular, science fiction and utopia. Starting with the publication of seminal works like Ursula Le Guin's *Left Hand of Darkness* (1969), Joanna Russ's *The Female Man* (1975), and Marge Piercy's *Woman on the Edge of Time* (1976),[7] and inspired by the second-wave feminist movement, criticism on feminist SF started to flourish. The ongoing interest in speculative fiction and its intersection with gender is clear by the prestige of the Otherwise Award (formerly known as the James

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[7] There are earlier examples of feminist SF texts, most notably Charlotte Perkins Gilman's *Herland* (1915) and Katharine Burdekin's *Swastika Night* (1937). Not to mention that Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818), which is usually considered to be the founding text of SF was, obviously, written by a woman.

Triptee, Jr. Award), which is granted to works of "science fiction, fantasy, and other forms of speculative narrative that expand and explore our understanding of gender" since 1991 ("Our History").

There are numerous book-length analysis of SF and feminism, such as Marleen S. Barr's anthology *Future Females: A Critical Anthology* (1981), which collected essays on authors like Ursula K. Le Guin and Marge Piercy, but also had essays by SF authors themselves like Joanna Russ and Suzy McKee Charnas.[8] Sarah Lefanu's seminal work, *Feminism and Science Fiction* (1989), was one of the first monographs to offer an analysis of the intersections of feminism and science fiction alongside a discussion on some key feminist writers. The rich history of feminist SF is discussed in Helen Merrick's *The Secret Feminist Cabal: A Cultural History of Science Fiction Feminisms* (2009), which traces a chronological account of SF female authors and readers. More specific works have also been produced, for instance, Sharon R. Wilson's collection, *Women's Utopian and Dystopian Fiction* (2013), gathers essays focusing on the utopian genre, particularly on writers like Margaret Atwood, P. D. James, and Doris Lessing. More recently, Ritch Calvin's book, *Feminist Science Fiction and Feminist Epistemology: Four Modes* (2016) uses epistemology as a lens to read contemporary SF writers such as Larissa Lai, Nalo Hopkins, and Laura Bynum.[9] Recent criticism also reflects the zeitgeist of the current sociopolitical context, as the collection *Ecofeminist Science Fiction: International Perspectives on Gender, Ecology, and Literature* (2021) edited by Douglas A. Vakoch demonstrates the concern of both writers and critics with the intersections between climate change, gender inequality, and late capitalism. This (very) brief list of published works in SF and feminism

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[8] Two decades later, Barr also edited a follow-up anthology on SF criticism, *Future Females, The Next Generation: New Voices and Velocities in Feminist Science Fiction Criticism* (2000).
[9] Calvin's monograph also considers influential SF authors already mentioned, like Atwood, Russ, Piercy and Le Guin.

serves to demonstrate the continued interest by critics to analyze novels that deal with issues of gender as well as the diverse approaches that have been used to do so. However, current criticism in SF has largely disregarded the theme of friendship. Consequently, it has also failed to consider friendship as a political tool.

Friendship

Although politics and friendship might seem to modern thinkers like two terms at odds with one another, Heather Devere and Graham M. Smith argue that it was not the case for classical political philosophy, in fact "friendship serves not only to provide political stability, but also alternative forms of community to the dominant status quo" (341). Ivy Schweitzer explains that

> The most striking revelation in the discursive history of friendship is its primacy as an affiliative mode and its public and political basis for civic community. The modern obsession with individual selfhood and sexual desire has obscured the fact that throughout the ancient world and up through the early modern period, friendship represented the highest ideal of ethical, political, and social development in the human sphere. (339-40)

Contemporary thinkers are starting to re-discover the ancient link between friendship and politics that was already discussed since at least the ancient Greeks, particularly by Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* (1959). One reason for the contemporary disconnect between friendship and politics, according to John von Heyking, is the loss of vocabulary that is specific to friendship:

> Friendship has been lost as a category of political analysis for numerous reasons, not the least of which is that we have difficulty even discussing what friendship is. Our popular vocabulary of intimate relations draws almost exclusively from romanticism, which

prevents us from even conceiving of such relations other than an erotic and bodily terms.

(15)

Unfortunately, we have lost some of the key vocabulary with which to talk about friendly love that does not immediately draw on romantic love, such as the Greek word *philia*. Another important reason for the diminishing importance of friendship is the rise of neoliberal individualism, as well as "privatized domesticity, and the normativity of heterosexual marriage," which leads "friendship's power as a model for *public* civic community and a salient cultural concept [to] wan[e]" (Schweitzer 351).[10]

Despite the apparent disappearance from philosophical consideration, in recent years, there has been a renewed interest in the link between politics and friendship, representing a move away from individualism and towards connections, community, and integration. Devere and Smith acknowledge that this shift in perspective is influenced by the feminist principle of "the personal is political" (349). The renewed interest is evidenced by recent publications such as P.E. Digeser's *Friendship Reconsidered: What It Means and How It Matters to Politics* (2016), and Danny Kaplan's *The Nation and The Promise of Friendship: Building Solidarity Through Sociability* (2018). The former presents a wide range of friendly relations from individual to institutional, while the latter presents a cultural sociological account of how friendships can help shape national attachment.

Of the Greeks, Aristotle's discussion of friendship in *Nicomachean Ethics* is perhaps one of the most influential works.[11] For the philosopher, friendship is essential not only to personal

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[10] I will explore the topic of neoliberal individualism more thoroughly in Part I.
[11] Another important Greek work is Plato's dialogue *Lysis*, which also focuses on friendship.

life but also to the functioning of the state (Badhwar 2003; Ward 2016). Peta Bowden writes that Aristotle's notion of virtue friendship[12] attaints "its characteristic political force" because it:

> understand[s] that the kind of affinity expressed in the intense intimacy of *philia* is also the 'glue' of political relations, holding states together by inducing harmony and like-mindedness between their citizens (NE 1155a23– 5). Accordingly, for Aristotle, the bonds of intimacy resound beyond the personal sphere providing the basis of communal congeniality; in its turn, the end of politics is the production of *philia*. (75)

The first problem starts to become evident: Aristotle's description of virtue friendship demands that individuals should be similar in order to pursue it. Not only him, but the tradition that followed with other works such as Cicero's *De amicitia* (*On Friendship, or Laelius*), and Michel de Montaigne's "De l'amitié" (*On Friendship*) all "assert that such friends of the highest order choose each other according to the elemental principle cited by many that 'like attracts like'" (Schweitzer 342). Unfortunately, ideal friendships then appear to be relationships that can only be achieved by individuals who have a similar "elevated status, virtue and, implicitly, maleness" (Schweitzer 342). Effectively, these accounts exclude mostly everyone who is not at the top of the social hierarchy. Moreover, it excludes the very idea that uneven friendships can even be forged between people who are not of equal status, or likeness, (men and women, rich and poor, etc), functioning to maintain the status quo:

> The stress on similarity in friendships thereby facilitates not only the strengthening of ties amongst those with power or status generally, but it also facilitates the strengthening of

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[12] For Aristotle there were several types of friendship, such as of utility, of pleasure, and of virtue. The last one being the most important one and the goal of one's virtuous life.

ties between men. They are thus a very important but insufficiently recognised element in maintaining the status quo in a society. (O'Connor, "Women's Friendships" 128)

Virtue friendship, which is supposed to be the goal of the ethical life, becomes an impossibility for mostly everyone, while also maintaining social hierarchies in place.

The second problem with Aristotle's description of virtue friendship (and those who followed) is the exclusion of women. According to Schweitzer, Aristotle "excludes women from the category of *philoi*, believing them constitutionally incapable of a fully rational, appetite-controlling intellect" (345). Remembering that in *Politics*, Aristotle clearly establishes that women are inferior to men: "the male is by nature superior and the female inferior, the male ruler and the female subject" (*Politics* 1254b). Their unequal status, for Aristotle, seems to bar women from entering into virtue friendships, since these relationships depend on sameness.[13] Although there have been numerous attempts at "rescuing" Aristotle's ethics to be more favourable towards women, the problem remains that if not completely excluded from the possibility of friendship and politics, then women are largely ignored by his writings.[14] Bowden recognizes that Aristotle, as well as other more traditional philosophers (like Cicero, and de Montaigne) present a view of friendship that does not include women:

feminist interest in friendship relations is impelled by the correspondence between the effective exclusion of women from the practice of ethically significant friendship in the tradition, and the relegation of women to social relations of secondary importance and to

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[13] There have been attempts at reclaiming Aristotle's conception of friendship to be more friendly towards women. Of note is Ann Ward's article, "Mothering and the Sacrifice of Self: Women and Friendship in Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*," which proposes that through motherhood women are included in the highest form of friendship and thus in the political realm. The problem with this interpretation is that it maintains the status quo of women firmly relegated to the private realm and contingent on women having to be mothers in other to have political power.

[14] For instance, see Freeland. Also, Bowden, in *Caring: Gender-Sensitive Ethics*, dedicates much of her chapter on friendship to discussing Aristotle's concept, even though she acknowledges his conception of philia to exclude women (62-77).

dependency on men. Aristotle's account of *philia* stands out as exemplary here, its direct

correlation between ethical possibility and social independence explicitly excluding

women from the highest forms of both realms. (85)

Because my focus in this thesis is specifically on women and their friendships as political tools to

change or subvert the status quo, Aristotle is an unfit choice, since at best his views on women

are problematic and demand extensive revisions and at worst his views are downright

misogynistic. Therefore, despite acknowledging his contribution to the understanding of

friendship as politically important, I have decided against employing his ethics as a theoretical

approach for this work. Similarly, other classic texts on friendship aforementioned that reject the

possibility of including women in their formulations are not part of my theoretical approach.

Female friendship, as this brief overview of Aristotle demonstrates, has been a topic that

has remained largely unexplored until very recently. Pat O'Connor, in her book on the subject,

Friendship Between Women: A Critical Review (1992), notes that "[u]p to the mid-1970s, the

topic of women's friendships attracted very little attention. In fact, it is hard to escape the idea

that it was systematically ignored, derogated and trivialized within a very wide variety of

traditions (including history, anthropology, sociology and psychology)" (9). Janice Raymond, in

an earlier work, *A Passion for Friends: Toward A Philosophy of Female Affection* (1986), already

noted the apparent invisibility of women's relationship. Raymond coins the term "hetero-reality"

to explain the phenomenon of women being consistently unacknowledged if alone or if in

company of other women. Within hetero-reality, not only relations between women are not

recognized, but if existent (as they surely are) these relations are rendered invisible by society,

such as Raymond's innumerable examples of groups of women being actively ignored. This

occurs because "hetero-reality has conferred social and political status only on hetero-relations"

(Raymond 9), which means that women together are a non-entity without power culturally, socially, or politically.[15] This view of women's relationships as irrelevant helps us understand why the topic of female friendships has been continuously ignored not only by society but also by theory at large. However, this landscape, as O'Connor pointed out, has been progressively changing, especially in light of the feminist movement.[16]

The feminist movement brought to the forefront notions of sisterhood and solidarity that have helped to jump start conversations and critical considerations about female friendship. Although long ignored, women's friendships have always existed and "[w]ithout powerful, chosen bonds of affection and care between women, feminism would be unthinkable, women's movements impossible" (Roseneil 324). In other words, the feminist movement is founded on the very notion of friendship and community between women. At the same time, however, "foregrounding friendship is a radical move for feminism, in multiple meanings of the word 'radical'" (Roseneil 325). One reason it is radical is because it forces us to reassess the very foundations of the hetero-patriarchal, capitalist systems that uphold our troubled present:

> The very existence of friendships between women sits somewhat uneasily in capitalist
> patriarchal societies where the 'reality' is the pursuit of power and profit in the public area
> and the existence of a heterosexual family-based unit in the private area. In Western
> society, although men are brought up to be independent and separate, there is the

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[15] In this same work, Raymond also coins the term gyn-affection to discuss female friendships. Raymond's work, however, falls short because it paints a picture of womanhood that is also based on an erasure of difference. According to Schweitzer, it is "a reductionist notion of sisterhood, ignoring the effects of inequalities in racial identity, class, sexuality, and status that emerge when women relate, ally, and organize across those differences" (356). It is also important to note that Raymond's views on transsexuality expressed in her book *The Transsexual Empire: The Making of the She-Male* (1974) are not compatible with this thesis.
[16] See also Roseneil on that topic.

assumption that women will be available to meet their emotional needs, without these

even having to be spelt out. (O'Connor, "Women's Friendships" 132)

Women coming together in mutual aid, affection, and companionship puts women's needs at

forefront and challenges the male-centric public sphere by demonstrating that there are

alternative modes of organization that do not demand a male presence to exist and thrive.

Women's friendships are also radical, because they can propose a relationship that is not

based on sameness, as the classical male-oriented discussions of friendship did. Leela Gandhi

writes that "'Friendship' … is one name for the co-belonging of nonidentical singularities"

(26),[17] emphasizing that despite their mutual relationship, friends should not need to be or seek

sameness. Similarly, María Lugones and Pat Alaka Rosezelle propose a model of friendship that

resists sameness and attempts to preserve difference in politically productive and powerful ways.

They discuss that the concept of sisterhood was appropriated by second-wave white feminists in a

way that inscribed it within a universalizing experience of womanhood that erased Black histories

and experiences. Lugones then suggests the term "compañera" as a way to preserve individual

particularities that does not erase women's differing and distinct identities. For the authors,

friendship must resist the impulse to create likeness, and, if able to do so, can become an

effective tool for the feminist movement:

> Because I think a commitment to perceptual changes is central to the possibility of
>
> bonding across differences and the commitment is part of friendship, I think that
>
> friendship is a good concept to start the radical theoretical and practical reconstruction of
>
> the relations among women. (Lugones and Rosezelle 141)

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[17] In her book, Gandhi proposes a postcolonial model of friendship that she describes as "anti-communitarian communitarianism" (26).

Thus, female friendship, for feminists like Lugones, Rosezelle, Gandhi and Roseniel, should seek to forge relationships across differences and preserve these differences intact. It considers people in their uniqueness and particularity and does not presuppose that friendship can only be built on the premise of "like attracts like." This, Lugones and Rosezelle contend, means that "[f]riendship across positions of inequality has to be worked for rather than discovered or found" (143). Rather than "falling in friendship," all the friendships discussed in this thesis have to be worked for continuously in order to start and/or be maintained.

Methodology and Thesis structure

Current criticism in speculative fiction has largely disregarded the theme of friendship as a political tool. And literary and film criticism tend to focus on friendships in realistic narratives, but not SF texts. Thus, female friendship in literature and other media and its political impact, specifically in speculative fiction, currently is a topic unexplored by scholars. The time is ripe for an in-depth investigation of female friendship, since there are more narratives being produced on the topic than ever before. These new works not only build on the tradition of seminal works on feminist dystopias, but are also influenced by current political events like the presidency of Donald Trump and the #MeToo movement. These texts reflect the anxiety and anger women feel towards inequality, harassment, and threats to their reproductive freedom. Feminist theory and activism has pointed out the importance that solidarity and community have to the political sphere, but this has been largely theorized within the social sciences and not used as a means of theorizing SF narratives. My thesis proposes to bridge this gap by providing a new way of thinking about feminist theory and its representation in popular media.

As for notions of friendship and specifically female friendship in literature, there are many critical works that deal with the concepts of community and female bonding in realist literature. That is the case of Nina Auerbach's *Communities of Women* (1978), Janet Todd's *Women's Friendship in Literature* (1980), and more recently Carolyn Oulton's *Romantic Friendship in Victorian Literature* (2016). Correspondingly, in film studies, the interest in female friendship is confined to realistic movies, for example, Karen Hollinger's *In the Company of Women: Contemporary Female Friendship Films* (1998) looks at movies like *Thelma & Louise* (1991). If a book on film and television takes SF narratives as its object of study, it tends to focus on the role of the female protagonist, such as the essay collection, *Action Chicks New Images of Tough Women in Popular Culture* (2004), that includes only a single essay on female friendship on the television shows *Buffy: The Vampire Slayer* (1997-2003) and *Xena: Warrior Princess* (1995-2001) (Ross 231).

Considering the ongoing interest in the overlap between speculative fiction and feminism, as well as the critical work being done to theorize friendship in realistic literature, it remains a gap to link notions of female friendship to SF literature. The fantastic and amazing worlds created in speculative fiction not only provide useful discussions on notions of gender (in)equality, but also provide new and challenging ways for women to connect and bond with each other. Through these relationships, we can examine larger themes of gender oppression, and resistance to said oppression. Ultimately, I am invested in analyzing how women can flourish through their connections with each other.

In order to discuss female friendship, this work is divided into two parts: autonomy and ethics of care, each with a slightly different theoretical approach that complement each other. The very first chapter presents an overarching discussion of Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* in its

importance to the feminist dystopian genre, its legacy through its numerous adaptions, and its feminist discussions. Following, in the first section, I focus on notions of autonomy in relation to Renée Nault's graphic novel adaptation of *The Handmaid's Tale* and contrast it with Kelly Sue DeConnick and Valentine de Landro's comic *Bitch Planet.* Autonomy has been a disputed concept for feminist thinkers: while some believe its conception is far too sympathetic with neoliberal individualism, others think it is a necessary concept for the feminist enterprise because women (and other minorities) have been excluded from acting autonomously for so long.[18] My discussion presents these feminist critiques and explores the notion of relational autonomy put forth by Catriona Mackenzie and Natalie Stojlar (2000). Relational autonomy challenges us to think beyond the framework of the atomistic bounded neoliberal individualism that Haraway warns us about and tries to highlight that it is precisely through relationships that people are able to exercise their autonomy. Jennifer Nedelsky explains that

> If we ask ourselves what actually enables people to be autonomous, the answer is not isolation, but relationships-with parents, teachers, friends, loved ones-that provide the support and guidance necessary for the development and experience of autonomy. I think, therefore, that the most promising model, symbol, or metaphor for autonomy is not property, but childrearing. There we have encapsulated the emergence of autonomy through relationship with others. ("Reconciling" 12)

Therefore, relational autonomy provides a framework that at once recognizes that people are embedded within networks of connections that can influence their own lives for better or for worse, and that it is through these relationships that they can be enabled to act out of their own free will. The oppressive societies I analyze, Gilead and the Protectorate, both curtail women's

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[18] For a detailed discussion of the feminist contingencies regarding notions of autonomy and possibilities of reformulating the concept, see Mackenzie and Stoljar.

autonomy, making it extremely difficult for them to forge friendships out of their own determination. Once women can forge relationships, however, they are also able to act in more autonomous ways, demonstrating that friendships can be sites that empower these women to act and be freer despite the oppressive societies in which they live.

In the second section, I focus on the ethics of care as a process that can foster friendships with political implications by analyzing Hulu's TV adaptation of *The Handmaid's Tale* and BBC America's *Orphan Black*. Care ethics, as Daniel Engster and Maurice Hamington explain, "points toward a more relational perspective on social and political problems that eschews simplistic judgments about right or wrong isolated from all context, for a more complete understanding of persons and actions enmeshed in relationships and situated in their environment" (2). Care ethics focuses on people in their particularities, thus providing a framework for friendship that does not demand friends to be alike. Furthermore, it takes into account that people are often not in equal standing and does not avoid dealing with imbalances of power. In caring relations, there is always a caregiver and a care-receiver that are not in equal footing, they each have to balance and accommodate each other's needs for care to take place. It is through caring that they foster the conditions for a resistance to the status quo to emerge: while in *Orphan Black* the clones crate a powerful *sestra-hood* to defy the control of Neolution, in *The Handmaid's Tale* TV adaptation, June becomes empowered through her relationships to actively work against Gilead's rule.

Friendship, then, is a means of engaging in politics, being political, and doing politics. Literature is a means of making us reflect on our own sociohistorical moment. More importantly, it is a vehicle to make us see potentialities that can impact our own worlds. To go back to Haraway one more time:

Each time a story helps me remember what I thought I knew, or introduces me to new

knowledge, a muscle critical for caring about flourishing gets some aerobic exercise. Such

exercise enhances collective thinking and movement in complexity. Each time I trace a

tangle and add a few threads that at first seemed whimsical but turned out to be essential

to the fabric, I get a bit straighter that staying with the trouble of complex worlding is the

name of the game of living and dying well together on terra, in Terrapolis. We are all

responsible to and for shaping conditions for multispecies flourishing in the face of

terrible histories, and sometimes joyful histories too, but we are not all response-able in

the same ways. The differences matter—in ecologies, economies, species, lives. (29)

Thus, SF offers the freedom to test different political ideas and to understand how society might

react in extreme scenarios. These thought experiments reflect our own political struggles and

shortcomings; ultimately, they might point at better ways to solve current problems.

1. Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985) in context

Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* was published in 1985 and has not been out of print since then. The novel imagines a dystopian future in which the USA suffered a coup, turning into the Republic of Gilead and being ruled by a religious fundamentalist group, the Sons of Jacob. Gilead arranges society in castes segregating people by gender, religion, and race. Plagued by infertility, one of the main goals of Gilead is to increase its population, thus women are particularly oppressed in this new regime having to obey strict rules of conduct and dress-code. The book is narrated in first-person by Offred, a Handmaid in Gilead who is expected to have babies for the regime. Handmaids are posted to high-ranking officials' households to try to get pregnant, and, if they fail to get pregnant, they can be sent to the Colonies to clean toxic waste. Life for the Handmaids is grim at best. Offred's narrative is fragmented, alternating between her life before the regime and her present situation. Slowly, the reader learns about how Gilead operates, how it came to be, and how they maintain people oppressed. Atwood's novel continues to resonate with readers, especially feminists, because it deals with themes of bodily autonomy, motherhood, forced reproduction, and oppression. All these topics remain relevant to this day because of the pervasiveness of patriarchy.

Atwood's novel has persistently inspired new texts and interested new generations of readers. In this chapter, I will contextualize the novel, and demonstrate its continued relevance to the present day. First, I will address how *The Handmaid's Tale* fits within the larger literary genre of utopia writing as a classic dystopian novel. Next, I will discuss the relevant historical and political contexts that inspired Atwood to create Gilead. Finally, I will examine the novel's multiple adaptations, and the reasons why some were more or less successful in translating Offred's tale to different media.

1.1 *The Handmaid's Tale* and the utopian tradition

The classic utopian text, which inaugurated it as a literary genre, is Thomas More's *Utopia* (1516). Classic utopian texts usually depict a traveller who accidentally discovers a new territory where society has evolved in a different and better way than the one the traveller knows (James 219-20). Tom Moylan describes utopia as "rooted in the unfulfilled needs and wants of specific classes, groups, and individuals in their unique historical contexts" (*Demand* 1). It is important to note that utopian literature is firmly rooted within its historical, social and cultural context. For instance, a reader encountering More's text for the first time in the twenty-first century will probably consider More's utopian society less than ideal. Although pre-dating SF as a genre, utopia is frequently considered to be a subgenre of SF. Darko Suvin, in his seminal work on SF literature, *Metamorphoses of Science Fiction: On the Poetics and History of a Literary Genre*, posits utopia as a sociopolitical subgenre of SF. For Suvin, the cognitive estrangement operating in utopia is a historical estrangement between the writer's environment and the environment envisioned by the text (63-8). Since its inception, the genre has "mutated, within the field of sf, into something very different from the classic utopia" (James 219). Utopia, then, is not a monolithic definition; it has been used to define varied, but critically similar texts. Thus, Lyman Tower Sargent makes several useful distinctions between utopian modes: positive utopia (eutopia) is "a non-existent society described in considerable detail and normally located in time and space that the author intended a contemporaneous reader to view as considerably better than the society in which that reader lived" (9); and negative utopia (dystopia) is "a non-existent society described in considerable detail and normally located in time and space that the author intended a contemporaneous reader to view as considerably worse than the society in which that reader lived" (9). To further complicate distinctions, Moylan uses "critical utopia" and "critical

dystopia" to refer to texts which present a critique of their respective positive or negative

societies (Moylan 1986; Baccolini and Moylan 2003). These nuanced differences between

utopian modes shows that the distinctions, even between positive and negative modes, are no

longer precise.

Whether in its positive, negative or critical form, utopia is rooted in a critique of the

current historical moment in which it is written. For Phillip E. Wegner,

> the Utopian narrative has the effect of both highlighting in a negative light many of the
>
> problems of the reigning social order and, perhaps even more significantly, of showing that
>
> what is taken as natural and eternally fixed by the members of that society is in fact the
>
> product of historical development and thus open to change. (80)

While positive utopia (eutopia) works by contrasting the current society with a perceived ideal

society and, thus, underscoring the shortcomings of the present, negative utopia (dystopia)

portrays a worst society to showcase how current trends could lead us into a nightmare scenario.

In both cases, writers are critical of the current underpinnings of society and provoke readers to

reconsider the status quo.

While eutopias seem to offer a glimpse of a better future, traditional dystopias seem to

offer readers a one-way ticket to hell without opportunities to turn around, course correct or even

resist. In other words, there seems to be no hope if society reaches the depths of dysfunctionality

portrayed by writers of dystopia. Raffaella Baccolini and Tom Moylan suggest that "dystopias

maintain utopian hope outside their pages, if at all; for it is only if we consider dystopia as a

warning that we as readers can hope to escape its pessimistic future" (7). Therefore, traditional

dystopias like Yevgeny Zamyatin's *We* (1924), Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* (1932), and

George Orwell's *1984* (1949) present all-powerful societies that manage to obliterate any form of

resistance by their protagonists. For these texts, the hope lies within the reader who can take the text as a warning and attempt to prevent society from ever reaching this point of no return.

Traditional dystopias, like eutopias, are also very formulaic by nature. Instead of a protagonist travelling to a distant new society, these texts usually begin *in media res* within the new social order which is usually set in the future of the writer's own present. The story begins when:

> the protagonist (and the reader) is already in the world *in* question, unreflectively immersed in the society. … Despite the absence of the utopian plot of the dislocation, education, and return of a visitor, the dystopia generates its own didactic account in the critical encounter that ensues as the citizen confronts, or is confronted by, the contradiction of the society that is present on the very first page. (Moylan, *Scraps* 148)

The reader is supposed to compare their own society to the nightmare society of the novel and understand the trends that could lead their own present into the text's future. In this manner, the dystopian texts function as much as a didactic text as utopian texts do, by teaching the reader to recognize the seeds of dystopia in their own present. Female writers in particular have found this genre to be effective to bring forth issues of systemic misogyny.

Female SF writers have a long history within the utopian tradition. SF, and more specifically utopian fiction, are genres that by design function as vehicles of social commentary and critique. Even within this potential revolutionary space, "[t]he utopias envisioned by male authors had not been radically different places for women, and through history women had and still have often been citizens of Dystopia" (Baccolini, "Dystopia Matters" 2). What female writers do very well is to unleash the potentiality of SF to highlight the negative impact gender roles have in their societies. Barr terms these texts as feminist fabulations because they "involv[e]

imagining alternatives to patriarchal imperatives" ("Feminist" 143). For Barr, "[f]eminist

fabulation is feminist fiction that offers us a world clearly and radically discontinuous from the

patriarchal one we know, yet returns to confront that known patriarchal world in some feminist

cognitive way" ("Feminist" 145). The cultural movements of the late 60s and 70s, and more

specifically, the women's movement, fermented a new wave of female utopian writing with

important works like Dorothy Bryant's *The Kin of Ata Are Waiting for You* (1971), Ursula Le

Guin's *The Dispossessed* (1974), Joanna Russ's *The Female Man* (1975), and Marge Piercy's

Woman on the Edge of Time (1976), just to name a few.[19] Russ demonstrates that several feminist

texts produced in this period "form a remarkably coherent group in their presentation of feminist

concerns," and they "imagine their better – and feminist – societies in strikingly similar ways"

(134). According to Russ, some of the points that these feminist SF novels address are:

community, government, ecology, class, gender, sexuality, and family. Russ observes that

feminist SF tends to portray a society without centralized government or class divisions, without

war or violence, and without gender differentiation (134). Moreover, feminist SF envisions

communities that are non-urban and respect nature; with equitable labour division, sexual

freedom, and non-nuclear and non-traditional family arrangements (Russ 134). Not tackled by

Russ, but equally important and present in these texts, is language, and the clear "desire to 'steal

the language' of/from patriarchy" (Stein 269).[20] The new languages or new uses of language in

these texts present reformations that reflect the shift in social values envisioned by these feminist

writers.

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[19] For an analysis of the similarities of these feminist utopian texts of the 70s, see Pearson. For more in-depth
analysis of other similarities between feminist utopian texts beyond the texts I mention, see Khanna, and Mellor.

[20] For instance, Piercy, in *Woman on the Edge of Time*, introduces the gender-neutral pronoun "per" to signify that
gender differentiation is no longer acknowledged by the future society of Mattapoisett. For an analysis of the use of
language as a space of both resistance and liberation by feminist SF writers, see Cavalcanti.

The positive utopian impulse of these feminist eutopias weakened in the 80s with the "neoconservative retrenchment" (Wegner 91), resulting in a turn from eutopian to dystopian writing. It is in this context that Margaret Atwood writes *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985). Despite working in the negative side of utopia, the concerns expressed by Atwood in this novel are remarkably similar to those of the feminist eutopian novels of the prior decade. Afterall, patriarchy was and still is a system that needs to be dismantled. Like the eutopian novels written by men that ignored women's position in society, Atwood notes that the same had happened with dystopian novels, because "[t]he majority of dystopias … have been written by men, and the point of view has been male. When women have appeared in them, they have been either sexless automatons or rebels who've defied the sex rules of the regime. They've acted as temptress of the male protagonist, however welcome this temptation may be to the men themselves" (*In Other Worlds* 146). *The Handmaid's Tale* then does not fully conform to the traditional dystopian model as per Zamyatin, Huxley and Orwell, starting by Atwood's choice of having a female protagonist.[21] Additionally, in Atwood's "hands the classical dystopia takes on a different quality … Atwood seems to be pushing the classical form to its limits in an effort to find the right level of cognitive figuration for the bad times of the 1980s" (Moylan, *Scraps* 164). For example, "[t]he discontent of the women and men in power," like Serena Joy's uneasiness with her domestic position or the Commander's nostalgia to a time when he could play Scrabble with his female partner, "turns Atwood's Gilead into a weak dystopia compared to the ubiquitous efficiency in the societies created by Forster, Zamyatin, Huxley, and Orwell" (Moylan, *Scraps* 164).[22] While the more traditional dystopias describe a society from which there seems to be no escape, Gilead

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[21] Atwood writes, "I wanted to try a dystopia from the female point of view - the world according to Julia [Orwell's character in *1984*], as it were" (*In Other Worlds* 146).

[22] Moylan is referring to E. M. Forster's story "The Machine Stops" from 1909 (*Scraps* 111).

is a closed chapter in human history as the "Historical Notes" at the end of the novel makes it clear.

Unlike the all-encompassing societies created by traditional dystopias in which the protagonist has never even known another way life could be organized, Offred remembers her life before Gilead came to power. When Aunt Lydia remarks, "Ordinary … is what you are used to. This may not seem ordinary to you now, but after a time it will, it will become ordinary," Offred realizes that Gilead counts on women forgetting that there was a "time before" their extreme oppression (Atwood, HT 38). Until a completely new generation grows up within Gilead, however, "memory, with the perspective it provides, remains a potent threat to authority" (Ferns 380). If Offred remembers in great detail her life before, then she "is only one of innumerable individuals who can remember the way things were, who can recall the outrages perpetrated in the name of the new order, who can contrast now with then and consider the implications of the differences" (Ferns 380). The access to this recent past plus the knowledge that Gilead is not a global society, but that other countries exist unscathed by the coup that took place in the United States, represent a true departure from the pessimistic scenarios explored by Zamyatin, Huxley, and Orwell.

Atwood often cites Orwell's *1984* as a direct inspiration to *The Handmaid's Tale*. Upon publication, critics were also quick in connecting the two works (Ingersoll 64). Atwood claims that her inclusion of the "Historical Notes" at the end of her novel is in debt to Orwell's "Appendix – The Principles of Newspeak" at the end of *1984* (Hancock 217). Her own reading of the Appendix, however, is much more optimistic than most of Orwell's critics.[23] For Atwood, the reader should keep in mind that Orwell's novel does not end before the appendix, "which is

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[23] See Resch 158; Moylan, *Scraps* 163.

written in the past tense, in standard English," and therefore "at the time of writing the note,

Newspeak is a thing of the past" (Hancock 217). If Newspeak is a thing of the past, then Oceania

is also a thing of the past, and the reader can rest assured that the Orwellian "boot stamping on a

human face" will not actually last forever (Orwell 274). Orwell's appendix, even if it does offer

some hope, does not tell the reader how the powerful party might have ended, or what this distant

future looks like, which are some of the reasons why critics are more reluctant to claim that 1*984*

offers much, if any, hope to its readers.[24]

Atwood's "Historical Notes" functions as a much more complete vision of a post-Gilead

future, and thus presents a more believable trajectory to the end of the totalitarian regime she

developed throughout Offred's narrative. First of all, the "Historical Notes" is fully

contextualized within "the Twelfth Symposium on Gileadean Studies, held as part of the

International Historical Association Convention, which took place at the University of Denay,

Nunavut, on June 25, 2195" (Atwood, HT 343). Professor Pieixoto's keynote speech aids the

reader in filling in some of the blanks in Offred's story, mainly the larger political context that

she was unable to know, because of her position as Handmaid. It also offers details on the period

after Offred's own life, providing a much larger historical context to the narrative the reader has

just read. These facts lead David Ketterer to term *The Handmaid's Tale* a "Contextual dystopia,"

because:

> Unlike the traditional dystopia, Atwood is concerned not just with the preceding context,
>
> the historical development – continuous or discontinuous – that led to the establishment
>
> of dystopia, but *also* with a succeeding *discontinuous* context, and historical development

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[24] Moylan considers the Appendix to give a very "slim trace of hope" (*Scraps* 162). Ultimately, the novel "delivers such a fulsome and uncompromising anti-utopian narrative … that it squeezes surplus utopian possibility out of its pages." Moylan continues, "[1984] gets caught in its own anti-utopian impulse and in its reception often goes no further than the social terror it begins with" (*Scraps* 163).

– unanticipated by Offred's dystopian discourse but implied without being described in

the "Notes" – that led, over time or abruptly, away from dystopia. (213)

The inclusion of the "Notes" points towards a society that has moved away from the totalitarianism of the preceding text and has reached a type of more evenly distributed social arrangement, with women occupying positions of power, and indigenous people's territories as hubs of knowledge production, for example. Critics have also noted that the talk demonstrates that the seeds of patriarchy still linger within this progressive future, indicating that Gilead might come to pass yet again, in a cyclical manner.[25] It is this ambiguity in Atwood's text that leads Moylan to position it within a historical threshold between the classical dystopian novels of Zamyatin, Huxley, and Orwell and the critical dystopias of the following decade.

Critical dystopias represent the next turn in the larger utopian tradition. Sargent, although coining the term "critical dystopia" as a companion to Moylan's "critical utopia," remains cautious of its actual development, pinpointing only one potential novel that seemed to fit its description: Marge Piercy's politically charged novel *He, She and It* (1991) (9). Baccolini identifies the numerous contributions that women SF writers made to critical dystopia, tracing this lineage all the way to Katherine Burdekin's *Swastika Night* (1937) and continuing through Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*, and beyond ("Gender and Genre" 19). Nevertheless, Moylan understands these texts to be predecessors, and chooses to reserve the term of critical dystopias to newer texts that respond more directly to the sociopolitical context of the late 80s and 90s (*Scraps* 188). Critical dystopias avoid falling into pessimistic despair and "therefore adopt a

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[25] Throughout the years, several articles have addressed how Pieixoto's talk is representative of a return of patriarchy. Remarking on the several sexist jokes Pieixoto makes, Arnold E. Davidson writes that "The grotesque transformation of women's bodies into passive receptacles for the perpetuation of the genes of the Regime's Commanders is itself grotesquely transmogrified, in the twenty-second century, into silly sexist jests" (n.p.). For more articles discussing Pieixoto's latent sexism: see Norris, Grace, and Caminero-Santangelo. For a creative response to Pieixoto's keynote speech set in the following Symposium on Gileadean Studies, see Doll.

militant stance that is informed and empowered by a utopian horizon that appears in the text"

(Moylan, *Scraps* 196). Additionally, "Albeit generally, and stubbornly, utopian, [critical

dystopias] do not go easily toward that better world. Rather, they linger in the terror of the

present even as they exemplify what is needed to transform it" (Moylan, *Scraps* 199). Some

examples of these critical dystopias are Octavia Butler's *The Parable of the Sower* (1993) and

The Parable of the Talents (1998), and Ursula Le Guin's *The Telling* (2000). Moylan is also

quick to clarify that the utopian tradition as a whole is on a spectrum and periodically texts swing

between more hopeful (eutopia) and more pessimistic (dystopia), while also producing more or

less critical and politically charged novels between these extremes (195). The turns and shifts of

the utopian tradition between eutopia and dystopia show that writers produce texts that respond to

their historical moments. Again, Atwood is correct in affirming that "Context is all" (HT 166),

which leads me to turn my attention to the context in which Atwood wrote and published *The

Handmaid's Tale*.

1.2 *The Handmaid's Tale* and its historical context

The United States during the 80s saw the beginning of the Reagan Era, the rise of the New

Right, and the anti-feminist backlash that aggressively campaigned to revert many of the

women's rights gains of the previous decades. The New Right movement "arose out of an

(un)holy alliance between neo-conservative ideology, monetarist economics, religious

fundamentalism and anti-federal regional interests," gaining popularity through national

television networks through "an appeal to common sense, traditional American values, and

people's fear of lawlessness" (Lauret 168). Soon, legislation that would benefit women and

minorities, such as the Equal Rights Amendment, that seemed like they were going to pass

suffered intense opposition (ERA was ultimately defeated in 1982). The New Right also mounted

an attack on abortions rights that were gained in 1973 through *Roe vs Wade*. Since then, and even to this day, abortion has been a battle ground between feminists and conservatives.[26] Within this regressive sociopolitical context, it is no wonder that Atwood decided that Gilead was most likely to take place in the US rather than in Canada.

The sentiment among the New Right was also very anti-women's liberation. The advances women made in the public sphere, like working outside the home, were touted as preposterous and an attack on the (white, middle-class) nuclear family. This sentiment is expressed by televangelist Pat Robertson, who claimed in a fundraiser letter that feminism is a "socialist, anti-family political movement that encourages women to leave their husbands, kill their children, practice witchcraft, destroy capitalism and become lesbians" ("Robertson Letter" n.p.). And Howard Phillips, chairman of the Conservative Caucus, who wrote that "to liberate the wife from the husband" breaks the family unit apart as "a unit of government" ("Letter to the Editor" n.p.). Taking their regressive rhetoric to the extreme, Atwood asks herself what if women really had to be confined to the private sphere of the home? How would that look? And, thus, Gilead offers one possible scenario to the regressive ideals put forth by the New Right.

Atwood insists that none of the mechanics she introduced in her novel were completely invented. Although she placed Gilead in the United States as a response to the neo-conservative climate of the 80s, she took inspiration from across the globe and across history:

> History, literature, and the present are in fact the intertexts of this feminist version of dystopia. The subservient role assigned to women in Victorian England; American Puritanism; the Inquisition's burning of books (with its repetitions up to the present) are

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[26] For a historical analysis on the rise of the New Right in the USA, see Blumenthal. For an account of the backlash against the feminist movement, see Faludi.

some of the historical events accumulated in the text. Gilead's obsessive desire to increase

the country's birth-rate is reminiscent of Ceaucescu's Romania. The régime [sic] itself is

a grotesque parody of the extreme attitudes of Christian and Islamic fundamentalism, and

of the conservative backlash in The United States during the 70s and 80s. (Rao 18)

Seeing the return of conservative politics, and understanding that history tends to repeat itself,

Atwood unites these different strands of the past to concatenate the Republic of Gilead. Not

escaping her keen eye is the feminist movement itself that also figures prominently in the novel.

Atwood's novel extends its critique to the feminist movement itself as well. In the 80s,

cultural feminists who protested pornography and prostitution, like the Women Against

Pornography group, found an unlikely alliance with the New Right that also stood against

pornography. Not only this unhappy association, but also the failure of the feminist movement to

combat the popularity of the New Right, seem to have further served as inspiration for the writing

of the novel. Moreover, Atwood herself has always had an ambivalent attitude towards the

feminist movement as a whole. *The Handmaid's Tale*, despite being largely considered a feminist

novel due to its dealing with topics germane to the feminist movement, presents a less than

straightforward embrace of feminism. A detailed analysis of the problematic feminisms presented

in *The Handmaid's Tale* is beyond the scope of this thesis. However, it seems important to

highlight a few of its concerning areas, since I am working under the notion that ultimately, the

legacy of *The Handmaid's Tale* is decisively feminist, even if the novel itself presents a rather

ambivalent sentiment towards the movement.

Atwood presents two versions of feminism, one in Offred's mother and her friend Moira,

another in Offred herself. Offred's mother was a second-wave feminist activist that participated

in women's politics, involving herself in women's marches, book burnings, and a desire to

advance women's rights. Moira is portrayed as a second-wave lesbian-separatist feminist, who

also involved herself in activism, being much more politically aware than Offred. For example,

Moira noticed that the fast changes following the terrorist attack on the USA's political leaders

would bring reversals to women's rights.[27] Conversely, Offred is presented as a sort of post-

feminist, who no longer needs feminism, because her rights have been won and are now

"guaranteed." Her mother reminds her, "You young people don't appreciate things, she'd say.

You don't know what we had to go through, just to get you where you are. Look at him, slicing

up the carrots. Don't you know how many women's lives, how many women's bodies, the tanks

had to roll over just to get that far?" (Atwood, HT 140). Gayle Greene observes that the

relationship between Offred and her mother, more so than Offred and Moira, serves to contrast

the second-wave feminism from the subsequent generation: "though the narrator is

condescending about her mother's feminism, it is the complacency of her generation that has

allowed the new regime: 'History will absolve me,' says the older woman, and it has" (206).

Offred does not pay attention to her political landscape, or involves herself in it: "I didn't go to

any of the marches. Luke said it would be futile," admits her, and this inaction is presented as

another reason Gilead was capable of cementing its hold (Atwood, HT 207). This *laissez-faire*

attitude towards feminism and politics demonstrates one avenue which aided Gilead's take over:

"Offered has, by implication, colluded in the emergence of Gilead through her own indifference

and when on the Aunts declares that 'Gilead is within you', this emphasises the way in which

patriarchal hegemony is maintained not by means of the force but through the ideology of

gender" (Wolmark 105). The lack of participation from Offred's generation in feminist politics

seems to imply that "Gilead has been brought about partly because feminism has lost sight of the

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[27] Once the Constitution is suspended, Moira warns Offred that "Here it comes … It's you and me against the wall, baby" (Atwood, HT 201).

larger issues and failed as an effective force in society" (G. Greene 206).[28] Offred's own

indifference as much as her mother's or Moira's active activism have aided the rise of Gilead.

Ultimately, "Atwood's fictional feminists are consistently ineffective," as both feminist positions

are framed as leading to the establishment of Gilead (Loudermilk 144).[29]

    One of the questions that Atwood gets asked most frequently is whether or not she

considers herself a feminist. Writing for *The New York Times*, Atwood replies that she demands

first to be given a definition of what the interviewer means by feminism. When considering if her

novels are feminist, she also makes distinctions:

> If you mean an ideological tract in which all women are angels and/or so victimized they
>
> are incapable of moral choice, no. If you mean a novel in which women are human beings
>
> — with all the variety of character and behavior that implies — and are also interesting
>
> and important, and what happens to them is crucial to the theme, structure and plot of the
>
> book, then yes. In that sense, many books are "feminist." ("What 'The Handmaid's Tale'
>
> Means in the Age of Trump" n.p.)

Like her understanding of *The Handmaid's Tale* as a feminist novel, Atwood remains ambiguous

about her own position as a feminist. Sarah Ditum points out that Atwood's reservations are

misguided:

> It's an answer that neatly shrugs off the deadening demand to make propaganda of her
>
> novel, but it's also not really so much of an answer as a slipping between two straw
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> feminisms. Feminism is neither the claim that women are perfect, nor is it anything that

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[28] Gilead's ascent to power is not the sole responsibility of an ineffective feminist movement, as Lucy Freibert remarks, "Atwood blames no one group, but indicts, by sheer exposure, those who espouse simplistic solutions that deny the rights and welfare of others" (284). For example, Moira's separatist attitude is also rejected by Atwood who understands that to get rid of patriarchy does not mean getting rid of all men.

[29] Several articles deal with Atwood's problematic portrayal of feminism in HT, see Neuman, Lauret, Loudermilk, G. Greene, and Callaway.

happens to be about women: it's a movement to dismantle a system in which men

systematically hold power over women and exploit them economically, sexually and (as

The Handmaid's Tale explores most obviously) reproductively. (n.p.)

Somehow, Atwood seems to be out of touch with the foundational premise of feminism: fighting

the patriarchal system, as bell hook's definition clearly states: "Feminism is a movement to end

sexism, sexist exploitation, and oppression" (xii).[30] Although it is true that there are multiple

facets of the feminist movement, there is an underlining consensus that patriarchy does real harm

to society, especially to women. While defining her sense of feminism, Atwood is strongly

against separatism, "Do you mean that I'm a 1972 feminist who felt that women were betraying

their gender to have sex with men? I'm not that kind of feminist," she claims (Conroy n.p.). She

is also against the exclusion of women from political movements, saying, "And I'm not the kind

that thinks that trans women are not women" (Conroy n.p.). Being clear about one's own

understanding of feminism is a worthy cause, but it should not mean a complete distrust of the

whole movement. From her interviews, Atwood's reservations with the feminist movement seem

to stem from a supposed feminist movement that puts women on a pedestal and forgets to be

critical of women's status as human beings as well. Of course, there is no such feminist

movement in the current days. Separatism, albeit existing within second wave feminism, is

indeed long gone. Intersectionality, on the other hand, constantly underscores that women's

experiences of oppression are interconnected with other systems, which means some women

participate in oppression even if they are themselves oppressed in other areas.[31]

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[30] And patriarchy is only one of several systems of oppression that operate within people's lives to varying degrees depending on one's circumstances.

[31] Also, it stands to reason that the pervasiveness of patriarchy is upheld by women themselves, otherwise the system would have collapsed long ago. bell hooks makes this point abundantly clear by saying, "all of us, female and male, have been socialized from birth on to accept sexist thought and action. As a consequence, females can be just as sexist as men" (xii). One only needs to think of public women who advocate for conservative ideals that ultimately

In the end, even if Atwood herself has reservations in endorsing feminism, and the novel presents a feeble version of the movement, it is undeniable that this text has inspired and continues to inspire new generations of women activists, writers, and readers, particularly because the novel deals with topics that of great interest to feminists themselves (like, sexism, bodily autonomy, and motherhood). The evidence for this is in *The Handmaid's Tale's* numerous adaptations and its recent successful TV show run that has amassed a number of viewers and awards. In the following section, I will discuss the novel and in relation to its adaptations.

1.3 *The Handmaid's Tale* and its adaptations

Atwood is no stranger to her literary works being adapted to a variety of media. Her novels *Surfacing* (1972) and *The Robber Bride* (1993) were adapted to film in 1981 and 2007 respectively. Six of her short stories were adapted by Shaftesbury Films into a TV anthology called *The Atwood Stories* (2003). Her children's book *Wandering Wenda and Widow Wallop's Wunderground Washery* (2011) was adapted by CBS into the children's television series *Wandering Wenda* (2017). Her novel *The Edible Woman*, and her short-fiction anthology, *Good Bones*, both have been turned into plays. Even Atwood's non-fiction has been adapted: her 2008 CBC Massey Lectures, *Payback: Debt and the Shadow Side of Wealth* (2008), were adapted by Jennifer Baichwal as a documentary, *Payback* (2012), featuring interviews by Atwood herself and other specialists like economist Raj Patel, ecologist William E. Rees, historian Karen Armstrong, and former UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Louise Arbour. Canadian director Ron Mann made a documentary, *In the Wake of the Flood* (2010), about Atwood's international book tour for *The Year of the Flood* (2009), in which she created a theatrical version

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diminish women's rights, such as Phyllis Schlafly, whose echoes are seen in Serena Joy. More recent examples include Amy Coney Barrett.

of her novel. More recently, Atwood's historical novel, *Alias Grace* (1996), was adapted into a mini-series by Sarah Polley to CBS in September 2017, which was later released in full by Netflix in November of the same year. After many years in the works, Hulu has recently bought the rights to produce a TV adaptation of Atwood's *MaddAdam* trilogy.[32] Considering their success with the adaptation of *The Handmaid's Tale*, Hulu's newest adaptation of Atwood's work is already highly anticipated. However, no other work by Atwood has been more adapted than *The Handmaid's Tale*.

The Handmaid's Tale has been adapted numerous times to multiple media. Its first adaptation was the rather unsuccessful 1990 movie adaptation by German director Volker Schlöndorff, and screenwriter Harold Pinter.[33] The unsuccessful movie did not stop other writers and producers from continuing adapting Atwood's dystopian novel. In 2000, an opera was staged by the Royal Danish Opera, by composer Poul Ruders, and librettist Paul Bentley. Following its Danish premier, the opera was performed again by the London's English National Opera, in 2003, by the Minnesota Opera in that same year, and again by the Canadian Opera Company in 2004. Also in 2000, John Dryden produced a documentary-style dramatization of the novel for BBC Radio 4. In 2013, the novel was again adapted, this time as a ballet by the The Royal Winnipeg Ballet with choreography by Lila York and music by James MacMillan. As a stage adaptation, Joseph Stollenwerk wrote a one-woman play that premiered in Cincinnati's Ovation Theatre in January 2015. In 2019, Renée Nault published a graphic novel adaptation of *The Handmaid's Tale*. Finally, the most successful adaption to date is undoubtedly Hulu's TV show

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[32] The adaptation was first to be produced by HBO under director Darren Aronofsky, but the project was not moving forward since 2016 (Otterson n.p.).

[33] "The film was an undeniable failure, grossing less than $5 million against a $13 million budget" (Gilbert n.p.).

by showrunner Bruce Miller, which premiered in 2017 and is still running with four seasons and a planned fifth season for 2022.

Linda Hutcheon, in her seminal monograph about adaptation studies, *Theory of Adaptation*, posits that some texts generate an impulse "to retell the same story over and over in different ways. With adaptations, we seem to desire the repetition as much as the change" (9). It becomes, then, a pertinent question to ask why the public wishes to retell and re-experience a story over and over again. Certainly, *The Handmaid's Tale* falls into this category of texts that continues to inspire a new retelling every so often.

Hutcheon focuses her work away from questions of fidelity, and instead proposes that one way to think of adaptation is as a process. According to Hutcheon, the process of adapting a work from one medium to another generates new modes of engagement with the stories being adapted. For example, "In the telling mode — in narrative literature … — our engagement begins in the realm of imagination, which is simultaneously controlled by the selected, directing words of the text and liberated — that is, unconstrained by the limits of the visual or aural" (Hutcheon 23). Therefore, when one is reading they are using their imagination to conjure up the text, and doing so at their own pace. The showing mode, in contrast,

> teaches us that language is not the only way to express meaning or to relate stories. Visual and gestural representations are rich in complex associations; music offers aural 'equivalents' for characters' emotions and, in turn, provokes affective responses in the audience; sound, in general, can enhance, reinforce, or even contradict the visual and verbal aspects. (Hutcheon 23)

Additionally, when one is watching a live performance or a movie, the pace is imposed on them by the performance. Essentially, the story is never quite the same in the different modes of engagement, because the experience it generates in the users are markedly distinct.

What Hutcheon understands as the process of adaptation regarding different modes of engagement, media theorist Henry Jenkins calls "multimodality." For Jenkins, the term multimodality, which was coined by Gunther Kress, refers to how

> different media involve different kinds of representation - so what Green Lantern looks like differs from a comic book, a live action movie, a game, or an animated television series. Each medium has different kinds of affordances - the game facilitates different ways of interacting with the content than a book or a feature film. A story that plays out across different media adopts different modalities. A franchise can be multimodal without being transmedia - most of those which repeat the same basic story elements in every media fall into this category. ("Transmedia 202" n.p.)

Thus, each new adaptation is not a simple recycling of the same story in a different media, but evokes different elements and different modes of engagement for the users. Both Hutcheon and Jenkins agree that "Any adaptation represents an interpretation of the work in question and not simply a reproduction, so all adaptations to some degree add to the range of meanings attached to a story" (Jenkins, "Transmedia 202" n.p.). This is true especially considering how each medium presents the story differently, generating a distinct reception that can emphasize aspects of the story in diverse ways.

Most adaptations of *The Handmaid's Tale* represent a move from the telling mode to the showing mode (with the exception of the BBC 4 Radio version, which is still an adaptation within the telling mode but from the written text to an oral account). These adaptations could not

be more distinct, however. While the movie makes use of moving images, actors performance, dialogue, and music, the ballet has no dialogues focusing on dancers performance, music score, and video projections. And the opera uses performances, singing, and projections to tell the story, while accompanied by a libretto. Even within the same mode, showing, there can be a wide range of performances to tell the same story, and each also creates a distinct experience for the spectator.

Another important point to highlight is the accessibility of each of these adaptations. As a bestseller, Atwood's novel has never been out of print, being easily purchased or borrowed from libraries for readers who wish to read the book. It also has been translated into more than 40 languages, which further increases the accessibility of the book beyond the English-speaking world. Meanwhile, the movie adaptation premiered in theaters over 30 years ago. The rather poor performance at the theaters and negative reviews from critics back then means that it is extremely hard for viewers to come by the movie to watch it now. As for the stage adaptations – opera, ballet and play – they are restricted in audience scope due to their live nature. Only viewers in locations where these productions were staged had access to them. Furthermore, stage performances are often cost prohibitive to the vast majority of the population, even if they wish to attend them. In contrast, Hulu's TV adaptation was able to reach a wider audience because of the nature of streaming services, which allows viewers to watch in their own time and at their own pace. Streaming services are less expensive than cable subscriptions and frequently offer subtitles or dubbing that increases their accessibility even more. Similarly to the novel itself, Nault's graphic novel is available at bookstores and libraries for readers interested in the story, having also been translated into other languages.

The Handmaid's Tale, despite carrying a profound interest in its story, is also a notoriously difficult novel to adapt. Atwood's story is told entirely in the first-person by Offred who narrates her life in an internal monologue without a clear chronology of events, often jumping back and forth between the present of narration and past recollections. The novel itself also has very little action, focusing on Offred's internal struggle to simply survive as a Handmaid within the extremely oppressive regime of Gilead. The telling mode, that is, the written narrative is particularly well-suited to tell these kinds of stories, while

> a shown dramatization cannot approximate the complicated verbal play of told poetry or the interlinking of description, narration, and explanation that is so easy for prose narrative to accomplish. Telling a story in words, either orally or on paper, is never the same as showing it visually and aurally in any of the many performance media available. (Hutcheon 23)

That is not to say that literature is in any way "superior" to other modes of storytelling. Simply, literature is well-equipped to present the inner life of characters, and to play with words and their meanings. All these elements are present in Atwood's novel, who as writer excels in crafting dense, private narratives. The adaptations that transposed Offred's story from the telling mode to the showing mode have had to grapple with the difficulty of transforming Offred's monologue into a coherent story that could be told via performance, dialogue, and music. Therefore, it makes for an interesting axis of analysis to see how *The Handmaid's Tale's* adaptations fared in doing so, especially the opera and the movie.

In a special edition of the University of Toronto Quarterly, several scholars, including Hutcheon, praise *The Handmaid's Tale* opera adaptation as a "manifest success" that "places it in a long line of works that managed to transpose well what is essentially a mode of *telling* stories

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into one of *showing* (or *enacting*) them" (Clark and Hutcheon 816). In order to represent Offred's interiority, the opera makes use of a double with two singers playing Offred simultaneously: one as Offred in the present, in Gilead, wearing her Handmaid costume, and the other as Offred in the past, "in the time before," wearing plain clothes. Together, these two versions of Offred sing a duet that serves to highlight Offred's conflict within herself. For Helmut Reichenbächer, "This most idiosyncratic representation cleverly externalizes the innermost private thoughts by dividing the inner battle between Offred and her Double. This trick is yet another theatrical sleight of hand used to adapt a characteristic element of the novel into an effective stage equivalent" (843). Likewise, Eric Domville asserts that "The emotional highpoint of the opera is the act 2 duet between the two selves" (876). Clark and Hutcheon also point out that the use of arias in the opera, which "sto[p] the plot action and allo[w] us to glimpse the inner world and thoughts of the character singing," gives the spectators "access to a shortened version of the novel character's interiority and even to her memories" (817). Ultimately, it is through the music score that not only Offred's interiority gets translated to the stage, but also how the emotional state of other characters are similarly conveyed to the audience, since, "[a]s in all opera, the music carries the burden of the drama, internal as well as external" (Domville 878).[34]

Unlike Hulu's TV show that decided to use voice-overs to transpose Offred's first-person narration from the text to the screen, Schlöndorff's movie adaptation decided against such cinematographic device.[35] At first, everyone, including Atwood, was pleased with Pinter's screenplay (Nischik 145). In an interview, Atwood claimed, "Harold Pinter is writing it, which is very interesting. If anybody can do it, he can. One of his specialties is scenes in which people

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[34] In the same collection of essays, Shirley Neuman's article argues that the opera adaptation ultimately falls short of translating Atwood's political commentary to the stage, particularly with regards to Atwood's critique of feminism (862).

[35] I will address Bruce Miller's decision to use voice-over for the TV adaptation more closely in Chapter 4.

don't say very much, but convey meaning anyway" (Hancock 217). However, the difficulty in finding a studio for the project, a change in directors, and in actors, meant that much of Pinter's screenplay got revised to the point that the final product, for Pinter, was unrecognizable (Nischik 144).[36]

Many reviewers seem to agree that Offred, played by Natasha Richardson, is an opaque, cryptic character. Even if the movie reveals Offred's real name as Kate, the story shifts from a focus on Kate as a storyteller to her as just one of an ensemble of characters. For example, Janet Maslin, writing for *The New York Times*, says "this heroine is essentially so passive and, at times, so dull. Ms. Richardson, alert and receptive as she is, often has little more to do than stand by and watch blankly as others impose their will on her" (17). Meanwhile, Sophie Gilbert notes that without access to Kate's interiority in the movie, "Offred becomes considerably more enigmatic and less human," which is a stark contradiction of the novel's focus on Offred as the protagonist (n.p.). In the end, "the film barely gives her more lines than other characters" (Gilbert n.p.). The result, according to movie scholars Hans-Bernhard Moeller and George Lellis, is that "In the screen medium's rendering from the outside, Kate becomes a less interesting character than Moira or Serena Joy, and this lack of a highly defined protagonist may be one of the reasons why so many reviewers have reacted coolly to the film" (252).[37] Nataly Zutter goes further claiming that "[Richardson's] delivery is all off. … Offred mostly seems bemused at her circumstances, never actually anguished. But she's also working with what she's given, which in truth isn't much" (n.p.). Commenting on the lack of access to Kate's thoughts, Zutter writes that:

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[36] It was one of his only scripts that Pinter did not publish (Nischik 144).

[37] Moeller and Lellis also attribute much of the problems of transposing Atwood's novel to the screen to Pinter's script (253-5). This is most likely an unwarranted condemnation, since Pinter himself did not agree with the finished product.

To add insult to injury, Pinter ditched any sort of internal monologue for Offred, not even

a brief narration during the opening and closing credits to bookend the story. What you

see is what you get—and considering that the Handmaids are punished for speaking out of

turn and can't even communicate with one another outside of coded pleasantries, losing

the insight into Offred's true thoughts makes it seem as if she doesn't have much to

contribute to her own story.

… The result, though sanctioned, was clearly *The Handmaid's Tale* as seen through the

eyes of two men: equal parts violent and erotic sex performed upon a Handmaid who tells

us no more than whatever neutral remarks she utters aloud. (n.p.)

The result is that Schlöndorff's movie displeased both critics and audience in its lack of emphasis

on Offred's story.[38] Regarding the happy ending of the movie, which depicts Kate safe in the

mountains waiting for Nick to rescue her daughter and join her, Paula Cooper declares that "To

depict Offred, as Schlondorff [sic] and Pinter do at the end of the film, as a comparatively happy,

reasonably safe, and definitely expectant mother – an Offred unconvincingly transformed from

parodic to actual Madonna – is to draw the teeth of Atwood's satire" ("Sexual Surveillance" 60).

The inaccessibility to her inner life, which is at the essence of Atwood's novel, effectively

transformed the story from Offred's narrative to someone else's story about a somewhat

mysterious and silent character named Kate who easily escapes the clutches of Gilead.

One major concern is that Schlöndorff did not buy into Atwood's premise from the start.

German director Schlöndorff saw this movie as his opportunity to break into American cinema,

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[38] Not all articles are negative towards the movie. For example, Rebekah Brammer analyzes the movie within a
larger tradition of dystopian films, see Brammer. And Amery Bodelson discusses the restroom in the movie as a
space where the women can actually be themselves outside Gilead's control and surveillance, see Bodelson.

but he was not convinced by Atwood's premise of a feminist dystopia, instead he saw a way to turn the book into a (erotic) thriller, which he hoped would appeal to a wider audience:

> "I [Schlöndorff] had a problem with the premise," he says. "I have a more optimistic view of the American future, so I didn't buy the political aspects. But as I got more involved with the constellations between the four or five characters, then I couldn't care less whether this was ever going to happen. … It's much more about women's fear of sterility, a woman's fear of losing any sort of independence she seems to have. It is very much about how your emotional needs may be exploited." (Forsberg 13)

In other words, Schlöndorff failed to understand Atwood's dystopia for what it really is: a warning against totalitarianism, religious fundamentalism, and rampant misogyny. Much less than being about women's fear of infertility, the novel addresses the fear of losing one's body autonomy. As journalist Rita Kempley writes in her review of the movie, "Schlondorff [sic] seems as uncomfortable in this feminist nightmare as a man in a lingerie department" (n.p.). By refusing to address the most important concepts present in the book, the movie falls short of the sociopolitical commentary the novel contains.

Hutcheon understands that adaptations always involve some degree of transformation: "Whatever the motive, from the adapter's perspective, adaptation is an act of appropriating or salvaging, and this is always a double process of interpreting and then creating something new" (20). However, the creation of something new can be more or less successful. Hutcheon suggests that "[p]erhaps one way to think about unsuccessful adaptations is not in terms of infidelity to a prior text, but in terms of a lack of the creativity and skill to make the text one's own and thus autonomous" (20-1). Considering these terms, Schlöndorff's adaptation transformed Atwood's dystopia so completely by failing to see the germane concerns of the book that the resulting

movie hardly resembled the novel. In and of itself this would not be a failed adaptation if Schlöndorff's movie, as Hutcheon suggests, was able to stand on its own. However, Reingard M. Nischik writes that "these major changes disappointed the group of knowing viewers … [and] the reduced thriller plot of the film also failed to raise the interest of a larger audience" (147-8). Ultimately, Schlöndorff's unsuccessful adaptation of *The Handmaid's Tale* is due to an amalgamation of factors, one of which was the public's disinterest in watching it.

The multiple adaptations of *The Handmaid's Tale* allow us to consider how the story itself changes through time. In the past 30 years since its publication, the sociopolitical context in which Atwood wrote the novel has greatly evolved. Hutcheon proposes yet another way to look at adaptations: through biology, as stories adapting to different contexts. She writes,

> To think of narrative adaptation in terms of a story's fit and its process of mutation or adjustment, through adaptation, to a particular cultural environment is something I find suggestive. Stories also evolve by adaptation and are not immutable over time. Sometimes, like biological adaptation, cultural adaptation involves migration to favorable conditions: stories travel to different cultures and different media. In short, stories adapt just as they are adapted. (Hutcheon 31)

Another reason for the shortcomings of *The Handmaid's Tale*'s Hollywood adaptation was its lack of suitability to its context. In the late 80s and early 90s, Hollywood was not preoccupied with an explicitly feminist text. Producer Daniel Wilson had enormous difficulty finding a studio willing to take on the project, as Nischik recounts:

> Hollywood in the 1980s was apparently not yet ready for such a radical statement on gender politics: "During the next two and a half years, Wilson would take Pinter [sic] script to every studio in Hollywood, encountering a wall of ignorance, hostility, and

indifference" (Teitelbaum 1990, 19). Reasons given for refusal were, among others, "that

a film for and about women … would be lucky if it made it to video" (19). (145)

To add another obstacle, no actress seemed interested in playing Offred. After initial interest

from Sigourney Weaver, who eventually had to back down from the project because she was

pregnant, Schlöndorff approached many American actresses without being able to find anyone

who would take the part (Nischik 146). He finally was able to cast the British Natasha

Richardson for the role. These setbacks demonstrate that in many ways *The Handmaid's Tale*

was not a good fit for the late 80s-90s Hollywood scene, as evidenced by the disdain from the

director to the political themes of the novel, the reluctance of actresses to play Offred, and the

almost impossibility to find a studio to produce the movie.

Since then, the novel's topics have been returning again and again to the mainstream.

With the 9/11 terrorist attacks that demonstrated the fragility of life, as well as the will of the

government to implement new laws in the name of national security, to the constant roll back of

women's access to abortion in the States, Gilead suddenly does not seem as far fetched as it did

in the 90s. Sure Atwood's context when writing the novel was different, but these developments

have helped the novel remain relevant throughout the years. Kate Newell explains that one reason

the continued interest in *The Handmaid's Tale* is

> a general feeling that the novel's themes reflect the political disease of a particular
>
> moment. Conversations related to any adaptation of *The Handmaid's Tale*, regardless of
>
> the decade, are likely to mention the contemporary political climate in the United States,
>
> and elsewhere. This sense of sustained relevance means that *The Handmaid's Tale* is
>
> almost always read through and against broad contextual lenses at the same time that the
>
> novel becomes the point of reference for that context. (34)

With the election of Donald Trump in 2016, the novel has felt more relevant than never. Not only did the Handmaid costume become a symbol of protest to women around the world, but also Atwood felt compelled to return to Gilead and publish a sequel novel, *The Testaments* (2019), which takes place 15 years after the end of *The Handmaid's Tale*. According to Atwood, the reason to return to the dystopian nightmare she created was, again, the current political climate. She says, "For a long time we were going away from Gilead and then we turned around and started going back towards Gilead, so it did seem pertinent" (Allardice n.p.). Hulu's adaptation also premiered within this context which led to increased viewers' interest in the show. Combining the correct historical context for a return to Gilead, the release of a new adaptation, a new sequel novel, and the highly publicized protests that co-opted the Handmaid as symbol of the oppression of women[39] means that *The Handmaid's Tale* is even more popular now than it was when it was first released.

The popularity of *The Handmaid's Tale* allied with the pervasive sense that women's rights are on the verge of being revoked has led to a new wave of feminist dystopian texts that respond to this current sociopolitical moment. Soon following Trump's election, both Orwell's *1984* and Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* saw their sales increase exponentially (Mayer n.p.). Women have witnessed in the last few years an erosion of their rights, especially concerning their reproductive and bodily autonomy, that makes the moment ripe for new dystopian writing to emerge. So much so that some critics question if dystopian fiction is really needed if it is so close to women's lived realities (Delistraty n.p.).[40] The new feminist dystopian fictions "raise

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[39] As Newell points out, "The political efficacy of the protesters dressed as Handmaids comes in the recognition that they are not Handmaids, but, rather, are evoking the status of Handmaid to prove a point" (52). The protests using the Handmaids costume took place around the world, from the US to Argentina to Australia, especially to protest against strict anti-abortion laws. See Boyle and Lavender.

[40] Cody Delistraty asks, "at what point the so-called 'dystopian novel' will become simply a reflection of the world in which we live" (n.p.).

uncomfortable questions about pervasive gender inequality, misogyny and violence against women, the erosion of reproductive rights and the extreme consequences of institutionalized sexism" (Alter n.p.). The contemporary sociopolitical context marked by abortion bans, far-right populism and rape culture fosters an "ambient fear that progress toward equality between the sexes has stalled or may be reversed" (Alter n.p.), which in turn fuels these works. Part of this legacy are the two other works in my corpus, BBC's *Orphan Black* and DeConnick and De Landro's *Bitch Planet*. But many more titles can be added to this list, such as Louise Erdrich's *Future Home of the Living God* (2017), which portrays a near-future in which the human race is suddenly devolving, and pregnant women begin giving birth to babies with bizarre genetic characteristics. Another title is Leni Zumas' *Red Clocks* (2018) that tells the story of four women as they navigate a United States that quickly outlawed abortion, and also IVF procedures, because of a new law gave fetuses the same protections as individuals. The new titles that deal with issues of reproduction, motherhood, and bodily autonomy continue to increase, showcasing the relevance of these topics to women, who see their rights being threatened daily. Understanding the context in which *The Handmaid's Tale* was written, its legacy within the utopian literary tradition, and the renewed interest audiences have in the story through its multiple adaptations, demonstrate that *The Handmaid's Tale* is a cornerstone of our popular culture.

Part I: Autonomy

We live in a moment in time in which the pervasive logic of individualism and exceptionalism has gone unchecked for long enough. Rampant individualism and speciesism have led us to the Anthropocene,[41] being pervaded by mass extinction, climate change, COVID-19 pandemic, war, polarization politics, police brutality, mass shootings, for-profit prison complexes, and so on. In human exceptionalism there is no room for non-human interaction, cooperation, or response-ability. In neoliberal individualism there is no room for relationality, community, or otherness. However, as Haraway reminds us, "Natures, cultures, subjects, and objects do not preexist their intertwined worldings" (13). This chapter will deal specifically with one of the old saws of Western philosophy: bounded individualism in the form of our cultural obsession with the autonomous self, and point towards a way to conceptualize autonomy that highlights our interconnectedness instead of our isolation.

To go back to Haraway's questioning that introduced this thesis, "What happens when human exceptionalism and bounded individualism, those old saws of Western philosophy and political economics, become unthinkable in the best sciences, whether natural or social?" (30), we see that Haraway identifies that when we talk about the individual we often talk in terms of boundaries. Similarly, Jennifer Nedelsky claims that our culture constantly uses boundary metaphors to define the self (*Law's Relations* 91). In law, boundaries are used to define both the state and the individual: one setting limits on the power of the other. Moreover, bounded individuals are protected against each other by their walls, which is one facet of Haraway's

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[41] Haraway prefers the term Capitalocene (which I also prefer), and she also proposes Chthulucene. However, Anthropocene has already gained a lot of traction in the humanities and thus it is widely understood without need for further explanation. For Haraway's full discussion on each term see, Haraway (30-57).

questioning. Later in the same chapter Haraway rephrases bounded individualism as "neoliberal individualism" (33) and as "utilitarian individualism of classical political economics" (57). The other facet of Haraway's individualism speaks of the homo economicus, that is "the free and rational chooser whose aim is to maximize desire satisfaction" (Meyers 2). Economic individuals are seen through the lens of the market: maximizing gains and pursuing self-interests (usually with little or no regard for others). Haraway then is criticizing a kind of individualism that is atomistic, isolated, and self-interested. Understanding this pervasive individualism is not hard, one only has to look at the figure of the lone vigilante in popular culture, like the Punisher or Batman, or at the capitalist myth of the self-made men, like Bill Gates or Oprah,[42] to see the enduring fascination with this type of character. In philosophy, this conception of an atomistic individual has also persisted. For example, Hobbes viewed men in the state of nature as coming out of the earth fully formed, like mushrooms (qtd in Benhabib 161).

Neoliberal individualism posits people as atoms:[43] somehow free, autonomous entities without a need for social connections. Moreover, social relationships are seen as threatening to the freedom of individuals, therefore there is a need to set up clear boundaries between society and the self.[44] In order to achieve this coveted level of freedom, one needs to be autonomous. Autonomy becomes equaled with unprecedented freedom from outside influence. Haraway's question denunciates this long-standing way of thinking that has led us to the troubled present we

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[42] Forbes has a self-made score. In this case, Bill Gates' score is 8, which means, "[s]elf-made who came from a middle- or upper-middle-class background"; while Oprah's score is 10, that is, "[s]elf-made who not only grew up poor but also overcame significant obstacles" (Fontevecchia n.p.).

[43] The notion of atomism is further developed by Charles Taylor. He writes: "The term 'atomism' is used loosely to characterize the doctrines of social contract theory which arose in the seventeenth century and also successor doctrines which may not have made use of the notion of social contract but which inherited a vision of society as in some sense constituted by individuals for the fulfilment of ends which were primarily individual" (187). See Taylor.

[44] For an in-depth argument on this point, see Nedelsky, *Law's Relations* (91-117).

face today. We live in pursue of a myth of autonomy: a goal we desperately strive towards, but that it is ill placed.

Instead of opposing autonomy with community, Haraway formulates two concepts that stand in relation: sympoiesis and autopoeisis. Autopoeisis is associated with autonomy, in the form of a self-sustaining system. Meanwhile, sympoeisis is associated with communities, integrated networks, and making-with. The two terms, however, are not mutually exclusive, as Haraway puts it, "As long as autopoiesis does not mean self-sufficient 'self making,' autopoiesis and sympoiesis, foregrounding and backgrounding different aspects of systemic complexity, are in generative friction, or generative enfolding, rather than opposition" (61). Autonomy, while seen as threatened by communities, is actually embedded in their network. In Haraway's conception autonomy and community are interconnected.

The concept of relational autonomy recognizes the interconnectedness of both autonomous individuals and the community at large. This concept differs significantly from the neoliberal goal of autonomy. By focusing on communities and relationships, relational autonomy presents autonomy in light of those networks. Relational autonomy is firmly linked to the ethics of care, which will be focus of Part II, because of the shift in focus away from isolated selves and towards social connections. According to Marian Barnes, the popularity of the ethics of care itself and also of relational autonomy "evidences a hunger to develop a robust alternative to the individualising and ultimately sterile dominance of the autonomous subject of neo-liberalism" (183). In this chapter, I will first present an overview of the feminist critiques of neoliberal autonomy. Next, I will present the reformulation of autonomy into relational autonomy, and its relevance to my consideration of friendships.

1. Feminist critiques of autonomy

According to Friedman, "Recent feminist philosophy has engaged in a love-hate relationship with autonomy" (*Autonomy* 82). On one hand, for some feminists, autonomy is a valued concept because it is seen as a necessary competence women need in order to free themselves from patriarchy. On the other hand, for other feminists, autonomy is not such a useful concept to begin with because humans are essentially social creatures who are embedded in their relationships. Mainstream accounts see the autonomous individual as a self-sufficient agent, ignoring the human need for connection, community, and relationships, which is the crux of the problem for feminist scholars. Friedman explains that feminist philosophers see the most traditional views on autonomy as "overly individualistic" because they "presupos[e] that selves are asocial atoms, ignor[e] the importance of social relationships, and promot[e] the sort of independence that involves disconnection from close interpersonal involvement with others" (*Autonomy* 82). These mainstream conceptions of autonomy are firmly grounded on liberal political theory; however, they were not brought forth by liberalism, instead starting much earlier with social contract theories, such as Hobbes's.

Social contract theory was conceived to protect individuals from the collective. Without the social contract, men are in the "state of nature," which according to Hobbes is "but a mere war of all against all" (De Cive, Preface, Para. 3/10, p. 32, mp. XIV). The state of nature is "a powerful metaphor," that conveys the message that "in the beginning man was alone" (Benhabib 160-1). Because man is alone, he has to fight with others just to get by every day. Benhabib explains that "[t]he state-of-nature metaphor provides a vision of the autonomous self" as a "narcissist who sees the world in his own image; who has no awareness of the limits of his own desires and passions; and who cannot see himself through the eyes of another" (161). The state of

nature being a state of constant war signals the inability of men to simply cooperate, have empathy, or trust others.

However, this picture of the state of nature does not seem credible. How about lovers? Or parents? Or children? Wouldn't a man be related to someone who they can trust? Hobbes tries to circumvent this by saying, "Let us return again to the state of nature, and consider men as if but even now sprung out of the earth, and suddenly (like mushrooms) come to full maturity, without all kind of engagement to each other" (De Cive, Ch. 8, p. 117 mp. 108). If men are indeed like mushrooms and are not born into family units and socialized in some sort of community, then, of course, that the state of nature might indeed be terrifying. According to Benhabib, this distorted picture "of men as mushrooms is an ultimate picture of autonomy" (161). As far-fetched as this picture seems, it has endured in our cultural imaginaries. Because not having to depend on or answer to anyone and being completely free to choose and do whatever one wants, is what we imagine autonomy to be.

Springing out of the ground "fully formed" and not forming any emotional or social connections, implies that women are not present in the state of nature (or anywhere else). The world painted by Hobbes is purely male: women are not even needed to generate new life. Benhabib describes the world of the autonomous, mushroom-like men as:

> a strange world: it is one in which individuals are grown up before they are even born; in which boys are men before they have been children; a world where neither mother, nor her sister, nor wife exist. … The point is that in this universe, the experience of the early modern female has no place. Women are simply what men are not. Women are not autonomous, independent, and aggressive but nurturant, not competitive but giving, not public but private. The world of the female is constituted by a series of negations. *She* is

simply what *he* happens not to be. Her identity becomes defined by a lack – the lack of

autonomy, the lack of independence, the lack of the phallus. (162)

Women are only implied from their absence in social contract theory. Autonomy becomes a

concept not used for women at all. Women are not even present in the state of nature, which

Benhabib associates with the public realm. Maybe women are still trapped in the ground (the

private realm) springing men out of it so that men can participate in public life.

In simple terms, autonomy means self-determination. Nedelsky argues that "[t]he image

of humans as self-determining creatures nevertheless remains one of the most powerful

dimensions of liberal thought" ("Reconceiving" 8). Autonomy constructed on the terms of the

self-determining individual seems like a worthy goal. Nevertheless, once it pits man against man

in a constant war, it does not seem as appealing as before. Liberalism, following Hobbes's

formulation of the social contract, understands autonomy on individualistic terms, which

Nedelsky claims is a "pathological conception of autonomy as boundaries against others"

("Reconceiving" 13).

Nedelsky notices that boundary metaphors are used in a wide range of discourses, from

child development to constitutional law (*Law's Relations* 114). Boundaries establish a division

between the self and the state, as well as a segregation between other selves. The result, argues

Nedelsky, is a false dichotomy between autonomy and collectivity ("Reconceiving" 12). For her,

This dichotomy is grounded in the deeply ingrained sense that individual autonomy is to

be achieved by erecting a wall (of rights) between the individual and those around him.

Property … is, not surprisingly, the central symbol for this vision of autonomy, for it can

both literally and figuratively provide the necessary walls. *The most perfectly autonomous*

man is thus the most perfectly isolated. … This vision of the autonomous individual as

one securely isolated from his threatening fellows seems to me to be a pathology that has

profoundly affected western societies for several centuries. ("Reconceiving" 12, emphasis

added)

Once again, man is thought to be alone. If in the state of nature, man was alone because he could

not trust anyone, now in social life, man protects himself (from the power of the state and

invasion of others) through property but remains alone. Nedelsky sees this formulation of

autonomy as pathological and, following Haraway's thinking, it is hard to argue otherwise: this

old saw of western philosophy has led us to a very troubled present indeed.

Despite all the negative connotations identified so far, to be autonomous has been a long-

standing goal for individuals (mainly men) in Western societies. Lorraine Code claims that "The

autonomous moral agent is the undoubted hero of philosophical moral and political discourse: the

person – indeed, more accurately, the man – whose conduct and attributes demonstrate the

achievement of moral maturity and goodness" (*What...?* 72-3). For instance, in Kantian terms, the

autonomous man is the one who has devised a strong moral code and is able to rationally abide

by it.[45] According to Code, the necessary characteristics of an autonomous agent are:

> self-sufficient, independent, and self-reliant, a self-realizing individual who directs his
>
> efforts toward maximizing his personal gains. His independence is under constant threat
>
> from other (equally self-serving) individuals: hence he devises rules to protect himself
>
> from intrusion. Talk of rights, rational self-interest, and efficiency permeates his moral,
>
> social, and political discourse. In short, there has been a gradual alignment of autonomy
>
> and individualism. (*What...?* 77-8)

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[45] I will return to Kant's conception of morality when I discuss care ethics in Part II.

Code's quote touches on several points that have been discussed in this section so far. First, the lurking state of nature which demands security from others in the form of boundaries that protect the self. Second, since others cannot be trusted, the autonomous man has to rely solely on his own devices by being self-interested and self-sustaining. Once again, the feminist critique points towards the erroneous conflation between autonomy and individualism, especially neoliberal individualism that is intrinsically attached to the logics of market.

With this brief overview of the problems feminists find in the concept of autonomy I have hoped to make it clear that one central aspect of this critique is the increasing equivalence between autonomy and individuality. These two concepts seem to overlap as if they were synonymous. A second problem with the notion of autonomy is the emphasis on men with the obvious exclusion of women. The autonomous individual also seems to stand in for White Western men of a certain economical affluence. Code explains that this is the starting point of much philosophical theory: "It has generated a social-political-epistemic imaginary visibly peopled by the self-reliant rational maximizer, the autonomous moral agent, the disinterested abstract knower, and the rational economic man of late capitalism, to mention the most familiar tropes; and invisibly peopled by less consequential, because less perfectly autonomous, Others" ("Perversion" 185). Therefore, the current view of autonomy excludes most people.

Even though most people do not fit in traditional views of autonomy, our culture presents it as the ultimate achievement someone can strive for. Autonomy is posited "as though its possibility and desirability were *hors de question*" (Code, "Perversion" 183). Society leads us to believe that everyone is excitedly pursuing their autonomy. The first problem being that obviously not everyone wants to be the perfectly isolated individual protected by the walls of a private property. Secondly, even if one wants autonomy, said goal is not achievable to a large

portion of the population, most notably women, who are responsible for most of the family rearing labour.

The feminist critiques that I have been presenting so far focus on philosophical constructions of autonomy from quite a while ago, such as Hobbes or Kant. Friedman identifies that, in our current society, the overly restricted view of autonomy is perpetuated by popular culture rather than by philosophy (*Autonomy* 92). [46] Similarly, Nedelsky identified that the stronghold of the boundary metaphor goes beyond philosophy or law demonstrating that our thinking is inherently restricted by the wide use of this metaphor. According to Friedman the true target of feminist critiques of autonomy should be popular culture, because:

> Popular culture has long lionized the self-made man, the ruthlessly aggressive entrepreneur who climbs over the backs of his competitors to become a "captain of industry;" the rugged individualist, the loner, the "Marlboro man" fighting cattle rustlers out on the open range; and the he-man, the muscle-bound "superhero" avenging his way to vigilante "justice." These male figures tend to be independent, self-reliant, aggressive, and overpowering. Often they defy established authorities and institutions to accomplish their goals. (*Autonomy* 92)

Popular culture, unlike philosophy, is consumed more frequently and by a much wider audience, thus, having more impact in our daily lives. Friedman exposes only some of the frequent tropes we routinely see or read in pop culture and that point towards individualistic autonomy as a legitimate goal for men. As usual, the picture of the lone, vigilante, or self-made woman is rare or

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[46] Friedman cites philosophers such as Gerald Dworkin, Thomas E. Hill Jr., Lawrence Haworth and Joel Feinberg, among others, who conceptualize autonomy to be fully compatible with relationships and community. I would add to this list Charles Taylor in the supra note 41.

non-existent.[47] Friedman continues, "What we have here is a cultural glorification of men (but seldom of women) who are independent, self-reliant, aggressive individuals who defy and defeat the social actors who try to control them or make them settle down to conventional lives. At a minimum, feminists are critical of the cultural glorification of male figures such as these." (*Autonomy* 92-3). Friedman emphasizes the need to stop perpetuating images of autonomy as they are currently portrayed in popular culture.

In sum, the feminist critiques of autonomy highlight two important aspects: the conflation with individualism and the exclusion of others. It becomes a very restricted concept, but it remains a standard of maturity, and a goal for most people living in western societies. Most feminist scholars think that there is something about autonomy that remains a valid concept, thus, it should not be completely thrown out of the philosophical window. Mainly, autonomy is a worthy goal to strive for in the face of oppression. Especially when the histories of non-male, non-white, and non-rich others are pervaded by a lack of agency. Having autonomy over their lives in the sense of deciding for themselves without coercive influence is vital.

2. Relational Autonomy

A third stream of feminist philosophers recognize autonomy as an important concept, but that it needs to be conceptualized in a way that highlights relationships and not mere individuality. This third stream falls under the umbrella of relational autonomy, which aims at maintaining the importance of autonomy but also emphasizing the relational aspect of the self. Catriona Mackenzie and Natalie Stojlar in their seminal anthology, *Relational Autonomy:*

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[47] It is, however, becoming more prevalent. Think of the trope of the "Girl boss," who is effectively a self-made woman entering into the capitalist arena and effectively maintaining the status quo. The simple gender inversion of these tropes does not serve to dismantle them, only to further enshrine the neoliberal individualistic logic further.

Feminist Perspectives on Autonomy, Agency, and the Social Self (2000), present some of the

multiple ways that autonomy can be conceptualized considering relationality. The sole agreement

in their collection of essays is that autonomy and relationships are to be thought in tandem

through a feminist lens. This section will discuss how only certain types of relationships foster

autonomy, especially friendships.

One key point is that not all relationships promote autonomy. Friedman explains that,

"Social relationships can either promote or hinder the development of autonomy competency

(e.g., through the right or wrong kinds of socialization), and they can either permit or obstruct its

exercise (e.g., by enlarging or constricting the range of someone's choices)" (*Autonomy* 96). In

other words, not all relationships are healthy and autonomy inducing; thus, being embedded in

relations is no guarantee of autonomy, especially because "[t]he connection between autonomy

and the 'social' … is manifold and diverse. Social relationships are, after all, a highly varied lot"

(Friedman, *Autonomy* 95). It is easy to think of relationships that hinder autonomy, such as,

abusive husbands, jealous mothers, possessive friends, or exploitative bosses. Those same

relationships could also foster autonomy if they were supportive husbands, trusting mothers,

understanding friends, or inspiring bosses. The quality of the relationships matter.

Autonomy is generated by and leads to better relationships. According to Code,

"Relationships without autonomy can be claustrophobic and exploitative, … but ideals of

autonomy have generated an autonomy-obsession that serves no one well" (*What...?* 73). The

aforementioned examples of "toxic" relationships are ones in which one party exerts power over

another, hence, diminishing one's autonomy. When two or more parties have a degree of

autonomy not only does the relationship improve, but everyone becomes better at exercising and

developing their autonomy. The autonomy-obsession pointed out by Code red flags what I have

exposed in the previous section, namely, the over emphasis on autonomy as individuality.

Relational autonomy then is a matter of distinguishing between the quality of the relationships

that further autonomy. Friedman specifies that, "we need an account that explores how social

relationships both promote and hinder the realization of autonomy. Representing these two sorts

of effects with roughly accurate proportionality is, however, a formidable project. Matters of

degree are notoriously difficult to specify philosophically" (*Autonomy* 96). Understanding

autonomy in the context of relationships is a nuanced endeavour.

Nedelsky understands autonomy as a capacity that can be learned rather than a trait one

either possesses or not; she writes of one "'becoming' autonomous" ("Reconceiving" 10).

Nedelsky continues:

> This capacity must be continually developed; it can flourish or become moribund
>
> throughout one's life. What is essential to the development of autonomy is not protection
>
> against intrusion, but constructive relationship. The central question then for inquiries into
>
> autonomy (legal or otherwise) is how to structure relationships so that they foster rather
>
> than undermine autonomy. (*Law's Relations* 98)

Nedelsky champions an understanding of autonomy that is rooted in relationships not in

boundaries. Furthermore, viewing autonomy as a capacity that is developed rather than an end

goal adjusts the overly individualistic trend of autonomy towards a more socially integrated view.

Expanding from personal relationships to institutional relationships, such as those between state

agencies, and communities and people, autonomy can be fostered by caring institutions.

Nedelsky claims that "[t]he model for autonomy must be integration, not isolation. The task is to

make the interdependence of citizen and state conducive to, rather than destructive of, autonomy"

("Reconceiving" 20). Understanding autonomy through relationality thus curbs the two main

critiques feminists make of mainstream autonomy: the overlap with individuality and the exclusion of others. If people can learn and exercise their autonomy through their relationships, then, there is no need to erect walls between people.

The next question is what kinds of relationships offer the best models that are conducive to autonomy. There are two main contenders: childrearing and friendship. For instance, Nedelsky champions the former, "[t]here we have encapsulated the emergence of autonomy through relationship with others" ("Reconceiving" 12). While Code is in favour of the latter, "[p]articipating in a trusting, mutually sustaining friendship or alliance can effect and maintain a balance between departedness and appropriate interdependence" (*What...?* 95). The main critique against using childrearing as a model relationship is that not everyone experiences it or even desires to do so.[48] Moreover, parent-child relationships always have an implicit hierarchy and power imbalance inherent to them. The same constraints are not embedded into friendships, which are freely chosen and less hierarchical.

Friendship offers fertile ground to exercise autonomy. Code argues that "[f]riendships can accommodate their own growth and can foster the growth of their participants, often by confronting ambivalences and ambiguities akin to those implicit in mother-child relations, but with the potential of being less emotionally fraught" (*What...?* 96). For instance, between two friends the individuals can learn to express their wishes with more ease than in a parent-child relationship, especially if the child is young. Children need to be educated and guided, which means they cannot have their way all the time. Friends cannot have their way all the time either,

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[48] This is a similar critique to Ruddick's and Nodding's use of motherhood as the model for an ethics of care, which I will go back to in Part II. First, it is too gender specific, which Nedelsky corrects by referring to childrearing as opposed to maternity. The second is that rearing children is not necessarily a relationship everyone gets to experience, additionally it is not a freely chosen relationship.

but this is learned through the relationship as each party asserts their limits and conforms to the other's.

Finally, Nedelsky expands that being autonomous means feeling autonomous, which can only come through relationships. Nedelsky writes,

> To be autonomous a person must feel a sense of her own power (which does not mean power over others), and that feeling is only possible within a structure of relationships conducive to autonomy. But it is also the case that if we lose our feeling of being autonomous, we lose our capacity to be so. Autonomy is a capacity that exists only in the context of social relations that support it and only in conjunction with the internal sense of being autonomous. ("Reconceiving" 24-5)

Friendships seem to be a more translatable experience to the exercise of relational autonomy; however, child-parent relationships can work as well. The main point made by both Nedelsky and Code is that autonomy can and should be fostered through relationships. Having an obsession with the popular depiction of a lone, self-made person; talking in boundaries; trying to isolate the self through rights and property, are not ways we can cultivate autonomy and community. The bounded individualism of the Anthropocene, to return to Haraway, has led us to the messy times of the present. Focusing on relationships and community is one way to turn the old saw of autonomy on its head and make it work in more feminist and communitarian ways.

Catriona Mackenzie, in the article "Three Dimensions of Autonomy: A Relational Analysis," defends a relational approach to autonomy considering people not living in ideal situations and/or not being fully ideal agents. As the philosopher explains:

> It does not assume that persons are ideally, or even hypothetically, fully rational agents or that their motivational structures are transparent to themselves. … Rather, its starting

point is the individual as situated in, shaped, and constrained by her sociorelational context in all its complexity; that is, its starting point is non-ideal agents in a non-ideal world, characterized by social oppression, injustice, and inequality. Given this starting point, the aim of relational autonomy theory is to theorize the kind of autonomy that is possible for non-ideal human agents; to diagnose how social domination, oppression, stigmatization, and injustice can thwart individual autonomy; and to hypothesize possible solutions, in the form of proposing how specific social relations, practices, and institutions might be reformed in such a way as to protect and foster individuals' autonomy. ("Three Dimensions" 23)

Given her commitment to conceptualizing autonomy in light of oppression, relationships, and the hardships of everyday life, Mackenzie proposes a nuanced and multifaceted conception. While most philosophers tend to understand autonomy as a synonym for self-governance and as such think of it as a unitary concept, Mackenzie proposes three overlapping dimensions of autonomy.

Mackenzie's conception of autonomy is a multidimensional concept which understands autonomy as three distinct, but superimposed notions: that of self-determination, self-governance and self-authorization.

1) **Self-determination:** identifies external conditions for autonomy, which Mackenzie characterizes as freedom conditions and opportunity conditions ("Three Dimensions" 18). According to Mackenzie, "it involves having the freedom and opportunities to make and enact choices of practical import to one's life, that is, choices about what to value, who to be, and what to do" ("Three Dimensions" 18). Therefore, in situations of oppression, individuals have a limited range of options to choose from, which hinders their capacity for autonomy.

2) **Self-governance:** identifies internal conditions for autonomy, that is, competence and authenticity conditions. For Mackenzie, this means "having the skills and capacities necessary to make choices and enact decisions that express, or cohere with, one's reflectively constituted diachronic practical identity" ("Three Dimensions" 18). Under oppression, not only are individual's choices limited, but, frequently, they also have internalized these limitations which also affects their internal sense of self and, thus, their autonomy.

3) **Self-authorization:** identifies accountability, self-evaluation and social recognition. Mackenzie argues that "it involves regarding oneself as authorized to exercise practical control over one's life, to determine one's own reasons for action, and to define one's values and identity-shaping practical commitments" ("Three Dimensions" 19). This final dimension is intrinsically dialogic, as an agent has to be able to reason, evaluate and justify their actions to other agents. Under oppression, individuals might feel like they do not have the capacity to self-evaluate or to enter into dialogue with others. Again, hindering their autonomy.

Finally, Mackenzie stresses that these dimensions are in constant flux over one person's life as their conditions, relationships, and psyche change over time. Moreover, "each of these conditions should be understood as a matter of degree rather than an all-or-nothing affair" (Mackenzie, "Three Dimensions" 39). Thus, relational autonomy can be a fruitful concept to understand how our personal relationships are shaped by oppressive regimes. Even more, how these friendships can offer sites to express our autonomy despite the less-than-ideal circumstances of injustice. In the next chapters, I will use Mackenzie's multidimensional notion of autonomy to understand autonomy and friendship first in Renée Nault's adaptation of *The Handmaid's Tale* and then in Kelly Sue DeConnick and Valentine de Landro's comic *Bitch Planet*.

2. Renée Nault's *The Handmaid's Tale* (2019)

Renée Nault is a Canadian artist who has an ongoing webcomic entitled *Witchling*. The artist was approached by Atwood's publishers to work on the adaptation of the famous novel, and, after submitting a couple of sample pages, she got the job. Despite having Atwood involved in the project, Nault had a lot of creative freedom, being responsible for scripting and adapting the text into the graphic novel format. In an interview with CBC, Nault explains that: "Margaret was hands off and let me do whatever I wanted. She would occasionally chime in with like, 'Oh no, actually I think this would be the other way.' She was very trusting" (van Koeverden n.p.). In the process of adapting the novel, Nault realized that both the release of Hulu's tv adaptation and the political climate of the United States, in particular, would draw attention to her rendition of Offred's story (van Koeverden n.p.). The comic adaptation of *The Handmaid's Tale* was released in March 2019.

However grim the political landscape of both Gilead and the USA, Nault's art is beautiful, as the artist explains: "Although the subject matter is bleak, I wanted the art itself to be beautiful, and for each page to stand as its own work" (van Koeverden n.p.). Each page is a watercolor painting that makes color one of the most prominent signifiers of the story. Firstly, seeing the stratifying dress code imposed on all women of Gilead is a lot more shocking than reading about it. Secondly, Nault employs different color pallets to signify Offred's ever changing timelines, from the horrifying present in Gilead to the blissful recollections of the past with her daughter, Luke or Moira, to the recent past of the Rachel and Leah Center. Offred's non-linear narration gets emphasized by the different color schemes Nault uses.

In order to adapt Atwood's novel, Nault obviously had to cut several passages. The artist explains that she "went through the novel over and over again with a highlighter and tried to figure out what passages made the novel what it is, the essence of it" (van Koeverden n.p.). What we have is a distilled version of Atwood's novel. Like any good comic, Nault's art is more than just illustrations to the action, carrying meaning that Atwood's novel had to convey through words. This makes the adaptation feel fresh and new even to readers familiar with the source text. Jan Baetens, writing on adaptations of literary works into comics, says that really striking comics "succee[d] in finding a strong visual equivalent of what is really at stake in the original work" (n.p.). Nault's *The Handmaid's Tale* does exactly that in a number of ways. Most evidently, Nault is capable of translating Offred's constant word plays, such as, "I sit in the chair and think about the word chair. It can also mean the leader of a meeting. It can also mean a mode of execution. It is the first syllable in charity. It is the French word for flesh" (Atwood, HT 126), into visual explorations. Nault creates a visual play by drawing the same panels repeatedly, but each time the frame is a little different. Nault's Offred is visually playing in the same way that Atwood's Offred is experimenting with her words.

This chapter will analyze how Offred's autonomy is constantly hindered by the oppressive regime of Gilead. To do so, I will use Mackenzie's three dimensions of autonomy to breakdown how the regime affects every aspect of Offred's life and how this reflects on her ability to create and sustain meaningful friendships.

2.1 Self-determination

Gilead is, evidently, an oppressive regime. As with any oppressive regime, citizens' autonomy across the board are limited. Women are far worse than the men, but that does not mean that men have that many perks either. What this means for autonomy is that everyone has

their opportunities and freedoms reduced, what Offred refers to as "reduced circumstances" (Atwood, HT 8).[49] Mackenzie and other autonomy philosophers agree that restricting people's ability to choose is in itself unjust ("Three Dimensions" 23). According to Mackenzie, external factors that prohibit autonomy:

> include social conditions that deny members of social groups fundamental political or personal liberties or restrict the opportunities available in their social environments, that thwart the development and exercise of autonomy competences, or that sanction social relations of misrecognition, thereby excluding some individuals or social groups from the status markers of autonomy and compromising their sense of themselves as self-authorizing agents. ("Three Dimensions" 23)

From this quote it is easy to see how Gilead poses serious problems to the exercise of one's autonomy. Handmaids, for instance, are destitute of any semblance of choice, that is, no choice in how they are addressed, on where they live, or on what they eat, just to name a few. Men serving as Angels or Guards have little choice in their profession, or who they marry. Even someone like Commander Watson has his autonomy curtailed, as he needs to rely on clandestine encounters to play a simple game of Scrabble. Exclusion is rampant in Gilead, as American Jews and African Americans are moved around the country to colonies. Moreover, anyone who disobeys becomes an *un-person* (an unwoman, an unbaby), and is sentenced to die a slow death while cleaning toxic waste.

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[49] Offred uses this expression when comparing her current room to one that might have existed in the time before for less affluent women: "Apart from these details, this could be a college guest room, for the less distinguished visitors; or a room in a rooming house, of former times, for ladies in reduced circumstances. That is what we are now. The circumstances have been reduced; for those of us who still have circumstances" (Atwood, HT 8). She uses it again to talk about coping mechanisms in the face of the regime: "In reduced circumstances you have to believe all kinds of things. I believe in thought transference now, vibrations in the ether, that sort of junk. I never used to" (Atwood, HT 119-20). And again: "In reduced circumstances the desire to live attaches itself to strange objects. I would like a pet: a bird, say, or a cat" (Atwood, HT 127).

Self-determination, then, is seriously lacking in Gilead. Having actual power to decide on one's life is not the case for the average citizen, but what does it mean to the extremely oppressed like the Handmaids? I will look at Mackenzie's two conditions for self-determination, opportunity and freedom, in Gilead's strict dress code.

Umberto Eco claims, "I am speaking through my clothes" (208). The ability to express oneself through clothing might be taken for granted by people in democratic societies. However, totalitarian regimes often attempt to restrict clothing options in order to foster national unity. For instance, in North Korea, people can only choose among a set of pre-approved haircuts, and, in Italy, Mussolini stimulated the fashion industry in order to shape nationalism.[50] Similarly, Gilead has a strict dress code in place: Handmaids wear red, Wives wear blue, Marthas wear green, Econowives wear stripes, and Aunts wear brown. The imposition of this dress code is another way that Gilead uses to control its citizens and diminish people's autonomy.

Fashion as an intrinsic part of politics is highlighted in Nault's adaptation. Tim Edwards argues that

> The perception of fashion as an apolitical phenomenon has always been a partial misperception, as fashion and appearance have always played a key part in the politics of difference. The politics of difference here refers to those politics which affect, reinforce or even invent difference within groups and societies whether according to class, age, gender, race, sexual orientation or, more simply, the politics of bodily regulation. (269)

Gilead's dress code serves the purpose of clearly and effectively classifying citizens within a social hierarchy that reinforces difference. In Gilead, men are above all women, Wives are above other women, and so on. The social hierarchy also serves the purpose of othering those who do

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[50] See Paulicelli and Fontana, Halvin, Bhattacharjya, and Willette.

not belong to the same social caste. Because they belong to very different social classes, Wives and Handmaids are not going to sympathize with each other even if they are both oppressed by men, as Offred learns really quickly with Serena Joy, "I was disappointed. I wanted, then, to turn her into an older sister, a motherly figure, someone who would understand and protect me" (Atwood, HT 17). The contrasting colors of their attire is a visual reminder that they are not the same in the eyes of Gilead.

Nault's graphic adaptation is striking in the use of color. Considering how gloomy and dark Offred's narrative is, the colors on the page are bright, lively, and radiant. The Handmaids are depicted in bright red, while the Wives are in a slightly muted ultramarine blue, and the Marthas are in deep green. The colors themselves do not translate the depressive tale Offred tells. They do, however, serve to classify and homogenize the women. In an instant, one can know exactly a person's class and status in this society. Not only are the women incapable of selecting a color they like, but they also cannot select a different hue or tone of attire. Everyone gets dressed in the exact same shade of red, blue or green. Zárate et al. explain that:

> The red worn by the Handmaids and the blue worn by the Wives are striking, but rather than suggesting joy … they function as norms, rules, and the visible markers of difference … The severity of colors turns the plain dresses into uniforms while homogenizing disparate women into servitude and categories. (213)

Imposing a dress code serves to eliminate difference and universalize people into a function: housewife, server, breeder. Essentially, everyone in a color caste is the same, which is another way of saying that everyone is replaceable.

Through the strict dress codes, Gilead aims to strip people off of their individuality and to transform them into a universal stereotype. Aydan Gulerce explains that "[u]niversalization is

both a process of homogenization towards the utopic idea of universal unity and an obligation to

the presupposition of universality. Universalization works as reification, in practice" (2039).

People in Gilead are treated as disposable, because there is nothing inherently unique about them.

They all serve a specific purpose; thus, anyone can be substituted by someone else who can fit

that role. Nault's drawings make this point abundantly clear by depicting all Handmaids in a

similar fashion.

Figure 1: First Oglen (left) and Second Ofglen (right)

Oftentimes, readers can even have a hard time distinguishing characters in the graphic novel. The figure 1 above is a side-by-side comparison between the first Ofglen and the second Ofglen, which shows that the difference between them is very subtle: eye color, and a visible mole in the second Ofglen. Apart from that they are incredibly similar, especially because they are in the exact same dress which does not allow them to display their personalities. In a review of Nault's adaptation, Caitlin Rosenburg writes, "It's frequently difficult to tell June and Ofglen apart, let alone the second Ofglen from the first. … Nault stuck to the same slender and conventionally attractive white women throughout. And distressingly, almost every face in this book is white" (n.p.). What Rosenburg missed from Atwood's story and that is captured so well in Nault's adaptation is precisely Gilead's impulse to homogenize and universalize. It is not an accident that all Handmaids look both beautiful and alike. Moreover, it was clear in Atwood's novel that Gilead was not interested in other ethnicities besides white, thus there won't be any faces of color in Nault's rendering of the story either. Behind Gilead's strict dress code and universalization impulse there is a eugenic project that demands only certain types of body. Seeing Nault's drawings, it becomes even more evident that only pretty, young, white women are Handmaids because those bodies are valued in Gilead above all others. And if these Handmaids give birth to someone with a disability or that did not fit Gilead's aims, these babies become unbabies further perpetuating Gilead's eugenic endeavours.[51]

Having only one dress style in one color does not meet freedom conditions of autonomy, which Mackenzie determines as having political liberties, "such as freedom of thought and expression, freedom of association, freedom of conscience and religious exercise, freedom to engage in political participation, and freedom from arbitrary arrest" ("Three Dimensions" 26). If

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[51] Another work in my corpus, *Orphan Black*, also deals with eugenics. I will return to this topic in Chapter 5.

Offred even managed to get a hold of other clothes, she would most likely face repercussions for wearing it. Offred explains that: "Everything the Handmaids wear is red: the colour of blood, which defines us. … I never looked good in red, it's not my color" (Nault n.p.). Contrasting the flashback sequences of Offred with the reality in Gilead, we can see Offred used to have different hair styles, dress in colorful clothes, but she was never wearing red, as she claims it was never truly her color. Most likely, if she were able to choose, that is not a color she would have picked to dress in Gilead either.

The dress code also does not meet the opportunity conditions for Offred to be said to have self-determination. Mackenzie defines opportunity conditions as "the kinds of opportunities that need to be available to agents in their social environments for them to have choices about what to value, who to be, and what to do" ("Three Dimensions" 18). In other words, for agents to be self-determining, there needs to be a significant number of options for them to choose from. Clearly, Offred does not have any options in regarding her wardrobe as she can only wear what is given to her, and that is a red dress and white wings. Cooper, writing about the red dresses in both Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* and Plath's *The Bell Jar*, claims that:

> [red clothing] is weighted with the contested meanings of the flesh and its fluids; the symbolism of dress radically complicates the narrative of suffering and resurrection that each text strives to utter. As a political signifier, moreover, clothing denotes in both novels a potentially fertile female body demeaned and threatened by a patriarchal authority intent on confining women to domesticity and childbearing. ("A Body" 96)

The color of blood which defines the Handmaids in Gilead is both the color of sexuality and fertility, and the color of sin and death. Red is associated with menstruation which is the sign that these women are still fertile, but also that they are not yet pregnant. The double signifier of red

also alludes to Gilead's insistence that Handmaids are not truly concubines, albeit the only women overtly sexual in Gilead. By using the color schemes and segregating women, Gilead's patriarchal regime also attempts to neatly confine women in their proper places. According to Gilead, not all women even have a need for sexuality, for instance the Marthas only job is to cook and clean, the Wives, meanwhile, remain free of the sins of the flesh. Handmaids' only job, on the other hand, is to produce kids, without their fertility Gilead has no more use for them.

Gilead's color-coded dress rules end up influencing the spaces as well. Nault's drawings show how in Gilead spaces also become codified by the colors and what they represent. As Zárate et al. argue:

> those colors do not represent different things for different persons but just one thing … It is this rigid classificatory system that points to the lack of freedom shaping this dystopian landscape. Rather than having a range of possible meanings, colors are rigidly fixed in just one authorized meaning. (212)

In Gilead, red is only associated with sexual servitude, blue with housewives, and green with servitude.

Nault's drawing of spaces represents Offred in high contrast with her surroundings, signifying that she does not belong. As the images bellow (figures 2 and 3) show, the living room and main areas of the home are all decorated in blue, demonstrating that those rooms are the domain of Serena Joy as the Wife. Meanwhile, the kitchen is all green, as it is the job of the Marthas to do all the cooking and cleaning. Finally, Offred's room (figure 4), supposedly would be her place, but it is depicted in a dark purple. The only other element in her room that is also red is the rug. Even in the space that should be hers, the blue of the Wife still is present as purple

is achieved by mixing red and blue. The household as a whole being the only space the Wife has to act somewhat freely. The Handmaid stands out in all these spaces as the odd one out, her red is unmistakably in contrast with it all: both the people and the places, further isolating her.
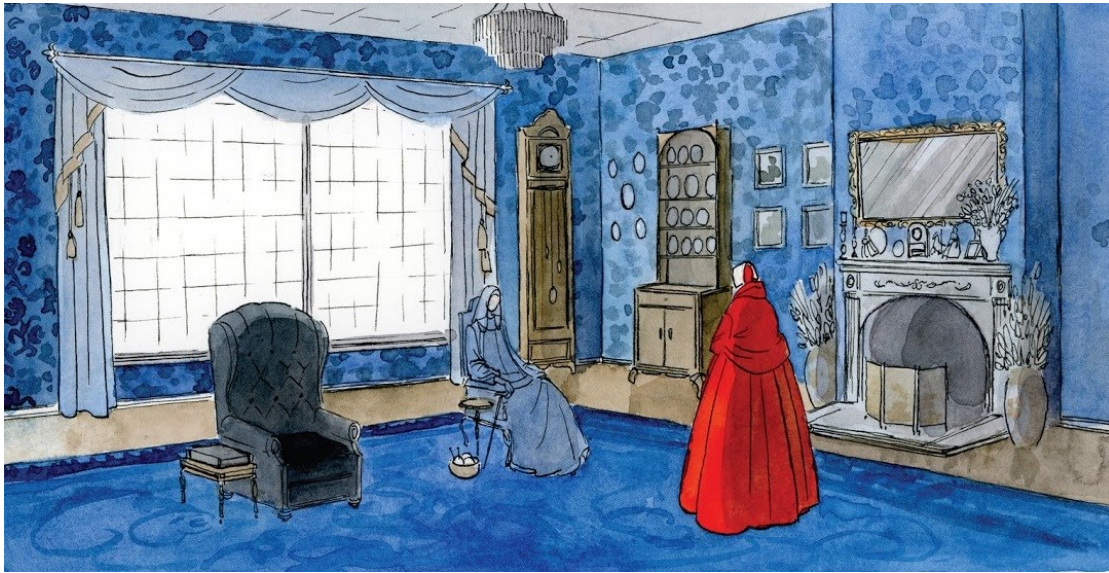
Figure 2: Blue living room in the Commander's house.

Figure 3: Green kitchen in the Commander's house.

Figure 4: Offred's purple room in the Commander's house.

The dress code exemplifies how Gilead can stifle self-determination. People in each caste are forced to dress the same, creating homogeneity that crumbles individuality. On top of that, it places each person in a strict social hierarchy that prevents them from banding together to fight the regime, since they become trapped in "othering" and distrusting people from other castes. The consequence is an erosion of social relations and, thus, friendship.

2.2 Self-governance

Since Gilead is a totalitarian and oppressive regime, it is easy to identify external conditions that impede autonomy. Mackenzie's self-governance dimension highlights the necessary internal conditions to the realization of autonomy. There are two main internal conditions: competence and authenticity. I will look at Gilead's capacity to undermine Offred's ability to mother to further diminish her sense of autonomy.

First, one must have the competence or skills that allow them to exercise their autonomy. Mackenzie explains, "Competence conditions specify the range of competences or skills a person must possess, to some degree at least, to be self-governing" ("Three Dimensions" 34). There are several skills that have been identified as necessary for autonomy, most notably, the ability to reason. Mackenzie focuses, however, on skills that have been traditionally left out of accounts of autonomy that include: "emotional skills, … imaginative skills, which are necessary for envisaging alternative possible courses of action, … and social or dialogical skills required for self-understanding or self-knowledge" ("Three Dimensions" 34).[52] Mackenzie's account highlights that there many equally important skills one must posses to exercise their autonomy, not just the capacity to reason.

Second, one must be authentic in their actions, "that is, what it means for a choice, value, commitment, or reason to be one's own" (Mackenzie, "Three Dimensions" 32). Mackenzie bases her definition of authenticity on John Christman's notion of authenticity as non-alienation, which means that actions are authentic if the agent can look back at them and feel the actions aligned with their values.[53] Another way to understand authenticity is through the notion of endorsement, as Stoljar puts it, "authenticity and hence autonomy require active affirmation or endorsement of one's deeply held commitments and concerns" ("Living" 109). For Stoljar, authenticity is when an agent is capable of self-reflecting and re-affirming their actions and values again.

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[52] More on autonomy competences, see Meyers, "Autonomy Competency."

[53] Christman's full definition is: "Autonomy involves competence and authenticity; authenticity involves non-alienation upon (historically sensitive, adequate) self-reflection, given one's diachronic practical identity and one's position in the world. To elaborate: "alienation" is active resistance to the factor in question; "sensitivity to history" involves the requirement that we accept the factor in light of how it came to be part of our psychic economies; "upon… self reflection" refers to hypothetical reflection in the narrow counterfactual sense of reflection were we to turn our attention to the factor and all else stayed constant; "adequate" self-reflection involves competent critical appraisal that would remain constant over a variety of conditions; "diachronic practical identity" refers to one's action-guiding attitudes, values, and principles that orient reflection and are central to our autobiographical narratives – the "I-self" – and are structured by (variable) social elements as well as one's physical embodiment" (155-6).

Gilead has interfered with Offred's self-governance in both the level of her competence and of her authenticity. The main example is that Offred's lost the ability to imagine a future for herself outside the regime. While Offred is capable of imagining what might have happened to Moira or Luke, she is incapable of seeing herself somehow out of the grip of Gilead (either as no longer a Handmaid or out of the country all together). Offred remains stuck in memories of the past, but she seems unable to use her past experience as a way to learn from or improve her current conditions. She is, in a sense, stuck in her memories which hamper her self-worth and her autonomy skills. In Nault's adaptation this is represented through the repeating motifs that appear in different scenes throughout the story. Poignantly, the moment that Offred is captured and separated from her daughter. This is a pivotal moment that made Offred start to question her own capacities as a mother, because she was unable to protect her daughter, and thus she starts capitulating to the regime's false narrative that she is an unfit mother.

Gilead creates a social script in which Handmaids' only value is their capacity to conceive a child, and that they are unsuited to mother their own children. Gilead recognizes only the Wives' capacity to mother. In regard to oppressive societies, Stojlar explains that they create social scripts, which are then: "'internalized' [and] manifest themselves in the psychologies of members of oppressed groups in a way that is analogous to standard impediments to psychological freedom. Like pathological and agent-related impediments, social scripts interfere with the agent's freedom to will otherwise" ("Living" 112). In other words, the oppressive social script created by Gilead is internalized by Offred who has her psychological freedom impaired, that is, she buys into the script and starts believing that she is indeed incapable of taking care of her daughter.

Figure 5: Offred's flashback to losing her daughter.

Offred's internalization of the oppressive social script and, consequently, her impaired autonomy skill starts in the moment that she can no longer hold onto her daughter to avoid capture. In Nault's drawing above (figure 5), we see that this moment is expanded in the form of the fragmenting and multiplying panels that extend the moment outside of the page suggesting that this continues to haunt Offred. The fragmenting panels also allude to the way Offred's recollections of that day appear fragmented within the narrative with this same imagery of the parting hands repeating itself in the story.

We learned to whisper almost without sound.

In the semi-darkness we could stretch out our arms, when the Aunts weren't looking, and touch each other's hands across space.

Figure 6: Handmaid's hands almost touching at the Red Center.

But then what happens, but then what happens?

Figure 7: Offred's flashback to losing her daughter.

The motif of the separated hands is repeated two other times in the comic. First, it appears in the context of the Red Center (figure 6). The text reads: "In the semi-darkness we could stretch out our arms, when the Aunts weren't looking, and touch each other's hands across space" (Nault n.p.). Nonetheless, we are not shown the hands touching, only the lingering moment before or after that happened. Already in the Red Center, Offred starts to buy into the social script that she is unfit to be a mother, and that is the reason she lost her child. Second, we see the hands almost touching in the middle of a flashback sequence about falling in love and marrying Luke (figure 7). This time the text reads: "But then what happened, but then what happened?" (Nault n.p.). The repetition of the words and the repetition of the images both serve to show the loop in which Offred is stuck, remembering the loss of her daughter, the inability to protect her, and the conclusion that Gilead is probably right: she cannot be a good parent. The following page confirms this by showing that when Offred wakes up after being captured she is told that "She's [Offred's daughter] in good hands. With people who are fit. You are unfit but you want the best for her. Don't you?" (Nault n.p.). This is the moment that Offred is fully confronted with the new oppressive social script invented by Gilead that not every woman is deemed capable of mothering.

Stojlar recognizes that there is a moment in people's life when they might encounter a social script that oppresses them in some way:

> There is often a moment in the lives of members of subordinated groups when the person encounters the stark social reality of the subordinating classification that applies to her. From that moment on, her self-conception includes a recognition that identifying as black (or as a woman) is not morally neutral but rather requires applying the descriptions and inferiorizing norms that are conventionally associated with the classification to oneself.

Thus, agents who consider their identities to be racialized (or gendered) cannot entirely

repudiate the oppressive social scripts that apply to them because the scripts are partially

constitutive of these very self-conceptions. ("Living"116)

Stoljar's description of recognizing oneself in the oppressive social script is precisely what

happens to Offred following the loss of her daughter. Offred realizes that the new social script in

Gilead says that she is not adept to take care of her child, and since she just indeed lost her to the

hands of others, the script must be right. Following this confrontation with the new social script,

Offred seems to accept and integrate the social script in her sense of identity, even if in other

flashbacks we see Offred capably taking care of her kid by bathing her or taking her to eat ice

cream. The crux of the matter is that Gilead was still able to influence Offred's sense of herself,

and thus thwart Offred's autonomy skills.

Offred also shows that she feels alienated from her daughter when looking at her picture.

In the aforementioned image, the text reads: "Time has not stood still. It has washed over me,

washed me away, as if I'm nothing more than a woman of sand, left by a careless child too near

the water. I am only a shadow now, far behind the glib shiny surface of this photograph. A

shadow of a shadow, as all dead mothers become. You can see it in her eyes: I am not there"

(Nault n.p.). Offred's monologue in this page reveals more about how she feels than how her

daughter might think or feel in reality. She uses expressions that show that she feels absent as a

mother, like "washed away", "shadow", "dead." The drawing positions the reader in Offred's

point of view, as if we are the ones holding and looking at her daughter's photograph. The

daughter is colorless though, so as a reader we cannot make assumptions of how the daughter

looks, there is little to go on from. The colorless photograph helps create the feeling of alienation

for the reader as well, because it is hard to interpret the daughter's eyes without relying on Offred's words.

The oppressive social script that Gilead designs for the Handmaids is internalized altering their sense of themselves. Through the separation of her daughter and her time in under the tutelage of the Aunts in the Red Center, Offred begins to believe that she is indeed incapable of mothering her child, even if she was capable of conceiving her, and even if she was a capable mother pre-Gilead. The script that tells women that they are empty chalices, waiting to be filled by babies, but not good enough to actually parent them is one more tool that Gilead employs to obstruct Handmaid's sense of autonomy.

2.3 Self-authorization

The final dimension of autonomy for Mackenzie is self-authorization, which means "regarding oneself as having the normative authority to be self-determining and self-governing" ("Three Dimensions" 36). In other words, the agent must regard themselves as an equal among other agents with enough self-worth to justify and authorize their own actions, commitments, and beliefs. In oppressive societies, such as Gilead, the agent most often is not deemed an equal, thus they are not treated with respect or authority to justify their own decisions. While a Commander among other Commanders will certainly have a higher degree of self-authorization, a Handmaid, even among other Handmaids, does not have the same opportunity. Mackenzie describes three conditions to self-authorizations: accountability, self-evaluation, and social recognition. In this section I will analyze Offred's sense of self-authorization through Nault's use of color bleeds to signify Offred's inability to self-authorize.

First, the accountability condition means that "the person regards herself as the kind of agent who can be held accountable and answerable to others for her reasons" (Mackenzie, "Three

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Dimensions" 36). As a Handmaid, Offred is unlikely to have to respond to anyone for her actions, as she is not regarded as an equal moral agent. As the ending suggests, if Offred is deemed guilty of something, she would not have a trial or a chance to explain herself but would simply be condemned by the regime. If, hypothetically, Offred were to be held accountable for her actions in Gilead, she would not be able to do so, because she is aware that her actions do not align with her true sense of self. For example, as Offred says first in the memory of victim-blaming Janine, "I used to think well of myself. I didn't then" (Nault n.p.); and then after the Particicution: "I'm not proud of myself for this, or for any of it. But then, that's the point" (Nault n.p.). Offred is self-aware enough to realize her own oppression by noting that Gilead forces her hand in doing actions she would not otherwise choose to do, however, she loses her own self-esteem and self-regard by capitulating to the will of the regime.

Second, Mackenzie defines the condition of self-evaluation as having self-trust, self-esteem and self-respect, which means regarding oneself as having an equal moral stand with others, trusting in one's own capacities, and reflecting on one's life and commitments as meaningful ("Three Dimensions" 37-8). As the previous example demonstrates, Offred does not think highly of her own actions in Gilead. Furthermore, she has trouble finding meaning in her meager existence in the house of the Commander.

Third, social recognition means that "the person is regarded by others as having the social standing of an autonomous agent" (Mackenzie, "Three Dimensions" 36). This final condition serves to fully demonstrate the dialogical nature of self-authorization. The agent must think of herself as an equal among other agents, but also be perceived as such by the others. In the case of Gilead, it is easy to see that this is definitely not the case for Offred. As the self-determination section discussed, Gilead put in place a highly rigid social hierarchy that prevents people from

regarding each other as equals. Even if Offred interacts with other Handmaids, they do not treat each other as equals, but as spies and not trustworthy, as we can see by how long it takes for her to trust the first Ofglen. Thus, Gilead fully impairs the exercise of autonomy for someone at the bottom of the social hierarchy, like Offred.

Gilead creates a social script in which Handmaids are only valued for their fertility, not as equal and rational agents on their own, like Offred explains, "We are two-legged wombs, that's all: sacred vessels, ambulatory chalices" (Nault n.p.). The metaphor created by Gilead is that Handmaids are but objects of fertility, useless until impregnated. As objects, they have no stand as rational agents, because their humanity is not recognized as being equal to others. Handmaids are ostensibly less human: they are empty humans until filled by the Commander. The Handmaids status as "sacred vessels" to Gilead creates a sense of alienation from their own selves as bodies and as agents. Cooper argues that this results in an "inability of the Handmaids, although defined and confined by their bodies, effectively to inhabit them" ("A Body" 95). Offred feels at odds with her own body, making it harder for her to act as an autonomous self.

Nault represents the sense of alienation between Offred and her own body in a two-page spread colored in red like blood, like the Handmaids' dresses. The two-page spread is a bleed (figure 8), which Harriet Earle defines as being:

> by their nature, dramatic and often violent. The image's domination of the page is striking and demands the reader's complete attention. The removal of frames from the page edges removes any sense of constriction or confinement – the image has total control of the page. Furthermore, it removes the reader's ability to control the timescale of the narrative, which is usually regulated by the gutters and panel borders. (n.p.)

The background color is in deep red, and the drawings are superimposed, almost floating in the background which conveys the idea of a dream-like state while Offred lays in her bed. We see her image twice in a fetus position: first in white over the ceiling wreath, and also all in black as a negative impression. The background seems to originate from her uterus, which is like a wound that bleeds out onto the page and beyond its limits. The page spread, like Earle's definition claims, is indeed dramatic and violent.

Figure 8: Two-page spread.

The text is also uncontained in space. In the second page, we read:

Each month I watch for blood, fearfully, for when it comes it means failure. I have failed once again to fulfil the expectations of others, which have become my own.

I used to think of my body as an instrument, of pleasure, or a means of transportation, or an implement for the accomplishment of my will.

There were limits but my body was nevertheless lithe, single, solid, one with me.

Now the flesh arranges itself differently. I'm a cloud, congealed around a central object, the shape of a pear, which is hard and more real than I am and glows red within its translucent wrapping. (Nault n.p.)

Offred is lamenting that now her body is equated with her uterus, as if reproduction was the only function, she has a right – or a duty – to perform as an individual in Gilead. The violence that Offred suffers in Gilead, of not being a person, of being used because of her body, is displayed in true force by the red that oozes out of her fetal-like body. Red is, once again, a color that defines her, both by her outfits, and also by her menstrual blood. The blood signifies at once that she is able to conceive, but not yet pregnant. Red is a color that signifies the violence Gilead directs towards the Handmaids.

Oppressive social scripts, like Gilead's, curtails Handmaid's sense of themselves, and thus impairs autonomous actions. Roessler explains that "[t]he harm that is being done changes the subject and her relationship to herself, which is the central reason the subject's status as a rational agent and ultimately her autonomy is undermined" (73). In other words, living under the totalitarian Gilead, Offred's sense of herself gets constantly belittled until she loses not only her opportunities and freedoms, but also her self-regard to authorize herself to act in a way that would support her own values and commitments.

2.4 Implications to friendship

Mackenzie's three dimensions of autonomy allows for a more nuanced analysis of what exactly constitutes an autonomous agent. Although I have attempted to exemplify and discuss each dimension separately, I believe that it is hard to fully differentiate between the three, because they ultimately overlap and influence each other, especially in situations of oppression. Mackenzie explains that:

> In social situations characterized by oppression or deprivation, the problem then is not just that restricted opportunities constrain self-determination but also that the internalization of these constraints can shape individuals' sense of who they are and what they can be and do. Here, the causal interdependence between the opportunity conditions for self-determination, the competence and authenticity conditions for self-governance, and the conditions for self-authorization become evident. ("Three Dimensions" 31)

The nuance of Mackenzie's definitions is that we can better perceive and distinguish exactly how one's autonomy is being affected by these multiple forces. Furthermore, Mackenzie is clear to establish that these dimensions are in a spectrum which can vary according to one's specific situation; for example, even though one can be oppressed in their place of work, they might not feel the same limitations within their group of friends. In the case of Offred, I have highlighted the instances in which she is indeed oppressed and cannot act autonomously. However, she does make some autonomous decisions, like repeatedly visiting Nick, which Nault does not depict in its entirety. From looking solely at the graphic adaptation, it does not seem like they maintain an ongoing relationship, but readers familiar with the novel are aware of their repeated encounters.

Autonomy is an important requisite for the discussion of social relationships such as friendships, because without some degree of choice, people cannot form and sustain these

relationships. The dialogical nature of autonomy means that our society's norms influence who we can and cannot form bonds with. In the case of Gilead, Offred has very little choice in terms of her life, but also in terms of forming friendships. She has a brief bond with the first Ofglen, which ends abruptly with Ofglen's suicide. The impossibility of having a deeper friendship with the first Ofglen is set from the start when the readers are introduced to her character by Offred saying: "This woman has been my partner for two weeks. I don't know what happened to the one before. Her name is Ofglen, and that's all I know about her" (Nault n.p.). Offred feels incapable of approaching Ofglen on her own terms, thus their relationship is dictated by Gilead's etiquette rules: the two women can only talk about trivialities. Gilead effectively prohibits them from autonomously talking and maybe developing their relationship into a trusting friendship. When they finally take a leap and share that they are both non-sympathizers to the regime, the relationship is still stifled by what they can and cannot do in Gilead. They are not free to talk more than the selection of empty slogans Gilead has made, they can only meet at state-sponsored events or on shopping trips, and they have little to no information to share with each other about a larger resistance to Gilead. Finally, when Oflgen is identified as a resistance member and decides to commit suicide, Offred instead of mourning her friend, feels immediate regret for ever getting involved with a Mayday agent. This demonstrates that even if they were forming a bond, it was not a very strong one like Offred's friend from the time before, Moira.

Offred and Moira's relationship offers a stark contrast between the status quo of the time before and that of the republic of Gilead. In one flashback sequence, Offred and Moira discuss feminist politics, and while they disagree, the pair is able to laugh it off their opposing views. The stakes for opposing views in Gilead is a lot higher, because the regime does not acknowledge difference, so it has to be silenced.
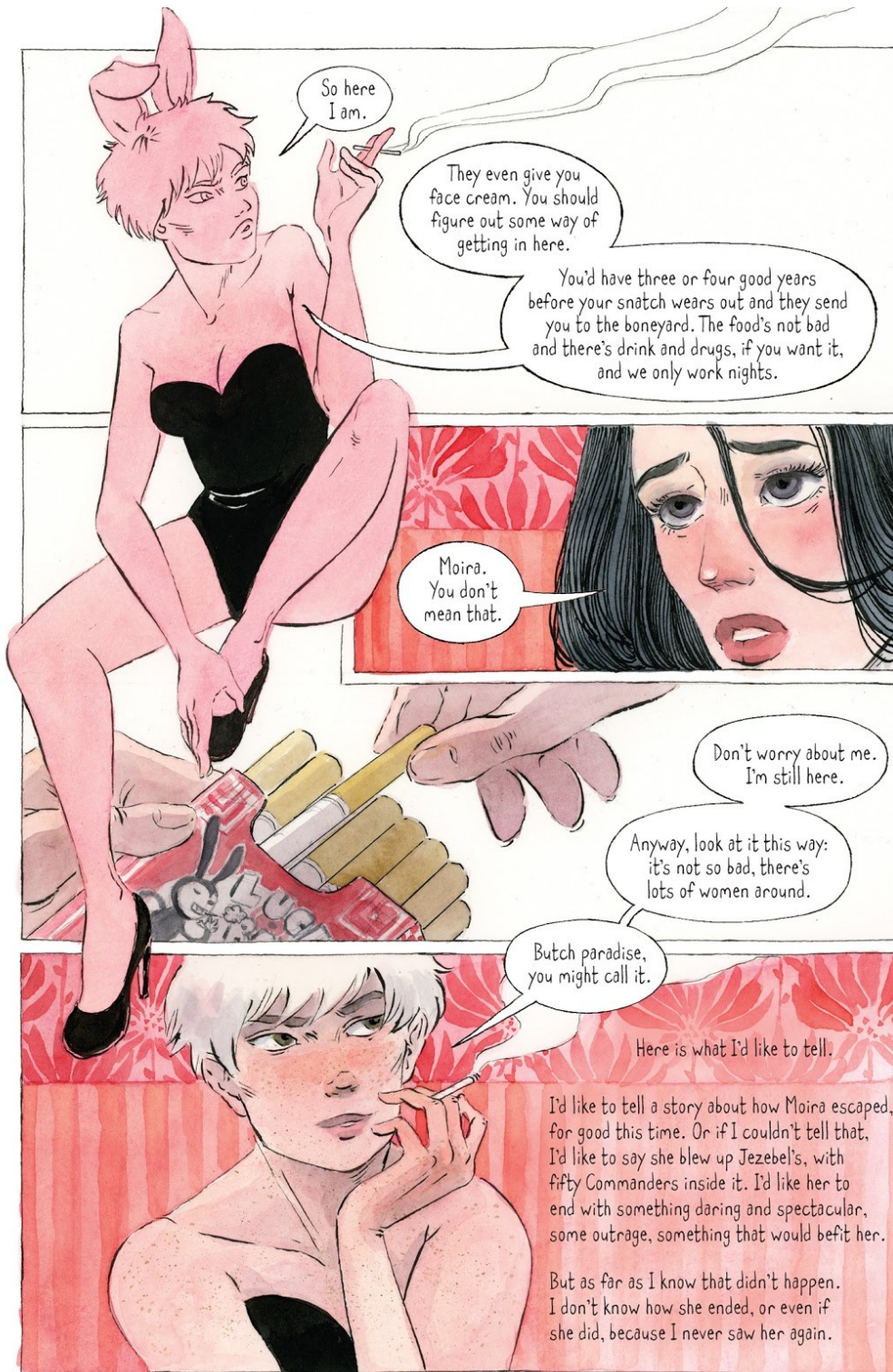
Figure 9: Offred and Moira's encounter at Jezebel's

One way to silence divergent women (apart from the public executions) is to lock them away at the brothel, Jezebel's, which is also Moira's faith. While Offred instantly regrets her involvement with the first Ofglen upon her suicide, Offred constantly fantasizes about what happened to Moira after her escape from the Red Center. During their time in the Red Center, these life-long friends have a hard time maintaining a friendship even though their relationship was strong before Gilead ever existed. The two rely on clandestine meetings in the bathroom where there is a small whole between stalls so they can talk and look at each other. When they are reunited at Jezebel's, Offred is happy to see her old friend, even in the dire situation they are both in. Moira is represented as a larger-than-life character in Offred's life (figure 9), in this page we see her breaking off from her panel, as if she is too big to fit into only one. For example, Moira kept attempting to escape Gilead, while Offred and the other women in the Red Center did not even try it once. Moira becomes a symbol of hope for Offred. Even seeing her friend in the brothel, does not stop Offred from wishing that her friend did in fact escape her fate. The text in the last panel reads: "I'd like to tell a story about how Moira escaped. … I'd like to say that she blew up Jezebel's with fifty Commanders inside it. … But as far as I know that didn't happen. I don't know how she ended" (Nault n.p.). Unlike her relationship with Ofglen, that ended in regret, Offred kept on imaging and desiring a spectacular destiny for her dear friend Moira.

Offred's limited interactions with Ofglen, and impossibility to maintain contact with her life-long friend demonstrate how Gilead makes it almost impossible for women to forge friendships. The severely curtailed autonomy that Offred has serves to further enshrine her in the oppressive regime and limit her own self-conception and ability to make her own choices. Without feeling like an autonomous agent, Offred fails to truthfully connect with Ofglen, which might have been avenue to work for the resistance and try to oppose the regime more actively.

However, Offred's self-esteem was so damaged by the social scripts she had been forced to accept in Gilead that she did not even feel capable to develop a relationship with her shopping partner, let alone help the resistance. Nault's adaptation by condensing Offred and Ofglen's relationship even more than Atwood's novel seems to signal to the hardship that it is to effectively make and sustain friends within Gilead.

2.5 Conclusion

In sum, this chapter analyzed the impact that oppression has on autonomy by looking at the ways in which Offred's autonomy is curtailed in Gilead. In turn, this affects the types of relationships she is or is not able to foster. Having some degree of autonomy is necessary in order to form longer lasting relationships, so people have the opportunity to seek out others who they might bond with, have the skills necessary to connect with others, and then have enough self-esteem to discuss and defend their own values and commitments, while holding others accountable to their own share of responsibilities. While pre-Gilead, Offred was able to have a life-long friendship with Moira, once under Gilead's regime she struggles to form the same kind of bond with another Handmaid. One reason being that she is not given the freedom to be with her shopping companion in an authentic way. Moreover, Offred had already internalized the social scripts imposed on her by Gilead that she is a mere vessel of fertility without the need to have intimate relationships with another person. Her very capacity to be a mother was also challenged by the regime alienating Offred from herself and further pushing her into isolation. Nault's adaptation seems to further emphasize these facts by presenting a shorter version of Offred and Ofglen's story and even a very short romance between Offred and Nick, which makes it seem that they did not have enough time to establish an intimate relationship. Autonomy is at the heart of social interactions that can help foster more or less of it. There are ways that we can

start fostering relationships even when societies, like Gilead, oppresses its people, which will be

the focus of my next chapter when discussing *Bitch Planet*.

3. Kelly Sue DeConnick and Valentine De Landro's

Bitch Planet (2014-2017)

Created by Kelly Sue DeConnick and Valentino De Landro, *Bitch Planet* takes place in a dystopian future in which society is under the controlling grip of the Council of Fathers. In this society, called the Protectorate, women who do not abide by the rules are cast out as non-compliant (NC) and sent to serve time off-planet at the Auxiliary Compliance Outpost (ACO), also known as bitch planet. Unfortunately, the dystopian society of *Bitch Planet* does not seem so far off to readers, because, as Danielle Henderson points out, "[t]he striking thing about *Bitch Planet* is that we're already on it" (*BP* issue #1). In our own society, patriarchy sets conventions that often deem women as non-compliant and cast them out under harmful labels, such as crazy, slut, or bitch.

Bitch Planet, published by Image Comics, started in December 2014 and its tenth and latest issue came out in April 2017.[54] DeConnick and De Landro also commissioned short pieces from diverse authors and artists and collected them in an anthology, *Bitch Planet: Triple Feature*, which explores the patriarchal society of the Protectorate, but none of the main characters of the main story. The comics series gained a lot of praise for its depiction of intersectional feminism, diverse characters, and its comprehensive back matter. For example, Brenna Clarke Gray and David N. Wright write that *Bitch Planet* "is a radically diverse and woman-centred comic, and DeConnick and De Landro foreground the inclusion of diverse ethnicities, sexualities, and gender expressions throughout the series run" (265). Moreover, each individual issue of *Bitch Planet* is

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[54] DeConnick has said in an interview back in February 2017 that the duo planned thirty issues (Schreiber). She also has been asked on Twitter multiple times if *Bitch Planet* is coming back and has always answered that it is indeed coming back at some point.

accompanied by several pages dedicated to educating and fostering a community of readers.

There are guest essays about the issues touched on the story, letters with extensive responses by

De Connick, De Landro, or the creative team, book recommendations, fan tweets, fan-made art

and NC tattoos, as well, as a lip glossary to explain feminist terms.[55] Unfortunately, the back

matter is not carried over to the trade version, which in turn offers a discussion guide to prompt

readers to reflect on important themes. The length of the back matter, reaching more than 10

pages in later issues, is a testament to DeConnick and De Landro's commitment to use comics as

a tool for having hard conversations, and constructing a safe space to have them in.

In interviews DeConnick does not cite Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* specifically as an

inspiration for the story, but we see the famous phrase, "Nolite te Bastardes Carborundorum,"

inside a bible that the NCs in the ACO use to pass messages around in issue #4. The influence

also seems clear to readers of both the novel and the comic. Andrea Horbinski succinctly

describes the connection on a roundtable about teaching *Bitch Planet* by saying that "It's *The

Handmaid's Tale* for the 2010s" (qtd in Tanski). Ellen Kirkpatrick (116) posits *Bitch Planet*

alongside a tradition of literary feminist dystopias that include Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*,

and other titles like Suzy McKee Charnas' *Walk to the End of the World* (1974), and Suzette

Haden Elgin's *Native Tongue* (1984). While feminist dystopias have a long history and tradition

in the literary genre that far extends the few novels mentioned by Kirkpatrick, the genre is

somewhat of a novelty in comics.[56] There are many feminist fantasy stories in comics nowadays,

such as *Lumberjanes* (2014-2020), *Monstress* (2015-present), *Pretty Deadly* (2013-2015) and *Rat

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[55] For more in-depth analysis of the back matter in *Bitch Planet*, see Gray. And for an analysis of how the back matter fosters community, see Jenkins "Non-Compliants."

[56] Brian K. Vaughan and Pia Guerra's *Y: The Last Man on Earth* (2002-2008) is considered somewhat of a feminist dystopian (more precisely a post-apocalyptic SF), since the premise is that every man suddenly died of a mysterious disease with the exception of Yorick, the male protagonist, and his monkey, Ampersand. However, in an Earth populated solely by women, we still have a white cishet male protagonist for 60 issues.

Queens (2013-present), as well as, feminist superheroes stories, like G. Willow Wilson's *Ms*

Marvel (2014-2019) and DeConnick's *Captain Marvel* (2014-2015), just to name a few. Comics,

however, had been lacking in terms of good feminist dystopian stories until *Bitch Planet*.

Following in the footsteps of great literary dystopian novels like *The Handmaid's Tale*, *Bitch*

Planet finds more in common with this book, then it does with other recent comics. And it is easy

to trace parallels between the two: a not-so-distant future that focuses on the patriarchal control

and surveillance of women to make them comply to rigid rules imposed by, mostly, white cishet

men. While in Gilead this control is exercised through strict social hierarchy, in the Protectorate,

it happens through copious amounts of advertisement and State sponsored TV, called "the Feed,"

that presents: "an unremitting diet of celebrity gossip, body shaming and misogyny" (Kirkpatrick

138). Women are encouraged to compare and compete against each other, while striving to

achieve an impossible standard that ultimately attempts to erase their differences, and make them

all the same, much like Gilead's dress code.

Both works are satires that aim at condemning hetero-patriarchy's tyrannical rule. In an

interview for *Book Riot*, DeConnick explains that:

> We're satirizing the condescending "good-father" patriarchy. Ideas like, 'We know
>
> what's best for you. Do as you're told and you'll be happier. We're infantilizing you
>
> because we love you.' The person we're aiming at, the one we're trying to make
>
> uncomfortable, is the guy who thinks 'I love women! I'm not part of the problem!' And
>
> women can participate in that as well. … It's the guy who thinks he's a good guy, that I'm
>
> aiming to make uncomfortable. (Schreiber)

DeConnick is interested in exposing the patronizing patriarchy that thinks it knows what is best

for everyone else. In a sense, this is Gilead's sentiment as well: that women like Offred cannot

possibly be left to their own devices, because that led to infertility, and now they, the Commanders, need to step in and correct the course.

Bitch Planet is an interesting choice of comic to discuss matters of autonomy because much of the story takes place in a prison where autonomy is almost out of the question. In the case of *The Handmaid's Tale*, even though Offred is not technically in a prison, there is no doubt that she is in fact a prisoner, as much incapable of going out of her room or house unauthorized as any NC who is incarcerated off-world. DeConnick uses the theme of the prison as a central motif that references back to prison exploitation cinema of the 70s. Henry Jenkins explains that "Amid the emergence of second-wave feminism, the women-in-prison films exploited both the desire of women to rebel against patriarchal institutions and the desire of men to see women punished for their transgressions" ("Non-Compliants" 592). DeConnick talks about her use of exploitation tropes in an interview for *Hyperallergic*, when asked about what exactly *Bitch Planet* is exploiting, the writer answers:

> Righteous indignation. Indignitsploitation? It doesn't roll off the tongue. Yeah, I'm trying to use the established tropes from the -sploitation genres, but subvert them and use them to instead underscore how these things are damaging, and some of the more subtle ways that this dehumanization of women — particularly women of color, but also women of size — marginalizes, criminalizes these women for just being who they are. Trying to use those tropes to put a spotlight on how that hurts us all. (Sharp n.p.)

DeConnick is clearly aware of the abysmal rates of incarceration in the US, and how it affects mainly people of color. Henderson writes in her guest essay in issue #1 that "African American women are *three* times more likely to be incarcerated than white women" (*BP* issue #1). This grim statistic translates to the prevalence of women of color in DeConnick and De Landro's

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prison landscape: "Like the demographics of those incarcerated in and targeted by the U.S. prison industrial complex, the prison population on *Bitch Planet* disproportionately comprises women and genderqueer people of color, specifically Black women" (Sweeney 152). As the series progresses and we learn of more NCs and their alleged crimes, we also learn that it is almost impossible to be compliant in the world of the Protectorate, some of these women are incarcerated just for existing, like DeConnick points out in the aforementioned interview. For example, twins April and May Liu are accused of "Unpermitted birth. Genetic error," and Marilyn Gunning of "Trisomy 21" (*BP* issue #5).

This section will analyze how the NCs of *Bitch Planet* also have their autonomy hindered by the hetero-patriarchy of the Protectorate. I will use again Mackenzie's three dimensions of autonomy to investigate how the regime affects women's lives. More importantly, I will show how the NCs are still able to create meaningful relationships despite the adversity, unlike Offred.

3.1 Self-determination

Much like in Gilead, women are condemned in *Bitch Planet* for not abiding by strict rules. In the Protectorate, women have few opportunities to express their autonomy, since any misstep might grant them the label of NC and then shipped off-world. Unlike Gilead, women are still able to work and live independently, as is the case for Penny Rolle, who we learn in issue #3 has her own bakery by being "state sponsored." Self-determination then is not as seriously curtailed in the Protectorate as it is in Gilead. However, women cannot be said to be fully autonomous either. In this section, I will look at how the opportunity and the freedom conditions for self-determination are thwarted by the advertisements both in the story and in the back matter.

Freedom conditions, as I have already argued, are part of external conditions for autonomy. They include political freedoms such as "freedom from arbitrary arrest" and personal

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freedoms, like "freedom from all forms of coercion, manipulation, exploitation, and violence, including sexual exploitation and assault" (Mackenzie, "Three Dimensions" 26-27). What we see clearly in the Protectorate is that women are not granted these freedoms, either political or personal. The very first issue centers around Marian Collins who is sent to the ACO, because her husband decided that he would rather marry a younger woman. Mr. Collins exploited the system that incarcerates women on very little to no evidence and then decided it would be better still to have her killed in prison. Marian ends up murdered by a guard in the midst of a prison riot.

As we learn of more NCs and their crimes, it seems that women can be denounced for anything, including patrilineal dishonor, irreversible ill-temper, gender propaganda, seduction and disappointment, marital neglect, fetal murder, and wanton obesity. The list of "crimes" tells us a lot about the values of the Protectorate; for instance, it seems that women are not allowed to have strong opinions or face charges of "terminal hysteria." No wonder they needed a whole other planet as a prison, as it appears that most women would be sent off on some charge to serve time.

On the surface, women in the Protectorate do have opportunities. As I mentioned above, Penny Rolle does own a bakery. Additionally, in issue #6 about Meiko's past, we learn that her mother teaches music, which is just a cover to teach advanced subjects to girls, like calculus. That is to say that women still hold jobs, and do have a say in their career. Furthermore, women can choose who they marry, unlike in Gilead.[57] While in Gilead the state keeps citizens in check by

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[57] The short story, "What's Love Got to Do With It?" by Jordan Clarke and Naomi Franquiz, in *Bitch Planet: Triple Feature*, is about a nurse who cannot find love and thus delays getting married. Her father ends up having to pay a much higher tax, because of her single status, and risks losing their home. To save her family's home, her only option is to be a surrogate to offset the high cost of being single. This drives home the parallel between Gilead and the Protectorate.

segregation (through the dress code, as I have discussed) and surveillance, the Protectorate keeps them in check through the media, via the Feed, and advertisements.

The copious amounts of advertisements alongside the mandatory viewing of the Feed serves to manipulate citizens into thinking that they have no other options but to comply, thus diminishing their freedoms and opportunities. Kirkpatrick explains that:

> Representations are powerful conduits for conveying ideas affecting our perception of self and others. They also operate as systems encouraging particular ideological agendas, fomenting partisan cultural systems. Aware of the effects of media representation, the creators of *Bitch Planet* powerfully demonstrate its use as a form of 'soft power'. The State's TV channel (the 'feed') nourishes the population, supplying everything they need to survive in the 'new protectorate'. … The 'feed' encourages women to compete for male attention, and men's 'appetites' are whetted by images of available, submissive women. (137-38)

The feed serves to convince people that a woman's job is to comply with whatever men want. Therefore, crimes like the ones I have already mentioned become possible because men also start to believe that they do indeed hold the power to make any sort of demands. The Feed and the ads serve to reinforce the patriarchal ideology at the heart of the Protectorate's regime. In turn, women start to adopt preferences that adapt to these new circumstances, further cementing the grips of oppression.
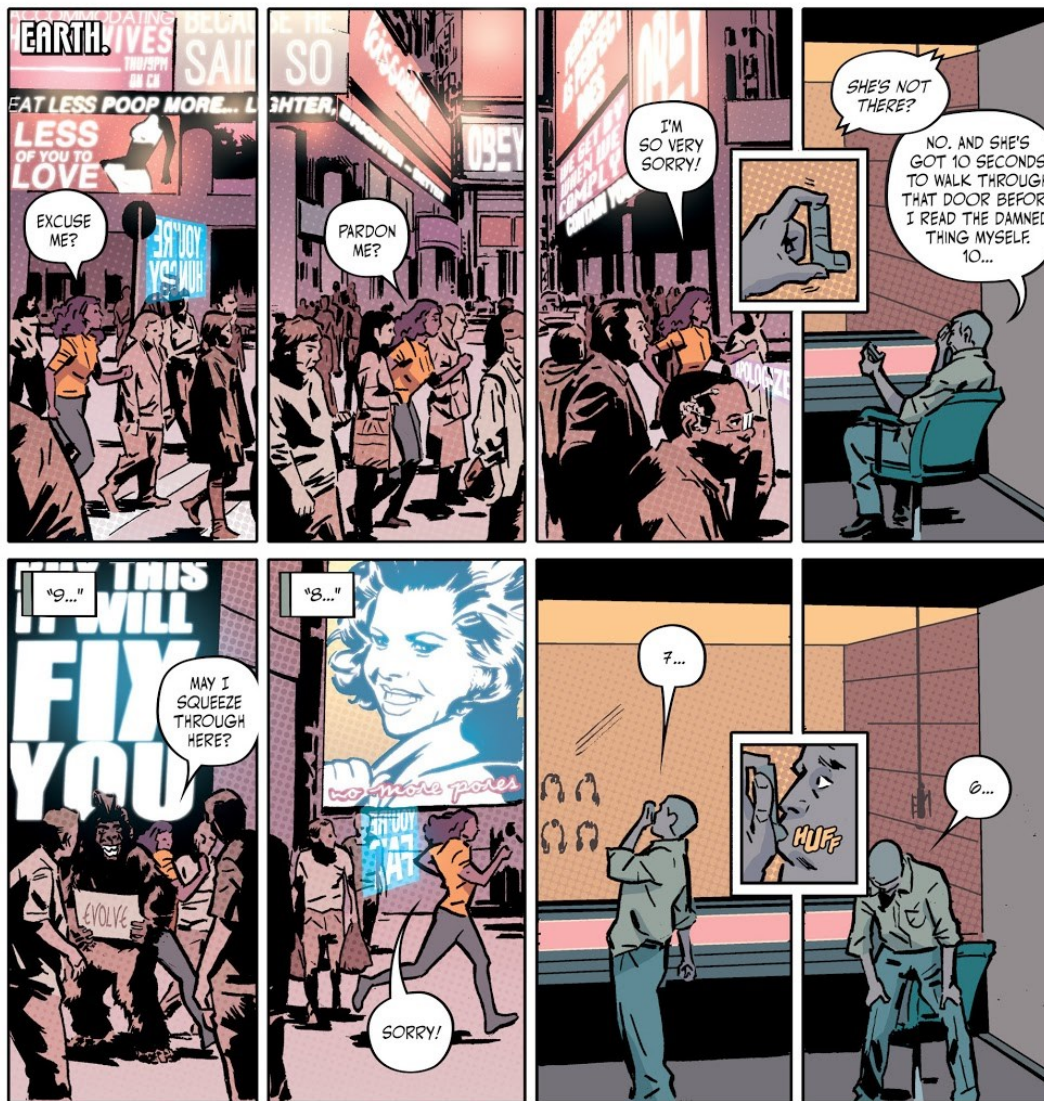
Figure 10: Billboards on the street. *BP issue #1*.

In situations of oppression, minorities tend to adapt their preferences to suit their circumstances. Unfortunately, sometimes these adaptive preferences also serve to reinforce the systems of oppression that limit people's freedoms and opportunities. Ann E. Cudd explains that "[f]eminists have explored how adaptive preferences, sometimes pejoratively termed 'deformed desires' in the context of oppression, reinforce the conditions that reduce freedom for themselves

and others in their oppressed social group" (143). Adaptive preferences are traditionally seen as non-autonomous, because people would tend to choose otherwise if their freedoms and opportunities were expanded. Serene J. Khader offers a comprehensive definition of adaptive preferences as, "a preference that (1) is inconsistent with a person's basic flourishing, (2) was formed under conditions nonconducive to her basic flourishing, and (3) that we do not think a person would have formed under conditions conducive to basic flourishing" (52). For Khader, an adaptive preference would be something that contradicts a person's well-being and that it only happens because the person is living in a situation of oppression in which their options are severely diminished.[58]

On the very first page of *Bitch Planet*, we see a street scene filled with big lit billboards like those in Times Square (figure 10). The words reflect the new regime in power: "Eat less. Poop More. Less of You to Love," "Because He Said So," "Obey", "We Get Buy When We Comply." These ads set up the tone of this dystopian society: women should be seen and not heard. Nothing is too extreme to achieve compliance. In issue #3, we witness the consequences of such extreme and constant propaganda: the mandatory Feed talks about a new parasite diet to help women stay in shape.

We see how adaptive preferences play an important role in the Protectorate in issue #3 through the Feed and the female customers at Penny's bakery. Issue #3 presents the back story of Penny Rolle and how she came to be in the ACO. Penny used to owe a bakery called Born Big. In the bakery we learn that it is mandatory to have the State TV on after 7 am or she could be reported. This moment in the story is telling because we see three female customers who have adapted their preferences to the new regime. One of the women asks for: "One sugar-free, salt-

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[58] Khader tries to keep her discussion of adaptive preferences completely separate from notions of autonomy, but Mackenzie offers a comprehensive reply in "Responding to the Agency Dilemma."

free, gluten-free muffin and three plates" (*BP* issue #3). Not satisfied with eating a really bland muffin, the women proceed to divide it among themselves. Meanwhile, the Feed talks about the new parasite diet: "Have you ever wished you had a gastrointestinal parasite? Well, for a couple of today's tweensters, that dream has come true!" (figure 11). For Kirkpatrick, "Scenes such as these demonstrate how regimes encourage women to see themselves as in competition with each other and, furthermore, to fear 'difference' and desire approval via 'sameness'" (139). The desire for an "ideal" weight leads women in the Protectorate not only to starve themselves, but also to pursue dangerous diets to achieve a body type that is most likely not suitable for everyone. Willingly having a parasite in one's body to lose weight is inconsistent with basic flourishing and is a clear example of an adaptive preference. Similarly, the women in Penny's bakery feel like they need to share a single muffin three-ways in order to keep up with such unachievable body standards, which in turn serves to perpetuate the pressure on women to be extremely skinny (figure 12). If women see others constantly measuring themselves, starving themselves, and worrying about weight, it becomes harder to resist giving into diet culture, because not doing so does not seem like it is the "normal" way to be.

In *Bitch Planet*, we see that one adaptive preference is women's willingness to starve themselves. According to Cudd,

> The oppressive social conditions have warped my sense of the good, making me into someone other than who I might otherwise be. I am less likely to protest or resist the oppressive conditions if I am satisfied with them, and others are unlikely to do so on my behalf. Such preferences create a sense of inevitability and even satisfaction with an unjust status quo. (144-145)

Figure 11: Feed broadcast discussing a parasite diet. *BP issue #3*.

Figure 12: Female customers at Penny's bakery. *BP issue #3*.

The women in Penny's bakery already appear like they have achieved the insane standard of beauty, but they are not satisfied. They proceed to discuss how many calories a third of the muffin is, and how many pounds their toilet scale registered earlier. The dissatisfaction with their current appearance being driven by a culture that constantly wants them to be less. They appear in the bakery to be satisfied to comply by perpetuating their own versions of extreme dieting, instead of talking about how disgusting it is to suggest that preadolescents would want a parasite worm in them in order to lose weight. They are complying to a standard that serves to further oppress and limit their options. Unfortunately, with a constant stream of information telling women that they can only eat less, be less, and be quiet about, it is easy to see how many might believe that they indeed do not have any other options but to comply.

The use of ads in the back matter of each issue gives us additional insight in the world of the Protectorate (figure 13). According to Gray,

> *Bitch Planet* is radically revising all of the various components of back matter in its issues, including the ads, which DeConnick and De Landro satirize throughout the run by representing products available in the world of *Bitch Planet*, like pills to make wives more compliant and a handy guide to tell if you have just spotted a feminist (hint: she wears glasses, maybe). (332)

The ads mimic the layouts one would see in old comics, selling trinkets like x-ray glasses. The back matter is often considered "back page garbage" and ignored by most readers. DeConnick and De Landro take full advantage of the space to continue the conversation of how ideology is also transmitted through these "garbage" spaces. Nowadays, our life is saturated with ads in giant billboards, on every internet website, and on the TV.

Figure 13: Advertisement page at the end of *BP issue #3*.

Even if we claim to ignore these ads, we can still feel the negative impact they have, for instance, in body image.[59] Knowing this, the ads at the back matter are both in-world and out-world additions to the dystopian society of *Bitch Planet*. They do add extra information about the society, while questioning how readers themselves are influenced through advertisement.

At the end of issue #3 one of the ads is for the parasite diet, but instead of trying to sell readers on the diet as a normal ad would do, the text confronts readers with the impossible beauty standards that are in place and would make one ever consider such harmful weight-loss methods. The ad says: "STOP BEING SO FAT AND GROSS YOU BIG FATTY," playing into how the media uses one's insecurities to sell them stuff, but then it continues: "OR maybe try not to let other people's standards of beauty or femininity or your value as a human being dictate your self-worth … maybe today try not to believe that your value is inextricably linked to some asshat's assessment of your desirability. Fuck that dude. Fuck that culture" (*BP* issue #3). DeConnick and De Landro revert the ad from trying to sell you an already absurd product to telling you not to buy into the very culture that tries to sell you these things and ideologies. The ad section functions at once as an example of what products and ads would be seen in the world of *Bitch Planet*, but also as a further layer of satire for the readers to confront how these ads also function in our current society.

Furthermore, the ads page is also a site of resistance, as a place to make fun of the impossible demands placed on women, and also as a place to form connections. Kirkpatrick notes that "there are also resistant spaces, smaller personal 'Missed Connection' ads, where activist citizens subvert the media by running statistics on female domestic violence and deaths. It is a powerful, uplifting experience to read these small shout-outs against an oppressive regime:

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[59] For a quantitative research on the impact of thin models in decreased body satisfaction of young adult women, see Hawkins, Nicole, et al.

people create ways, spaces, to resist" (136). The "back page garbage" gets ignored so often that creates a space where resistance can exist. In other issues, the smaller ads feature conversations between rebels that seem to plot against the regime. In issue #3, "Missed Connection" offers real statistics on domestic violence. Functioning at two levels at once, both advancing the in-world patriarchal society of the Protectorate, but also as an off-world mockery of the power of advertisement, the back matter shows that even in the midst of oppression, people find ways to fight back.

The women in the Protectorate appear to have a few more opportunities and freedoms than the Handmaids in Gilead do. However, we can see how the average woman has adapted their behavior in order to survive in the Protectorate. These adaptive preferences maintain the status quo as it is, and it facilitates the continued oppression of women. Meanwhile, the back matter ads offer readers a way to question the messages in advertising and to seek out spaces to resist these messages.

3.2 Self-governance

Self-governance represents the necessary internal conditions to autonomy, and it is composed of competence and authenticity. Similar to Gilead, the Protectorate also hinders people's self-conception, which in turn diminishes their autonomy. I will look once again at issue #3 and the character of Penny Rolle to discuss how the society of the Fathers attempts to restrict people's self-governance by rewarding compliance. Nonetheless, Penny resists to fit into the narrow standards the Fathers set out for women, and thus shows that she can remain autonomous at least in her self-governance.

To have competence, according to Mackenzie, means having the necessary skills to take autonomous action. There are several skills that relational theorists have identified as necessary,

for instance, cognitive skills, emotional skills, and "volitional skills, such as self-control, and decisiveness" (Mackenzie, "Three Dimensions" 33-4). In issue #3, there is a flashback to Penny's adolescence under the tutelage of Mother Siebertling. In this brief memory, Penny has hit a boy for talking about her grandma, and Mother is appalled. She asks Penny: "Why? Why can't you control these violent impulses of yours?" (*BP* issue #3). The question points to Penny's apparent inability to self-control, suggesting that in the eyes of the regime Penny does not have the necessary skills to be trusted to be autonomous. The sequence continues with Mother trying to "fix" Penny's hair, namely, trying to fix Penny herself.[60] Like her hair, Penny refuses to fit into the boxes presented to her by the Protectorate, even if the Mother tries to tame her. Young Penny does not seem to understand why she has to conform and act the way that is expected of her, instead of how she truly feels. To which Mother replies, "It doesn't work like that. You need to learn to see yourself through the Fathers' eyes" (*BP* issue #3). Learning to see oneself through the Father's eyes means that Penny cannot continue to develop her personality and independence, because that makes her non-compliant and dangerous. The flashback shows us that the only competences encouraged by the Fathers are the ones that make Penny easy to deal with, namely, pleasant, and passive. Her strong emotions are unruly, like her hair. In a nutshell, Mother Siebertling tries to teach Penny the adaptive preferences that would make her a "good girl" in the eyes of the Fathers, but these competences would not foster Penny's authentic self.

In order to be self-governing, one must act with authenticity. What I have demonstrated in the previous section, is that the oppressive society of the Protectorate distorts people's own motivations into adaptive preferences that are not conducive to basic flourishing. In consequence, the women in Penny's bakery that are sharing a single sugar-free, taste-free muffin cannot be said

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[60] Urcaregui points out that this scene brings up the notion of white people, like Mother, policing Black women's hair ("Intersectional" 56).

to be acting authentically, since they are acting according to circumstances rather than genuine endorsement. To reiterate, authentic actions happen when the agent is capable of reflecting on their choices and endorsing the course of action that they took; or, as Christman puts it, the agent does not feel alienated from their own decisions (155-6).

In issue #3, in her adulthood, Penny has another burst of emotion that leads her to breaking the Feed in her own bakery and then being prosecuted by the Council of Fathers. Penny's crimes include insubordination, assault, aesthetic offenses, capillary disfigurement, and wanton obesity. Maite Urcaregui explains that "In the charges lobbed against her [Penny], the Fathers claim that they have jurisdiction over her body and, in doing so, suggest that it is a piece of property that does not belong to her but rather to the state" ("Intersectional" 54). In her trial, the Fathers take on the paternalistic approach claiming to know her better than herself, and what is in her best interest. Contrasting Penny with other women in the comic, specifically the three customers in her bakery, we see that Penny's refusal to adapt her preferences and comply is seen as a crime against the state.

Even if Penny were to comply, her race marks her as different in the world of *Bitch Planet*. Urcaregui points out that the absence of women of color in the landscape of the Protectorate speaks of our own society's systemic racism that sees whiteness as the only standard of beauty (for instance, the women in the feed, Mother Siebertling, and the AIs are all white). Thus, Penny "as a black woman, is always already outside of the mythologized ideal of femininity, which is founded on a white norm. Her 'aesthetic offenses' include not only her size but also her masculine-leaning gender performance and her blackness" (Urcaregui, "Intersectional" 55). What we see in the character of Penny is the intersectionality of multiple

systems of oppression operating at once: gender, race, and size.[61] Penny's true crime in the eyes of the Fathers is her refusal to try to fit in a system that is already stacked against her. She is unwilling to change any aspect of herself in the name of conformity.

In a final attempt to make Penny comply, the fathers put her in front of a special technological apparatus that is supposed to read one's brain and then reproduce their ideal version of themselves. The Fathers' expectation is that her ideal version would resemble their own: skinny, straight-haired, passive, docile. Instead, Penny appears in their mirror exactly as she is (figure 14). In this moment, we can see that Penny's actions are authentic, since she endorses all that she has done up until this point. Her ideal-self and her present-self align completely, as the mirror does not show any difference between the two. According to Urcaregui,

> Penny does not give the Fathers the satisfaction of believing they have the right to describe her own reality; instead, she recognizes the value of her own lived experience and unique standpoint and maintains an insurgent sense of self-love. She defines and values herself by her own standards rather than those of a patriarchal, racist society" ("Intersectional" 55).

That is to say that Penny acts in self-governing ways whenever possible, by styling her hair the way she likes, by refusing to slim down due to pressure from society, and by speaking her truth.

The last page of Penny's story shows her laughing at the Fathers futile attempts to make her comply. We see that Penny hesitated to look in the mirror for a moment, but once she confirms that her ideal self is exactly as she is, her reaction is to laugh. For Urcaregui, her laughter itself is a site of resistance:

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[61] For a more comprehensive discussion of intersectionality and *Bitch Planet*, see Urcaregui, "Intersectional."

Figure 14: Penny's ideal self exactly as she already is. *BP issue #3*.

Through her laughter, she rejects the mythical ideal of femininity from which she has

already been excluded and claims her own noncompliant body as her ideal self. She

refuses to become small and demands the right to take up space. Her laughter is a

conscious refusal of the Fathers' attempts to obliterate her subjectivity through spiritual

and physical violence. ("Laugher" n.p.)

The Fathers have no other choice but to send her away to the ACO, Penny's ideal self defies their

paternalistic impulse of "knowing" what is best for her.

Despite the oppressive society of the Protectorate that attempts to limit women's choices

and chaperone their decisions at every turn, some characters find ways to remain autonomous,

such as the case of Penny. She is able to maintain a level of self-governance even if she is

punished for it. She remains true to her own values and commitments by refusing to dress, act

and be the way the Fathers want. Penny's story "offers self-definition as a means of heroic

resistance and hopefulness" (Urcaregui, "Intersectional" 55). Penny shows that resistance to

oppression is not always overt and big, but it can be just about refusing to have adaptive

preferences, like refusing to buy into diet culture.

3.3 Self-authorization

Self-authorization for Mackenzie means "a person must not only be capable of

understanding and responding to this social demand but must also regard herself as a valid source

of self-authorizing claims" ("Three Dimensions" 37). An agent can be held accountable for their

actions, values and commitments by other agents, provided that the agents are viewed as equals.

In the Protectorate, the Fathers did not deem Penny's wants and needs as valid, because she was

not viewed as an equal among them. The situation changes once Penny arrives at the ACO. Even

though Penny is effectively an inmate and subject to the whims of prison guards, among the other

NCs she is viewed as an equal agent. Mackenzie describes three conditions to self-authorizations: accountability, self-evaluation and social recognition. I will analyze Penny and Kam's reaction to Meiko's death in issue #7.

Kam is an ex-athlete from the world before who volunteers to go to bitch planet in search of her sister. Once there, she is framed for the murder of Marian Collins, which was paid for by her own husband and orchestrated by prison personnel. Kam is offered a deal that, in order to be absolved of the murder, she has to lead a NC team on the gruesome sport of Megaton for the entertainment of the Fathers.[62] Megaton is a sport similar to football in which the teams compete to score points at the end of the field. Unlike football, any tackling tactics are acceptable as long as it is one-on-one. Kam assembles the team after being convinced by other NCs that it is a means of getting back at the Fathers at their own game. The two main players we see in action are Meiko, who is super fast, and Penny, who can tackle anyone. In issue #5, there is a practice game against the prison guards in which Kam instructs the players to keep Meiko's path clear to ensure they score. The prison guards attempt to gain the lead by converging against Penny and others and tackling them as a group, which is illegal. Even though Penny cannot keep up with Meiko to keep her path clear, they are still able to score. As Meiko celebrates, a guard who is upset about losing to a bunch of women ends up killing Meiko. Penny feels responsible for Meiko's death, because she was supposed to be the one to offer her back up.

The first condition for self-authorization is accountability, which "means being responsive to others' requests for explanation, being prepared to provide reasons for our beliefs and values, and being willing to defend or revise them in light of others' critical questioning" (Mackenzie, "Three Dimensions" 37). Mackenzie highlights the dialogical nature of accountability by saying

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[62] For a discussion on the relationships between racism, plea deals and *Bitch Planet*, see Sweeney.

that it also means being prepared to hold others accountable for their actions as well. In issue #7, we see a grieving Penny feeling responsible and accountable for Meiko's death. Her sadness translated as the shower water that washes over her while she sits limply on the floor by herself (figure 15). When Kam arrives, she attempts to tell Penny that Meiko's death is not her fault, but the other does not seem to believe it at first.

Figure 15: Penny grieving the death of Meiko. *BP issue #7*.

Figure 16: Kam and Penny discussing Meiko's detah. *BP issue #7.*

Figure 17: Kam and Penny holding hands. *BP issue #7.*

Penny and Kam both regard each other as equal moral agents and thus they are able to hold each other accountable. While Penny believes that she can be held responsible for Meiko's death, because she was unable to keep up with her partner at the Megaton match, Kam wants Penny to know that it was not her fault that a guard decided to brutally retaliate. Penny is not convinced, "It is. Kam, it is my fault. Meiko's dead and it's all my fault" (*BP* issue #7) (figure 16). This reaction shows that Penny is capable and ready to take responsibility for her actions, namely, she can be held accountable by an equal like Kam. Kam, in this instance, wants to show Penny that the outcome, however, was not her responsibility. After all, it was not Penny who decided to hurt Meiko on purpose. The interaction shows two moral agents arguing and negotiating their parts on the events that unravelled.

The second condition is self-evaluation that Mackenzie understands as having self-trust, self-esteem, and self-respect. For Mackenzie, it means regarding oneself as having an equal moral stand with others, trusting in one's own capacities, and reflecting on one's life and commitments as meaningful ("Three Dimensions" 37-8). In this brief exchange between the two women, Kam tells Penny that they are often seen as strong women, "We're strong, right? You and me. We spend our whole lives being strong, and then… One day you realize that strong ain't strong enough" (*BP* issue #7) (figure 17). We know that Penny is strong, both physically and mentally. She has demonstrated that she is able to take on any guard that attempts to tackle her. Moreover, she is strong to withstand the ideological agenda of the Fathers and still assert herself as she is, not who they would want her to be. Penny's self-trust and self-esteem seem linked to her capability to be strong, which crumbles with the loss of her friend. Her guilt over Meiko's death also stems from her realization that being strong was not enough to protect her friend.

The scene between Penny and Kam plays into the Strong Black Woman stereotype and subverts it. According to Rachel Marie-Crane Williams, "Black women are often presented in popular culture as characters with finite possibilities … These stereotypes threaten to crowd out accurate representations of black women seeking to build authentic selves and liberation from tiny cultural pigeonholes" (n.p.). In this issue's critical essay, Angelina Jade Bastién explains this archetype as "unbreakable, silent, always giving to others by never asking anything for herself. Her strength is mythic" (*BP* issue #7). The image of Black women as able to stand any kind of hardships without asking for help might seem ideal, but Bastién points out that, "[it] is just another way to silence black women. It operates as another way for our pain to go unheard" (n.p.). We see Penny being strong at all times up until this moment: she was strong back on Earth, and she was strong inside the prison. In this moment of grief, she does not want to ask for help and tries to keep Kam away. Kam offers her the opportunity to be vulnerable in this moment. In the last panel, we see again a self-assured Penny looking forward instead of down. Kam shows Penny that being strong is not the only option, but that she is a layered person who can also let herself feel grief over the loss of her friend and have support in her moment of deep sadness. Carrie McClain, in the blog *Black Nerd Problems*, writes that this scene is "[a] blessed representation of sisterhood, of Black sisterhood, of Black women comforting each other… of Black women being vulnerable and absolutely fucking worthy of love and comfort and all the good things" (n.p.). While Penny's self-esteem was hurt by not being strong enough to protect Meiko, Kam shows Penny that being strong is not the only way to be and act in the world. By negotiating accountability for Meiko's death, and showing that sadness and vulnerability can be shared between the two, Penny is also capable of seeing that her sense of self does not have to be attached solely to her strength.

Finally, the third condition is social recognition, that is, a person must be "regarded as a respect-worthy, autonomous agent by others" (Mackenzie, "Three Dimensions" 38). In the Protectorate, Penny is not regarded as an equal agent by the Fathers, who are paternalistic towards her. Inside the ACO, Penny finds other women who treat her like an equal, and therefore afford her larger autonomy in her social interactions than what she had on Earth. Obviously, she is still inside of a prison and very limited in the activities she can and cannot do, but in her relationships we see Penny being treated fairly and as a worthy moral agent. In her interaction with Kam, Kam recognizes Penny's suffering as natural and does not demand her to change or hide her feelings. In contrast, in issue #3, Mother Siebertling does not recognize Penny's hurt feelings regarding the boy who spoke ill of her grandmother. Instead, Mother tries to tell Penny to contain it and to act as the Fathers would approve: passively and quietly. Mackenzie argues that "[s]uch failures of recognition are quite typical in social relations involving domination or inequalities of power … internalization of non- or misrecognition can corrode an agent's sense of self-regard, thereby undermining her sense of herself as self-authorizing" ("Three Dimensions" 38-9). Disregarding someone's feelings, (even if Penny's action to hit some was wrong) tells the agent that their emotions are somehow wrong. In turn, this can signal to the individual that they do not have social recognition.

After Kam tells Penny that being strong is not enough, there are two long horizontal panels focusing on the two women holding hands (figure 17). The gesture of holding hands shows that the two women recognize each other in their strength and in their pain. It is a very vulnerable moment in which they support each other. The long panel focusing on their holding hands serves to intensify the meaning behind their action by expanding time and freezing it in their touch. While the dialogue before shows that Penny and Kam are capable of holding each

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other accountable for their actions, holding hands demonstrates that they acknowledge each other's presence, feelings, and thoughts. It fully shows the social recognition that Penny did not have from others on Earth. The next panel shows both women from a distance sitting down on the floor of the showers. They are at the same level, recognizing each other as moral agents, when a guard standing up tells them their time is over, reminding readers that they are not fully in control of their autonomy, despite the acknowledgement they share as moral agents. Once they rise, Kam offers a rallying claim to Penny, by telling her that the true culprit of Meiko's death is still out there. Instead of holding herself responsible for Meiko's death, both women appear to agree to hold the true murderer responsible. The last panel shows a changed Penny, standing up and looking ahead, accepting that the responsibility of Meiko's death is not hers. After interacting with Kam, Penny can reclaim her sense of herself, demonstrating how social relationships can shape people's self-authorization, and thus their autonomy.

3.4 Implications to friendship

Bitch Planet offers a different account of relationships under oppression than Nault's *The Handmaid's Tale*. Unlike Offred, who struggles to maintain her sense of autonomy, Penny is able to assert herself despite the impositions placed on her by the Fathers. Ultimately, the price she has to pay for her sense of self is to be imprisoned off-world. However, it is at the ACO that Penny finds others with whom to foster stronger friendships. Not only she connects with Meiko, but also with Kam.

Interestingly, it is inside the prison that many of these women find others like themselves. While on Earth these women were bombarded by the Feed and advertisements constantly telling them to be otherwise, but at the ACO they no longer have to deal with these negative messages. Yes, they are incarcerated, but they are also freed from the constant media intrusions telling them

that they are not enough (not thin enough, passive enough, pretty enough). At the ACO, with others who also "failed" to comply to the impossible standards set by the Fathers, they find peers who regard them as equals, which is the case of Penny and Kam. While in issue #3 we see Penny in stark contrast to the female customers at her bakery that buy into the social script that they have to starve themselves, at the ACO she is among women who did not conform to those notions. In this sense, Penny is finally among peers who regard her as equal, and not as someone who is lacking, such as Mother Siebertling who thought Penny needed fixing.

Penny is able to maintain a sense of autonomy, despite the oppressive society in which she is embedded. Having some autonomy over her life, means she is in a better position to seek relationships that in turn reinforce her sense of autonomy. As I have discussed in the previous chapter, Offred's own autonomy is much more curtailed than Penny's, which leads Offred to remain in a subjugated position unable to truly foster friendships. On the other hand, Penny cultivates a relationship with Meiko and Kam. When Meiko dies, Kam offers Penny the emotional support she needs by asserting Penny's position as an equal moral agent capable of her own choices and decisions. Kam shows Penny that she is indeed responsible for her choices, but not for the choices of other people (like the guard who fatally injured Meiko). In this way, Kam aids Penny in her grief and also in her sense of self-esteem: Penny can rest assured that she regarded within the ACO as a capable autonomous agent. To return to Friedman's notion that not every relationship fosters autonomy: we can see that Mother's tutelage of Penny attempted to dimmish Penny's autonomy and groom her to be the passive woman the Fathers expect her to be. In contrast, Kam authorizes Penny to feel sad and vulnerable for not being able to protect her friend, but maintains Penny's agency and responsibility to hold the correct person responsible for

Meiko's death: the guard who did it. In short, through her relationship with Kam, Penny can more fully exercise her own autonomy.

3.5 Conclusion

I have argued that despite the Protectorate function in a paternalistic and oppressive way that is eerily similar to Gilead it still offers more opportunities for women to maintain their autonomy. The Protectorate attempts to control the citizens in a different way, mainly through constant advertising and programing through the Feed, billboards, and ads. Another way to keep women in check is the mass-incarceration of those who fail to internalize the damaging social scripts put forth by the Fathers. The crimes women can be charged with mirrors the priorities the Fathers have: to encourage slim, beautiful, passive, obedient, and compliant women. Even though women can hold jobs, choose who to marry, and even go to school, they are barred from positions of power and have to defer authority over to their husbands. They can even have charges fabricated against them, as is the case of Marian Collins who gets sent to ACO because her husband wished to marry someone younger. Once the NCs find themselves in the off-world prison, however, they also find themselves with other women who share their own dissatisfaction with the current society. In their inability to comply, they also are for the first time free to just be themselves. In the ACO, these women can recognize each other as equal peers, which is the case of Penny and Kam. Penny and Kam's relationship demonstrate how some friendships are able to protect and encourage autonomy in each individual. Through their friendship, Penny is recognized as a moral agent capable of making her own choices and responsible for her actions, while also having the space to be vulnerable and express her emotions without judgement. Kam reminds Penny that she is still strong, even if she was not able to protect Meiko. More importantly, Kam aids Penny in realizing that to be a tur autonomous agent, she also has to

realize where her responsibilities end: and it was not her fault that Meiko was killed. Kam asserts Penny's self-esteem and sense of self-governance by reminding her friend that the true culprit for Meiko's death is the one who should pay for it. It is through their friendship that Penny is further able to exercise her autonomy. Thus, I have hope to demonstrate that relational autonomy is an important component to foster and maintain not only friendships, but also a sense of freedom, even in oppressive societies. In the next part, I will introduce ethics of care and continue the discussion on how friendships can foster a way to survive and thrive in oppressive societies.

Part II: Ethics of Care

When Haraway asks us to stay with the trouble of the present, she pinpoints two common options that we can fall prey to in these difficult times: we can either give up all together, or foster hopes of a future techno-godly fix (4), humanity's very own *deus ex machina*. Refusing both options, Haraway wants us to stay rooted in the messiness of the present moment, holding the tensions between peoples, places, and organisms. In a sense, to stay with the trouble means owning up to the mess we find ourselves in and taking response-ability for our and others' lives, ecosystems, and habitats. In order to stay with the trouble, we should make kin, "that is, we require each other in unexpected collaborations and combinations, in hot compost piles. We become-with each other or not at all" (Haraway 4). To become-with, to make-with, and to think-with are the ways in which Haraway highlights what we need to survive and thrive in the Anthropocene. In other words, rampant neoliberal individualism has to give way to friendship, kin, communities, connections, relations. Haraway continues:

> Relays, string figures, passing patterns back and forth, giving and receiving, patterning, holding the unasked-for pattern in one's hands, response-ability; that is core to what I mean by staying with the trouble in serious multispecies worlds. Becoming-with, not becoming, is the name of the game; becoming-with is how partners are, in Vinciane Despret's terms, rendered capable. (12)

Haraway relates the notion of "becoming-with" with the popular children's game of cat's cradle in the sense that the game needs at least one more person to play it with, and that each new pattern is only formed by the collaboration between the partners. It is only through being in

partnerships and alternating between giving and receiving that we can stay with the trouble of the present and escape bounded individualism.

To think about how to "become-with," as Haraway proposes, I turn to notions of care ethics. Care ethics, or ethics of care, can serve as a counterpoint to the pervasiveness of neoliberal discourse as it sheds light on the values of connection, solidarity, and responsibility. According to Fiona Robinson:

> Care ethics is a critical feminist theory that seeks to reveal the different forms of power that keep the values and activities of care hidden from "public" view, and to demonstrate the devastating effects that ensue when care is consistently devalued, sidelined, and subordinated to the higher values of profit and military power. As an antidote to the values of neoliberalism, care must be recognized as a social responsibility, an attribute of citizenship, and a basis of feminist solidarity. ("Future of Feminism" 308)

Care ethics is a robust body of work that focuses on relationality and interdependence and stands in direct opposition to notions of individual autonomy and atomism analyzed in Part I. Thus, care ethics can provide a framework on how exactly we can become-with in a world that is interconnected, in flux, and in dire need of responsible action to counteract the effects of individualism.

María Puig de la Bellacasa claims that "[c]are is omnipresent, even through the effects of its absence" (1). Care is necessary to the life of all people and, when it fails, infants cannot grow, the sick do not recover, and human life does not flourish. At one point or another one has been cared for and one has cared for another person. The ethics of care is a philosophical theory that has amassed a robust body of work in the several decades since its first formulations. In a nutshell, "care ethics [posits] ethics as relational, contextualized, embodied and realized through

practices rather than principles" ("Decentering Ethics: Challenging Privileges, Building Solidarities" CFP). Society tends to forget about the labour involved in care, making it invisible. However, the ethics of care demands us to bring care to the spotlight and to ask questions, such as: how care is an integral part of everyone's life; how we depend on others constantly; how to put relations at the forefront of theory and practice of both ethics and politics. In this chapter, I will provide an overview of feminist critiques of traditional Western theories of ethics, then I will present how the ethics of care provides a feminist standpoint that contrasts to these theories. I will also briefly discuss the definitions of care and its main themes. Finally, I will demonstrate how care is also relevant to political theory.

1. Feminist critiques of traditional ethics

Feminist ethics, broadly speaking, and care ethics, more specifically, have provided a critique of traditional Western ethics on a number of ways. Traditional Western ethics are understood primarily as deontology (especially Kantian ethics), utilitarianism, and social contract theory. Hilde Lindemann points out that, even though these ethical theories are substantially different from each other, they share several characteristics (75). Feminists have criticized these theories in at least three respects, notably in their treatments of: notions of personhood, society, and rationality. This next section will expand on each of these critiques in turn.

Firstly, the notion of person put forth by traditional ethics is that of an ideal individual who is capable of impartial judgement. These theories presuppose abstract moral agents who are equally powerful (same social status), and rational (same education). Additionally, to maintain their impartiality, these moral agents are not considered to be in a relationship with one another. More poignantly, however, is the fact that to achieve an equal status of rational strangers, these

moral agents must be presumed to be the privileged white men at the top of the social hierarchy. Virginia Held argues that these traditional theories purport:

> Abstract and idealized forms of the judgements made by persons who are dominant in an established social order. They do not represent the moral experiences of women caring for children or aged parents, or of minority service workers providing care for minimal wages. And they do not deal with the judgments of groups who must rely on communal solidarity for survival. (25)

Traditional moral theories, then, rarely take into account oppressed, underprivileged others, favoring ideal scenarios that do not represent the lives of a great number of the population, including those of women, children, people of color, queer people or disabled people, to name a few. If most of the population does not seem to fit into an ideal ethical theory, then ethics needs to be adjusted to account for them. As Alison Jaggar points out, "[a] feminist mode of moral reasoning must be applicable to circumstances that are less than morally ideal" (180). One main concern of feminist ethics and ethics of care is to provide a solid framework of moral theory that will account for power inequalities between agents in a way that reflects lived realities.

Secondly, the critique of society refers, mainly, to the artificial separation of the public and the private spheres. Traditional theories view the public sphere as a place in which rights are imposed in order to secure people's freedom. Lindemann explains that the rights to freedom of the public sphere "are couched negatively, in terms of things the state or other individuals may not do to you, and can be fairly summed up as the right not to be interfered with" (92). Subsequently, with this freedom, people are able to pursue their versions of the good life in their private spheres. As many feminists have already argued over the decades, the division of society

between the public and private spheres contributes to the oppression, subjugation and invisibility of women's lives and labour. But it is not merely women who suffer from this divide; other marginalized individuals do too. This conception implies a public sphere where every individual is seen as equally free and autonomous, which is an illusion that ignores large parts of the population.

The public sphere is supposed to be a place of impartiality, which we might understand as opposed to the subjective nature of family, friendships, and community ties, that is, of the private realm. Impartiality is needed in the public realm as a method or an ideal intended to curb self-service, namely the "favoring one's own interests" (Friedman, *What Are Friends For?* 9). For Friedman, this ideal is unattainable because there is no way to actually measure whether one has managed to occupy a completely unbiased moral standpoint, since theories do not fully describe how this is supposed to be achieved by normal biased people (*What Are Friends For?* 10). Moreover, Lindemann argues that these very theories are not impartial, because "they favor persons whose social standing, concerns, and occupations look suspiciously like those of well-to-do white men" (93-4), which is to say, those who already have privileged access to the public realm.

The public sphere is also often presented as universal and impersonal, represented by the world of law, politics, and war. Again, these realms seem to suspiciously foreground the world of well-off white men who work outside the home (Lindemann 94). Held highlights how these traditional theories all make use of impartiality:

> Both Kantian moralities of universal, abstract moral laws, and utilitarian versions of the
> ethics of Bentham and Mill advocating impartial calculations to determine what will
> produce the most happiness for the most people have been developed for *interactions*

between relative strangers. Contractualism treats interactions between *mutually disinterested individuals*. … All require impartiality and make no room at the foundational level for the partiality that connects us to those we care for and those who care for us. (24 emphasis mine)

Universality (i.e. that every one is considered to be the same) and impersonality (i.e. that no one is put above anyone else) are important concepts for a few aspects of society, for example, an accused person standing trial should certainly not be judged by someone who holds a grudge against them. However, these realms, which are allegedly populated by disinterested strangers, do not easily translate into the everyday lives of most people. Most people interact and live among a community of relationships where they make biased decisions that affect particularized others in their networks. Hence, moral theories should be able to accommodate exactly these types of particularized relationships.

Finally, feminist critiques of traditional ethical theories review notions of rationality. The problem identified by feminists is not with reason *per se*, but with the fact that traditional ethics considers only reason as a valid source of knowledge.[63] Lindemann makes a list of other forms of knowledge that regularly compose our moral thinking, but that end up being largely ignored in traditional Western ethics:

It excludes the emotions, rather than acknowledging that feelings such as gratitude, resentment, and anger play a useful role in our moral thinking. It excludes what we care about, rather than acknowledging that what we care about often is the reason we ought to do something. It excludes trust, rather than acknowledging that trust is what keeps our moral judgments from being paranoid. And it excludes narrative or other representational

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[63] This is a similar problem that was highlighted by feminist discussions of autonomy as rationality is often considered as the only necessary competence an agent needs to act autonomously.

modes of reasoning, rather than acknowledging that stories and images are powerful tools

for making moral sense of the world and our place in it. (95)

In other words, rationality cannot be the single criteria for moral thinking and action. In everyday life, people use not only their reasoning skills, but also their feelings, their relationships, and their bodies to make a decision on the best course of action. Thus, a more comprehensive moral theory needs to include or, at least, be open to forms of knowledge other than reason.

As these three critiques demonstrate, traditional Western theories leave out or ignore much that is representative to the lives of marginalized others, women included. Lindermann notes that "all three theories [Kantian deontology, utilitarianism and social contract theory] fail utterly to acknowledge the morally crucial labor that must be done in families and other private places if society is to function at all" (92). The author here refers to all the mothering, nursing, serving, and caring that needs to happen every day so that "autonomous" and "equal" men can go out and thrive in the public realm. Feminist ethics aims at addressing the short comings of more traditional Western ethics to include all individuals, not only white privileged men. Moreover, as mentioned above, a feminist moral theory must grapple with non-ideal states, such as oppression, inequality and vulnerability, because this is the reality of our world and societies. Ethics of care, specifically, attempts to address relationships, emotions, and non-ideal circumstances that are lacking in more traditional Western ethics. By foregrounding relationships, ethics of care understands that power imbalances are common occurrences; that relationships are not always chosen; that vulnerability and dependency are a natural part of life; and that each person is unique and cannot simply apply a universal rule to guide their lives. In the next section, I will present some of the components of care ethics.

2. Definitions of care

The first articulations on the ethics of care date back to the 1980s in the works of Sara Ruddick (first in her essay "Maternal Thinking" [1980], and later in her book *Maternal Thinking: Toward a Politics of Peace* [1989]), Carol Gilligan (*In A Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women's Development*, 1982), and Nel Noddings (*Caring: A Relational Approach to Ethics & Moral Education*, 1986). For these writers, "mothering" is paradigmatic in the way one cares for others.[64] Thinking about mothering relationships opened up new ethical possibilities that traditional Western philosophy had rejected up until this point. These works showed how women's points of view could generate new knowledge to established ethical theories.

Carol Gilligan's work was the first book-length analysis of this new "feminine ethics." Gilligan, a moral psychologist from Harvard, was unsatisfied by the findings of her mentor, Lawrence Kohlberg, whose research suggested that girls develop moral maturity slower than boys. Gilligan identified in her own research that girls would speak "in a different voice" about the moral dilemmas presented to them. While boys tended to think in terms of universal principles and rules, girls pondered the relationships and the contexts of each scenario. Thus, Gilligan concluded that girls display a different way to reason around moral problems, but that they are not necessarily slower to develop, as Kohlberg had suggested. According to Gilligan:

> In this conception, the moral problem arises from conflicting responsibilities rather than from competing rights and requires for its resolution a mode of thinking that is contextual and narrative rather than formal and abstract. This conception of morality as concerned with the activity of care centers moral development around the understanding of

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[64] Caring as mothering is a notion that has been criticized by many scholars. For a detailed critique, see Koehn.

responsibility and relationships, just as the conception of morality as fairness ties moral

development to the understanding of rights and rules. (19)

Gilligan aptly summarizes the key insight that ethics of care brought to traditional ethics, namely

a focus on context, relationships and narrativity. The works of Ruddick, Gilligan, and Noddings

consider moral dilemmas not through the lens of a fully autonomous, impartial, and emotionless

individual, but rather through the lens of a connected, relational, and embodied individual.

Since the appearance of these initial works, the ethics of care has been flourishing as a

philosophical theory. Moreover, there has been an appropriation of the insights of care into

diverse fields of study, for instance, education (Bozalek et al 2021; Noddings 2007; Johnston

2006); business (Hamington and Sander-Staudt 2011); health care (Groenhout 2018; Edwards

2011; Gastmans 2006), animal ethics (Puig de la Bellacasa 2017; Donovan and Adams 2007);

social policy (Mahon and Robinson 2011; Hankivsky 2004); and literary studies (Schaffer 2019;

Hétu 2018; DeFalco 2015). Significantly, numerous scholars have used the ethics of care to

develop political theories in both national and international contexts (Tronto 1994, 2013; Engster

and Hamington 2015; Robinson 2011; Hamington and Miller 2006; Held 2006).

The prominence of care in various fields of study begs the question of what exactly care

is. The answer to this question turns out to be more complex than one might expect. Each

philosopher of care seems to focus on a different aspect of care when elaborating their own

definitions. Amelia DeFalco considers, for instance, the many uses for the word "care" in our

everyday language: "We give care, take care, care for, care about, have cares, and don't care" (5).

Given the multiple uses of care in our language, DeFalco concludes that, "[i]n its broadest sense,

care is affection, devotion, responsibility, even obligation; it is action, behaviour, motivation, and

practice: care feels and care does" (5). DeFalco's description points towards care as significant to

people's lives in diverse and overlapping ways. It is precisely this diversity that makes a concise definition of care so difficult to achieve.

Joan Tronto and Berenice Fisher propose a now famous definition of care as, "everything that we do to maintain, continue, and repair our 'world' so that we can live in it as well as possible. That world includes our bodies, our selves, and our environment, all of which we seek to interweave in a complex, life-sustaining web" (40). This definition is one of the broadest definitions of care in the available critical literature, and some even claim it is too broad. This view of care includes almost everything, in that it makes care about everything and everyone. However, this definition succeeds in including the relationships between humans and non-humans in care relations. Thus, for example, taking care of nature becomes a caring act. Moreover, Fisher and Tronto's definition includes self-care in the realm of care ethics, which is important, because if the caregiver is self-sacrificing in a caring relationship, then no care is actually happening. Overall, having such an extensive definition effectively addresses several forms of caring relationships and caring agents.

Puig de la Bellacasa uses Tronto and Fisher's definition as a guiding point for her own articulation of care in her book, *Matters of Care: Speculative Ethics in More than Human Worlds*. For the author, the definition succeeds in pointing out the interconnectedness of our world, and in positioning care in the realm of politics. Puig de la Bellacasa writes that Tronto and Fisher see care "as vital in interweaving a web of life, expressing a key theme in feminist ethics, an emphasis on interconnection and interdependency in spite of the aversion to 'dependency' in modern industrialized societies that still give prime value to individual agency" (4). Care is fundamentally about the relationship between people and their worlds as opposed to abstract problems solved by disinterested and autonomous individuals. This definition also points to

Tronto's own project of positioning the ethics of care as a politics of care, because "care engages much more than a moral stance; it involves affective, ethical, and hands-on agencies of practical and material consequence" (Puig de la Bellacasa 4). Moreover, care "points to how the 'ethics' in an ethics of care cannot be about a realm of normative moral obligations but rather about thick, impure, involvement in a world where the question of how to care needs to be posed" (Puig de la Bellacasa 6). Care, then, is not just an ethical theory, but also a practical framework that positions care as a politics. Tronto and Fisher's conception of care, and Puig de la Bellacasa's further expansion on it point towards care as much as a sentiment, a moral compass, and an active political practice.

In contrast to Tronto and Fisher's broad view of care, Diemut Bubeck's definition provides a relatively narrow conception of the concept. Bubeck states that "[c]aring for is the meeting of the needs of one person by another person where face-to-face interaction between carer and cared for is a crucial element of the overall activity and where the need is of such a nature that it cannot possibly be met by the person in need herself" (129). Bubeck's conception of care is very specific and this, too, creates some problems. For instance, according to this definition, human and non-human interactions do not pertain to the realm of care ethics. Moreover, every caring interaction must be in person. This does not seem like a problem at first, but then this excludes the possibility of caring for distant others.[65] In this view, contributing to a charity that sends money to alleviate suffering in another country is not care. Similarly, as Talia Schaffer exemplifies (525), having supper ready for a spouse does not constitute care, because an able spouse would be capable of preparing the food by themselves.

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[65] With COVID-19, so many of our daily caring interactions moved online, from health appointments, to schooling, to interacting with loved ones. In light of this, Bubeck's definition of care as only occurring face-to-face proved to be too restrictive. COVID-19 showed us that care, even if not ideal, can happen at a distance too.

Held finds both Fisher and Tronto's and Bubeck's definitions problematic because they do not take into consideration the motivations behind the labour of caring (32-3). Held argues that caring for a child while wishing them ill would undoubtedly not be the same as caring for a child while wishing them well. Thus, for Held, the care practice must be evaluated by the value of care (38). According to Held, "for the actual practices of care we need care as a value to pick out the appropriate cluster of moral considerations, such as sensitivity, trust, and mutual concern, with which to evaluate such practices" (38). Held continues that the value of care arises from caring relations, attesting the importance of care to be understood in a network of relationships (42).

Each theoretical discussion of care seems to posit a definition of care following a distinct focus. For instance, Puig de la Bellacasa writes that she "resist[s] categorizing care but rather seek[s] to emphasize its potential to disrupt the status quo and to unhinge some of the moral rigidities of ethical questioning" (11). Thus, for the author, care is a framework to promote thinking through and about ethics. Puig de la Bellacasa is more interested in the potential subversive nature of care than she is interested in defining what care is. Similarly, Bowden refrains completely from defining care, instead the author takes a phenomenological approach to instances where care is present, such as mothering, nursing, friendship and citizenship (2). Like Bowden, I too have a feeling that care is "ethically important" (1). For the purposes of this thesis, defining care seems to be less relevant than recognizing the instances of care. My focus is on the presence or lack thereof care in the narrative representations of female friendships.

Even though the authors do not necessarily agree on a definitive conceptualization of care, Engster and Hamington argue that, as a school of thought, they agree on a number of

themes. They identified five main themes that are constantly addressed regarding the ethics of care: relationality, responsiveness, contextuality, blurred boundaries, and emotions (3-4).

1) **Relationality:** Care ethics presupposes that the subject is fundamentally interdependent on a network of relationships. This view contrasts with the idea of an autonomous agent put forth by most Western traditions discussed in this chapter, and also in Part I. As Fiona Robinson explains, "our subjectivity and our very existence comes into being through relations with others — relations which are thick with responsibility, and must be negotiated with due regard for both the dependence and the difference of those others" ("Future of Feminism" 309). We are inevitably related and connected to others throughout our lives. The network of connections we form with others determines much of our own subjectivity as well as our responsibilities and actions in the world.

2) **Responsiveness:** Care depends on people's abilities to respond to others in the community. Moreover, good care depends on assessing the best way to meet those needs. Therefore, care demands active listening to others, and acting on the needs expressed. This concept relates directly to Haraway's notion of response-ability.

3) **Contextuality:** Care values the particularities of each case. Unlike more traditional ethical models that seek universal rules, care resists the notion of a rigid set of rules or parameters that guide all actions. For care ethicists, each case is a complex set of parameters with unique agents that deserve to be considered in their own context before coming to a resolution.

4) **Blurred boundaries:** Engster and Hamington argue that "Care challenges the established contours of ethical theory" (4), which means that care is not interested in

compartmentalizing knowledge and practices into neat categories. Like feminist theory, care fully embraces the now famous dictum that "the personal is political." For care, there is no such thing as a division, or boundary, between the public and private spheres. Similarly, Tronto maintains that it is time to challenge the separation of morality and politics, and the artificially disengaged and rational moral point of view (*Moral Boundaries* 6).

5) **Emotions:** instead of shying away from or rejecting emotions altogether in moral considerations, care understands that emotions provide valid forms of knowledge. The moral agents in care are not supposed to make decisions or take action based solely on a disengaged rational stance. Care embraces the networks of connections with others that serve to inform and guide moral life, just as it does in real life.

Care has also been thought of as a process. Fisher and Tronto have broken down the process of care into four distinct phases. Their intention is to provide a thorough understanding of caring practices. Viewing care through this lens allows us to fully grasp the active engagement involved in caring. In later writings, Tronto further expanded on the four phases in the process of care as: 1) "caring about," which is the recognition of needs; 2) "taking care of," which is deciding and taking responsibility for those recognized needs; 3) "care-giving," which is the actual work required to meet needs; and finally 4) "care-receiving," which is the response that the cared-for gives back to the caregiver in regards to the quality and adequacy of the care received (*Moral Boundaries* 105). In *Caring Democracy* (2013), Tronto added one more step to the process of care, 5) "caring with," which ensures that all care is consistent with democratic ideals of "justice, equality, and freedom for all" (23). For Tronto this process, with the addition of the fifth step, should be the basis for our democracies. As she explains:

The first four phases of care imagined a citizen as someone who is attentive, responsible, competent, and responsive; "caring with" imagines the entire polity of citizens engaged in a lifetime of commitment to and benefiting from these principles. "Caring with" is our new democratic ideal. (*Who Cares?* 14)

Fisher and Tronto's process is important because it delineates a type of *modus operandi* of care, which makes explicit the steps necessary for care to be successfully achieved. The addition of the final step squarely positions care as a political tool that can reshape our society into a more nurturing, accepting, and equal one. More importantly, the process can be used to identify where there might be a problem and why needs are not being met. In the next section, I will examine how care can be conceptualized as political.

3. The politics of care

Tronto's seminal work, *Moral Boundaries* (1993), was so significant to the ethics of care because it explicitly formulated care as a political concept. Almost three decades after the publication of this book, politics is now at the very core of considerations on care, so much so that in the recent Care Ethics Research Consortium's conference, *Decentering Ethics: Challenging Privileges, Building Solidaritie*s (2021), many panelists, including Tronto herself and Hamington, signaled a desire to move away from the nomenclature "care ethics" and turn to "care theory," in order to expand the breadth and scope of thinking about care and its undeniable necessity for human flourishing. More recently, Tronto writes that "[c]are practices beg decisions about who does what, and illuminate that caring is not only Political (happening at the institutional level), but political, occurring in everyday life and decisions" (*Who Cares?* 11). Care permeates both the public and private realm, and, thus, should be featured in political discussion,

such as policy making, but also in everyday activities, such as who is responsible to take the kids to school.

The potential implications for a political view centered on care are enormous, as the publication of numerous essays demonstrate, such as the anthology edited by Daniel Engster and Maurice Hamington, *Care Ethics and Political Theory* (2015). Hamington states that "[t]he contemporary enthusiasm for care among political theorists portends an exciting infusion of relational and contextual concern into political theory and analysis" (285). Bringing the core themes of care (relationality, responsiveness, contextuality, etc) to the forefront of politics certainly introduces new possibilities to active citizenship and to democratic society as a whole.

Care, then, more than an ethical theory, has impactful political implications. In *Caring Democracy* (2013), Tronto argues that democracy must be reconceptualized to fully include care at its center. She writes, "[d]emocratic politics should center upon assigning responsibilities for care, and for ensuring that democratic citizens are as capable as possible of participating in this assignment of responsibilities" (7). For Tronto, the goal of democracies is to care for individuals and to support them when they are vulnerable, making sure that everyone, either institutions or individuals, have taken up their fair share of caring responsibilities. Similarly, Olena Hankivsky understands the transformative potential of care to social policies: "Arguably, the inclusion of a care ethic can lead to greater social justice in social policy because it opens up new ways of seeing human beings, their social problems, and their needs, and it enables us to analyze critically how government responds to these" (2). In other words, governments and institutions can be upheld by the care process examined by Fisher and Tronto. Governments and institutions should first and foremost actively listen to the needs of citizens and try to alleviate said needs. In turn,

citizens can assess if their needs are being properly met, which can foster their active participation in the political realm.

Active participation in the public realm brings us back to the point discussed earlier in this chapter regarding the artificial division between the public and private realm. While traditional ethical and political theories assert this divide between the two spheres, care – and also my previous discussion of relational autonomy – attempts to highlight how these two are in fact a continuum: "[t]he political nature of care is not equated with contemporary characteristics of ethics but rather endeavors to reconnect the personal and public spheres in ways that alter our relationship to both" (Hamington 274). While our more mainstream discourses around politics and ethics maintain a divide between the public (as a place for political participation, impartiality, rights and duties) and the private (as the place for personal freedom, no public intervention, and personal relationships), care asks to reconsider these assumptions in a way that challenges and redefines how we live as individuals embedded in social relationships.

Unfortunately, contemporary political and ethical theory often disregard personal relationships in favour of impersonal relationships between strangers, even though we all live surrounded by people we know, if not intimately, at least as acquaintances. Bowden explains that:

> On the contemporary philosophical landscape the tendency to equate the moral with the impartial has diverted attention from personal relations towards more formal and contractual interactions. Duties to, and the rights of, indistinguishable others take centre field in deliberations on the moral life. Relations of friendship formed in that indeterminate and risky realm of personal preference and affectional influences have been largely removed to the sidelines of ethical concern. (61)

Care aims at taking these relationships into account and transforming how we think about our place in society. By redirecting our attention from the impartial to the partial (which is where most of us live anyway), care radically reframes how we must think about morality and politics. Relationships of family, kinship, friendship, and communities are more relevant than those between strangers, especially because these are sites rife with possibility for human flourishing. Moreover, "[r]ich interpersonal interactions marked by care provide important knowledge bases for political action" (Hamington 284). Hamington gives the example of a US Senator who changed his views on same-sex marriage after his own son came out as gay (284). Caring relationships have the potential of effecting real political change, such as in the case of the US Senator, but also on smaller scales, as when people get involved in activism, volunteering, or protesting for causes that become important to them, because of someone or something they care about.

Finally, care allows us to see not only the micro-scale, what Tronto refers to as politics (small case), but also the macro-scale, or Politics (capital p) (*Who Cares?* 11). Caring well is viewed as a political question as much as a morality question:

> Through the lens of care ethics, questions about good caring become social questions that transcend the narrow confines of individual self-actualization, nuclear-familial trade-offs or even national social policy. Indeed, the relationality of care ethics should not be limited to a simplistic understanding of the relation between "carers" and "cared for;" rather, a care perspective allows us to see politics, across multiple scales, as relational. (Robinson, "Future of Feminism" 306)

Similarly, like conceptions of autonomy need to consider our embedded relationships, so does conceptions about care. Expanding the notions of care that we apply to care well for our parents,

kids, or friends, we can also think about caring well for our communities, and countries. After all, macro-politics are also embedded in relational contexts. And understanding that there is no real separation between the private and public sphere, means understanding that our private decisions can have political implications and vice versa. As Hamington puts it, "[w]hen I care, it is an act of will, a choice, but always a choice mediated by my relational self in a social/political context" (286).

To conclude, care ethics provides a framework that links morality and politics. As Daryl Koehn writes, "[c]aring for particular people and caring for the world are intertwined" (2). We can expand our notions and think of caring institutions, caring democracies and caring societies that put at the forefront of their enterprises the meeting of needs of the most vulnerable; ensure that people are empowered by their situations; and foster a sense of community and strengthening relationships among citizens. In the following chapters I will analyze Hulu's *The Handmaid's Tale* and BBC America's *Orphan Black* in how the caring process aids the characters to form friendships that result in political power to resist the status quo.

4. Hulu's *The Handmaid's Tale* (2017-present)

Hulu's tv show adaptation of *The Handmaid's Tale* is spearheaded by writer and showrunner Bruce Miller. The show premiered on the streaming platform on April 26, 2017 and it has four seasons to date, having been renewed for a fifth season in 2020. Its first season received considerable critical praise, including eight Prime Emmy Awards. It was the first show from a streaming service to win the coveted 2017 Emmy Award for Outstanding Drama Series.[66] Similarly, Elizabeth Moss, who plays June/Offred, has been praised for her performance on the show, winning the 2017 Emmy Award for Outstanding Lead Actress in a Drama Series, and the 2018 Golden Globe Award for Best Actress in a Television Series Drama. Upon its release, the series drew constant parallels between Gilead and Trump's presidency, with several critics deeming it "timely" (Fienberg n.p.).[67] More poignantly, several feminist activists around the globe adopted the red robes and white bonnets, symbol of the handmaids and their oppression, as symbols of protest policies that aimed at curtailing women's rights.[68]

Miller admits that he had been fascinated by Atwood's novel since he read it in college. According to the showrunner, he was excited by the news that MGM and Hulu were looking for a showrunner. Initially, the studio wanted a female showrunner, but Miller decided to pitch his idea anyway. Miller was hired after his pitch, in which described the show as "an adaptation grounded in a recognizable reality, and hewing closely to the book's first-person point of view through close-ups and Offred's Atwoodian voice-over. Structured like a thriller where no one can be

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[66] For a complete list of all the awards, see "The Handmaid's Tale (TV series)."
[67] For a discussion on the parallels between Trump's election, Atwood's novel and Hulu's adaptation, see Green; for how the actors who play Commander Waterford (Joseph Fiennes) and Serena Joy (Yvonne Strahovski) drew inspiration from Trump's rhetoric, see Brooks; and for an interview between Elizabeth Moss and Margaret Atwood and the timeliness of the TV adaptation, see Dockterman.
[68] The protests using the Handmaids costume took place around the world, from the US to Argentina to Australia, especially to protest strict anti-abortion laws. See Boyle, and Lavender.

trusted, the tense adaptation doesn't sanitize the book's cruelty either" (Onstad n.p.). Miller went

on to write the first three episodes, which got Atwood's approval. According to Miller, Atwood

was very involved in the project, and willing to discuss with him the details of the world she had

created:

> I [Miller] was working very hard to recreate the experience of the book on television.
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> Also, when you do something that's a classic, usually the author is long gone. We were in
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> a very good position of having a book I wanted to emulate and a person to speak to about
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> emulating it. It was a great benefit to me, but also this book's been adapted a lot of times
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> before. It was an opera, it was a ballet. It was a play. There was a movie. It was all sorts
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> of things. In fact, she was an expert on having this adapted — she knew how to give it
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> over. (Insider n.p.)

Once the scripts were approved, Miller got Elisabeth Moss on board to play Offred/June, who

agreed to the role if she could also act as Executive Producer with decision power over scripts

and editing (Onstad n.p.). In addition to Moss, Miller composed a team of mostly female writers,

and female directors for the first season (8 out of 10 episodes were directed by female directors).

In this chapter, I will focus my analysis on season one of the tv show, because it offers the

most direct correlation to Atwood's novel. The subsequent seasons go beyond the events of the

book and the graphic novel, after Offred has stepped up into the van and "into the darkness

within; or else the light" (Atwood, HT 339). This will allow me to draw more parallels between

the novel, the graphic novel and the show regarding events that happen across the three media.

Because Miller's adaptation reveals Offred's real name to be June, I will henceforth refer to

Atwood's character solely as Offred and Miller's character as June to distinguish between them.

My focus on this chapter will be on how June has greater autonomy to forge relationships in the

tv adaptation. I will pay particular attention to how June is able to create and maintain a strong friendship with Janine (Madeline Brewer), despite Gilead's oppression. Through caring for Janine and maintaining their relationship, June realizes that she is not powerless to resist the tyranny of the regime. First, I will briefly discuss the production of the TV series. Next, I will go back to my discussion on autonomy to demonstrate how a few changes in the TV adaptation meant June has more relational autonomy than Offred in the novel or the graphic novel. Finally, I will analyze June and Janine's friendship through the process of caring for each other. As a result, not only June is able to become more politically active, but also to inspire other Handmaids to stand together in opposition to Gilead.

The first season of the show encompasses most of the events in Atwood's novel. In fact, because the novel has so little action, the first three episodes of the show seem to cover most of the original novel. Jen Chaney notes that "[b]ecause the novel is so compact — the first episode of the series covers more or less everything that happens within the first 100 of its roughly 300 pages — Miller extends certain scenes and adds new ones that provide a sense of reinvention to this evocative American horror story" (n.p.). As it is to be expected of an adaption, Miller expands on the world created by Atwood. For example, viewers learn what happens to the first Ofglen; also, Miller writes flashbacks showing the Waterfords' involvement in the creation of Gilead, and even what their relationship before the coup was like. The tv show goes beyond what Offred knows and reveals information on other pivotal characters as well. The first season ends, however, exactly like the novel: with June stepping into the van not knowing what awaits her.

The book is written entirely in first-person by Offred, which means the readers only get to experience her narrow point of view of the events and life in Gilead. Even if Miller expanded on this scope, he still wanted to keep true to the story, that is, to Offred's story. In order to achieve

this, Miller decided to use voice-overs to convey Offred's internal monologue. Voice-overs are a somewhat disputed device among screenwriters, because, while they can be well-done, they can also detract from the plot and be "the epitome of telling rather than showing; they [can] flatten" (VanArendonk n.p.). Therefore, it was a difficult decision, but one that ultimately Miller felt it should be done:

> The hardest thing and the thing I thought the most about was the voice-over. The movie didn't have voice-over. … I felt like it was essential. The whole book is voice-over, and it's half of her personality. It's June. June and Offred are kind of the two main characters, and they're always in conflict. Offred is saying, "Let's just stay calm and survive," and June is saying, "Don't let them fucking talk to you like that," and then Offred is saying, "Quiet, you're going to get me killed." The conflict between the two of them is really the center of the show. Without the inner voice, the outside person is so implacable, so difficult to read, [it's] impossible to tell what they're thinking and feeling. (Insider n.p.)

Through the use of the voice-over, the show can convey the tension between appearances (Offred) and reality (June). While we see June composed and answering meekly to others, be them Mrs. Waterford, Commander Waterford, or the other Handmaids, we also hear her explosive thoughts. The viewer is painfully aware that she is doing everything in her power just to keep it together. In the first episode, June is doing her daily shopping when another handmaid proudly announces that they have oranges. Ofglen tells June that "We should get some oranges before they are all out" ("Offred"). As they are picking the oranges, Ofglen happily says, "Praise be his bounty. Take some," as a happy soundtrack plays in the background ("Offred"). In voice-over June says, "I don't need oranges. I need to scream. I need to grab the nearest machine gun," contrasting both with the cheerful nature of her companions and with the soundtrack ("Offred").

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This little scene serves to show the contrast between how June must appear on the outside: content and cheerful because there are oranges available, and how she really feels on the inside: desperate and willing to topple Gilead if she could.

It is difficult to imagine that the series would be able to achieve this effect without the use of the voice-overs. Kathryn VanArendonk writes that:

> It's hard to conceive of a *Handmaid's Tale* adaptation that could work without some version of Offred's inner monologue. It's fundamental to the structure of the story. … For the bulk of the novel, we only get Offred's point of view, and that's an argument in and of itself: Here's what it feels like to be a person caught within this oppressive system, the novel contends. There's no way to escape it. (n.p.)

For June, the only escape from the constant suppression of her real identity seems to be the inner monologue she keeps with herself. When Rita gives her tokens to go shopping, she says, "Don't be rude, leaving your friend outside waiting" ("Offred"). But June can hardly think of Ofglen as a friend, as she narrates, "I want to tell her that Ofglen is not my friend, that I've exchanged barely fifty words with her in the two months since I got here. I kind of want to tell her that I sincerely believe that Ofglen is a pious little shit with a broomstick up her ass" ("Offred"). Of course, none of that is something June is allowed to say out loud, at best she can smile to herself as she thinks of it.[69]

Another reason for the success of the voice-overs in the TV adaptation is because they are not overly done. As the series progresses and the viewer is more familiar with the inner workings of Gilead, the voice-overs get used more and more sparingly. Moreover, only June gets voice-

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[69] For an analysis of June's voice-overs in the show as a split-self, see Harrison.

overs, even when the series is focusing on another character's arc. For instance, in 1.3 "Late,"[70]

the first Ofglen/Emily (played by Alexis Bledel, we eventually learn in the show that her real

name is Emily) gets sentenced to female castration because of her romantic involvement with a

Martha. Despite part of the episode focusing on what happens to her, from her trial to the

aftermath of her surgery, she never utters a word verbally (she is gaged) or in the form of a voice-

over.

Visually, the show uses constant close-ups of Moss to drive home the idea that this is very

much Offred's story. In fact, "Ms. Moss said that the camera sometimes came so near to her face

that she would bump up against it" (Onstad n.p.). The tight frame around Offred's face also

serves to mimic her view with the white wings, which obstruct the Handmaids' peripheral vision.

If the viewers get a narrow view of Gilead is because the Handmaids also get their views

restricted. Anne Helen Petersen points out that "[t]he framing underlines the smallness of her

world, even as it allows the audience access to the smallest of reactions amidst her performance

of demurity and submission" (n.p.). By being up so close to her face, the viewer is able to see the

smallest expressions from Moss, which also serves to demonstrate how June needs to constantly

police herself.

Reed Morano, who directed the first three episodes, created a compelling visual

vocabulary for the series. Along with the constant close-ups of June's face, she used shallow

depth of field to blur much of the background and keep only the foreground (usually June) in

focus. Additionally, she helped create a color scheme for the shots to navigate the different

timelines and spaces of Gilead, much like Nault's graphic novel adaptation. Unlike Nault's

adaptation that uses the colors to represent dominion over spaces as well, Morano saves them for

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[70] I will use an abbreviation to talk about particular episodes: ex. Season 1, episode 3 becomes 1.3.

the characters: "[Morano] rations out reds for the robes of the handmaids. She saves chilly blues for the wives. As much as possible, light comes only from direct sources and shafts of sunlight crash through murky scenes like unauthorized interlopers" (Fienberg n.p.). Gilead is colored by these direct sources of light, making it a soft almost idyllic place. Moreover, to convey the orderliness of Gilead, Morano used static camera shots that made the scenes look like paintings. Meanwhile, the flashbacks were shot with a lot of movement, in a "cinema verité" style, which is "a very visceral type of camerawork, to really put you in the moment" (O'Falt n.p.). The different color schemes and different camera movements, help situate the viewers in the different timelines much like Nault's color palettes in the graphic novel differentiated between Offred's memories and her present.

The choice of colors used for each woman's position was thoughtfully considered for the adaptation. Miller claims in an interview that there were intense discussions about the colors that should be used for each of the women's castes in Gilead: "I've never been on a show where there's been more discussion about [color]. In the world of *Handmaid's*, people are divided by color" (Insider n.p.). Costume designer Anne Crabtree was responsible for arriving at the perfect shades of red, blue, and green worn by the Handmaids, the Wives, and the Marthas. Unlike the comic that uses very bright shades for all the distinct uniforms, the show maintains the tension between the colors without over stimulating or distracting the viewer. According to Crabbe, "We made [the Handmaid's uniform] a blood red and this heavy dark teal for the Commander's Wives to make them opposites in the way of Technicolor films, ... And also we made them powerful in the frame because there's constant tension" (Desowitz n.p.). The Marthas wear a muted green outfit, the Aunts wear brown, and the Econowives wear grey. Much like the novel or the graphic novel, in the tv adaptation, the women do not get to choose what they wear. Their codified

wardrobe is another way that Gilead exerts power over them and diminishes their autonomy. In the next section, I will return to the discussion on autonomy to demonstrate how June is slightly more autonomous on the tv show than she is in the novel and graphic novel. Poignantly, her autonomy allows her to form friendships that aid her desire to resist Gilead.

4.1 Autonomy

Gilead is as much a totalitarian oppressive regime in the TV adaptation as in the graphic novel and the book. Miller retained all the key elements of Atwood's storyworld and expanded only on the details already mentioned in the novel. Thus, autonomy is still severely lacking in the show. Despite maintaining the oppressive nature of Gilead, Miller does make enough subtle changes to June as to confer her with more autonomy than she has in the original novel and the graphic novel. The TV show does a great job at underscoring the relationality of autonomy, and how "[h]umans are ontologically dynamic because of our capacity to be transformed through our relations" (Hamington, "Politics" 282). Even in a totalitarian regime, the Handmaids in the show (especially June) still form bonds with one another that help them assert a small level of autonomy that is almost absent in the novel. In consequence, this relational autonomy allows them to forge friendships and overtly resist Gilead. I will briefly return to my discussion of Mackenzie's three dimensions of autonomy to demonstrate how the show allows for more autonomy to the Handmaids, notably June.

The first dimension is self-determination, which refers to the external conditions to autonomy, such as having the freedom and opportunities to make one's own choices. In the case of Hulu's adaptation, this dimension remains almost the same as for the graphic novel, since the oppressive regime and the systems it has in place to keep people segregated and helpless are much the same. The dress code that serves to differentiate and universalize women is faithful to

Atwood's novel. However, the TV show demonstrates that even when one is made to wear a uniform, they still find ways to make it a display of their personality. Miller explains that,

> Ann Crabtree and her costume designers did an amazing job. They also individualized each costume. I know from the outside they all look the same, but they are slightly changed. One of the things I was fascinated by is how people express themselves through their clothes no matter how much they are put into a uniform. (Sperling n.p.)

The best example of that is the way each Handmaid uses their standard issue red scarf during the winter scenes (figure 18). June uses her scarf loosely around her neck on top of her cloak. We can also observe that each Handmaid ties their scarf in a slightly different manner, signaling their individuality and preference for how to wear the same piece of outfit. Meanwhile, neither the novel nor the graphic novel discuss such individual preference for wearing the Handmaid's uniform. Especially Nault, who draws each Handmaid exactly the same, seems to emphasize only their indistinguishability.

Figure 18: 1.5 "Faithful," Handmaids at the market displaying the different ways they wear their scarves.

The second dimension is self-governance, which pertains to internal conditions of autonomy, namely, competence and authenticity. According to Peter G. Stillman and S. Anne Johnson, "In Gilead, the modes of personal identity formation and intersubjective relations are so weakened, degraded, and debased that the modes of domination and control … are internalized by those who are subjected to the regime" (75). As I discussed in relation to Nault's adaptation of the novel, under Gilead's rule, the oppressed, above all the Handmaids, tend to internalize their own oppression, which leads to even less autonomy. In the case of Offred, I have discussed how the regime works to undermine her capability to mother. Another important aspect in Atwood's novel is how Offred slowly accepts her patronym and shuns her name from before, emphasizing Gilead's control over her sense of self.

In the novel, the reader never learns Offred's real name. After its publication, critics argued over Offred's real name, speculating that her name was June, because of a brief mention that at the Red Center the Handmaids would tell each other's names in darkness: "Alma. Janine. Dolores. Moira. June" (Atwood, HT 4). All of these names are attributed to other characters in the novel, with the exception of June, which lead critics to believe this to be the narrator's own name. Over the course of the book, we witness Offred growing accustomed to being powerless and becoming a subject to the regime. This indoctrination is, of course, gradual. We can observe this by contrasting Offred's remarks about her previous name at the beginning of the novel and at the end. In the beginning, Offred still clings to her name from before: "I keep the knowledge of this name like something hidden, some treasure I'll come back to dig up, one day" (Atwood, HT 95). Her attitude slowly changes, and towards the end of the novel she no longer wants to associate herself to her previous name. Offred says, "I must forget about my secret name and all ways back. My name is Offred now, and here is where I live" (Atwood, HT 165). Forgetting her

name and forgetting her past mean that she is internalizing the role that Gilead has forced upon her. Instead of trying to maintain some independence and individuality, symbolized by her name, she is giving in to her place as a Handmaid, as a reproductive vessel, as Offred. Offred becomes even more disempowered.

The language used by Gilead aids in their agenda of stripping Handmaid's of their individuality by taking away the Handmaids' names, and restricting their conversations. Naming the Handmaids as property of their Commanders further destabilizes their sense of self, because:

> Language is … central to the construction of identity for the individual. When an individual is given a name or a label, that individual comes to see herself in a certain way. She comes to see the roles and names given to others in contradistinction to her own names and roles. Society doesn't merely construct, through language, the way individuals are seen by others, they construct large portions of the very identity of the individuals themselves. (Robinson-Greene 22)

Constantly being called Offred and having to use the empty language promoted by Gilead[71] means Offred begins to accept the limiting role of breeder imposed on her. Her denial of her real name signifies that she no longer thinks of herself as an individual capable of enacting her own choices and having free-will, because Gilead forbids her to do so, and, above all, makes her believe she is incapable of doing so. Unfortunately, the Offred in the novel believes that lie.

In the TV adaptation, June does not resign her sense of self to the regime. In the very first episode, we start by learning that she is called Offred, but that is not her real name. The passage is taken almost verbatim from Atwood's novel. As she is sitting by the window in her room, and

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[71] The Handmaids' speech is highly conventional with only empty slogans being "safe" for them to use, such as "Blessed be the fruit," or "May the Lord open," which leads to empty conversations between them.

she says in voice-over, "My name is Offred. I had another name, but it's forbidden now. So many things are forbidden now" ("Offred").[72] In this opening scene, June's gaze is towards the floor and her attitude is diminished, as she claims, "thinking can hurt your chances" ("Offred") (figure 19). Her attitude seems to mirror that of Atwood's Offred, in the sense that she is resigned to her role. However, as the episode progresses, June gains a newfound strength when she learns that her companion, Ofglen/Emily, is actually against Gilead. Being able to truly talk to another person who is a victim of Gilead's regime (both of them were separated from their families and forced into their position) gives her hope that others also fighting their current situation.

Figure 19: 1.1 "Offred," June resigned in her room at the beginning of the episode.
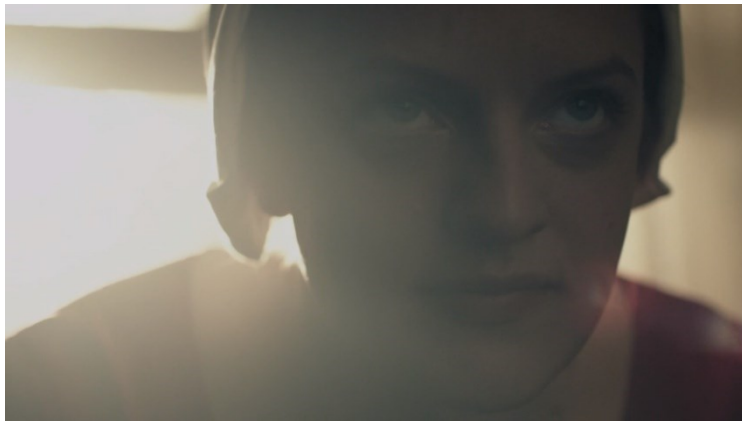
Figure 20: 1.1 "Offred," June looking defiantly ahead at the end of the episode.

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[72] In the novel, the passage goes: "My name isn't Offred, I have another name, which nobody uses now because it's forbidden. I tell myself it doesn't matter, your name is like your telephone number, useful only to others; but what I tell myself is wrong, it does matter. I keep the knowledge of this name like something hidden, some treasure I'll come back to dig up, one day" (Atwood, HT 95).

As they are saying their good-byes, Ofglen/Emily warns her that there is an Eye (a spy for Gilead) in June's house. June goes back in her house wary; she examines every other inhabitant with suspicion. She is finally paying attention to her surroundings. This is how Hulu's adaptation starts to construct June as an active character with autonomy: she is taking charge. Heather Hendershot explains that "[t]o look for danger is an activity, a way not to be simply in a situation (Offred's identical days of entrapment) but to be in a story. To be in a story is to have motivations, to consider that if there are friends (Ofglen) and villains (an eye), then something new and unpredictable could happen" (15). As an active protagonist, June cannot be diminished by the regime, there must be some form of resistance. This is how Miller confers her more autonomy, by not entirely letting her internal sense of self succumb to the grueling life in Gilead. At the very end, sitting on the same windowsill, the final scene mimics the very first one with the same lighting, and the same framing. However, June's demeanor has changed slightly, her body is tense, in expectation, and while she looks down, she says in voice-over: "Here someone is always watching. Nothing can change. It all has to look the same. Because I intend to survive for her. Her name is Hannah. My husband was Luke." She pauses and then looks straight ahead in defiance, "My name is June" ("Offred") (figure 20). June asserts herself as active in this story by proclaiming her name and thus her identity outside Gilead's control. She does not shy away from her family, who she deliberately names as a way to keep her focused on what matters to her. In the novel, in contrast, we also never learn her daughter's real name, since she mostly avoids thinking of her.

Giving Offred a name was very important to showrunner Miller, because it was a way to demonstrate her resistance to Gilead. Miller says:

I think Margaret intended her not to have a name. Her name was Offred. It was part of the story … I felt like it is in the first episode, it's an important thing that she has a name because part of the show is that she's not going to let that go. She is strong and stubborn, even though she has to be on the outside kind of content looking and silent and meek and keeping a hold of her identity was such an important part that it needed the name to do it. (Insider n.p.)

Thus, the very first episode goes in a different direction from Atwood's novel in terms of June's internalization of oppression. While in the novel, Offred slowly gives up on keeping her name and using it as a beacon of hope. In the show, June starts the episode meek and afraid to let herself even think of her name, but ends the episode fiercely asserting herself, even if she still needs to keep up her meek appearance to everyone else in her household. Hendershot summarizes:

Transformed by the conversation with her companion, Offred is no longer Offred to herself or, by extension, to the audience. She has named herself. In the opening shot in the window, she could not even use her own true name in an inner monologue, because she had fully internalized the interdiction against pre-Gilead names. But now, June has begun to forge a plan. … Inside, she will now be June. Thus begins her empowerment, which will increase throughout the ten-episode season. Gradually, she finds herself by finding other women with whom to connect and by resisting a system that depends upon women's distrusting other women. (15-6)

Believing in herself as someone who has the capacity to act, even though with very limited choices due to the oppressive nature of Gilead, is how June begins to take an active role in her own story, instead of the passive attitude of Nault's Offred or even Atwood's Offred.

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June's newfound sense of self, in this episode, is brought forth by an interaction with another Handmaid who hates the regime as much as she does. Being meek and resigned were not attitudes that June was adopting authentically, meaning that was not how she understood her own sense of self. Having Ofglen model a distaste for Gilead during their brief interaction also allows June to be authentic to herself: she is not a subdued woman. This demonstrates how autonomy can act relationally with one person holding space for the other to gain a sense of their own capabilities.

The third dimension of autonomy is self-authorization, which highlights the relational aspect of autonomy. This third dimension "involves regarding oneself as authorized to exercise practical control over one's life, to determine one's own reasons for action, and to define one's values and identity-shaping practical commitments" (Mackenzie, "Three Dimensions" 19). The agent must be able to reflect on their actions and then be able to be held accountable for them. In order to justify oneself to others, the agent must be considered as equal to others, otherwise there is no point in explaining oneself. In the case of Miller's adaptation, June remains firm in her sense that she is an agent in her own rights and thus capable to not only justify herself to other Handmaids (for instance, Alma who recruits her to retrieve a package from Jezebels for Mayday), but also to hold others accountable for their actions, in particular Moira.

In the first episode, 1.1 "Offred," June and Moira (Samira Wiley) are reunited at the Red Center where they make a promise to each other to find Hannah together. Moira tells June that "All this crazy shit is gonna end and then we'll find her. I swear" ("Offred"), and they pinky swear on it. When they are briefly reunited at Jezebel's, in 1.8 "Jezebels," June is shocked to find a diminished Moira who no longer believes she can do anything to change her situation. June is hopeful, "We're gonna find a way to get you out of here, ok?," but Moira is unconvinced, "June,

I know the way out. Black van, feet first. That's it. Look, forget about escaping. This is Gilead. No one gets out" ("Jezebels"). Moira, much like June in the beginning of the first episode, believes that she is alone and that her situation is beyond her power. She has grown to accept the limitations Gilead imposed on her, even claiming that she has "all the booze and drugs you want. Food's good. We only work nights. I mean, it's not so bad" ("Jezebels"). Moira has become complacent with the regime by believing that she has no other options.

In the next episode, 1.9 "The Bridge," June goes back to Jezebel's and holds Moira accountable to her promise to help her get Hannah out. June was back to Jezebel's to retrieve a package for Mayday, however, Commander Waterford never leaves her alone to get the package from the bar as she is supposed to. Instead, he believes June wanted back to be able to see Moira and thus arranges a meeting between them at their suite. June realizes that, if she is not capable of getting the package, Moira definitely is. So, she asks her friend for help. Moira refuses and even tells June that her name now is Ruby, not Moira (as yet another example of Gilead taking away people's names in order to cripple their autonomy). June is not accepting of Moira's defeated attitude and uses her position as friend and equal agent to Moira to remind her that both of them have some agency, even if limited by the regime. June makes her remember that they promised each other to find Hannah and that her friend is responsible for keeping up with her promises. June finishes by saying, "Do not let them grind you down. You keep your fucking shit together. You fight!" ("The Bridge"). June has learned to get her sense of self back, and consequently her autonomy. Moira needed to remember that she can still be treated as an equal agent who is responsible for her own actions, in this case, responsible for keeping a promise to June. If Moira gives up resisting Gilead, then she has failed her friend and their endeavour to find Hannah. At the end of the episode, not only did Moira come through to June by getting the package to her,

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but she also found enough strength to carry out a plan to escape Jezebel's and Gilead, arriving in Canada. By holding Moira accountable, June reminded her friend that she indeed had some autonomy to act in Gilead. The relationship between Moira and June demonstrates the relationality of autonomy, as they can instill in each other the necessary conditions for them to reclaim what Gilead tried to diminish.

Ultimately, the small changes Miller makes to June, such as having her reclaim her own name, giving her the opportunity to use her uniform in her own style, and having her remain connected to the other Handmaids and Moira, portray her character as much more autonomous than Nault's Offred, who was unable to trust Ofglen, or Atwood's Offred, who shun her own name. In the show, June is much more confident in her position as an equal subject with a unique standpoint, and a voice of her own. She is able to remain focused on her identity before Gilead to try to find a way back to her family. Furthermore, June uses her friendship with Moira to demonstrate the relational aspect of autonomy, and how she can push her friend to make her own choices and not buy into Gilead's propaganda that all women are helpless. In the next section, I will focus on June and Janine's friendship, which is very different from both the novel and the graphic novel. More importantly, June learns to care about Janine and through her caring she can be politically active to resist Gilead's agenda of pushing women against each other.

4.2 Care Ethics

In this section, I will discuss Tronto's caring process and how it aids in strengthening June and Janine's relationship. As Tronto explains, "care is a complex process, and it also shapes what we pay attention to, how we think about responsibility, what we do, how responsive we are to the world around us, and what we think of as important in life" (*Who Cares?* 8). June demonstrates that as she starts to pay attention to other Handmaids, especially Janine, she also pays attention to

the regime around her. By taking responsibility for Janine's needs, she takes responsibility for her own actions within Gilead and actively seeks to participate in the resistance group, Mayday. Finally, she also acts in favour of Janine, refusing to stone her friends and inspires other Handmaids to show loyalty to each other above loyalty to Gilead. Through caring and friendship, June learns to be more politically engaged than Atwood's Offred. First, I will look into how Gilead fails to provide adequate care to its citizens, and how Atwood's Offred fails to care about the other Handmaids in the novel. Next, I will analyze how June begins caring about Janine through empathy and that leads to June taking responsibility for the other woman. Finally, I will discuss the act of caring through June's and the other Handmaids' refusal to carry out Janine's execution. As a result of the caring process, Janine gets to live, and the Handmaids send a clear statement to Gilead that they are loyal to each other.

4.2.1 Failing to care

There are times that caring for others is an easy task, especially in times of prosperity and peace. Care also comes easy for those we are related to or have already a relationship with. In the case of Gilead, care is severely impaired by the regime not only because there is war and hardships (lack of food, for instance), but also because social connections and relationships are markedly diminished. In times of severe hardships, it becomes harder to choose to care, but, since care is such an integral part of human survival, it also becomes even more important to choose it then. For example, during World War II and:

> During the Holocaust, millions of Jews died and many more suffered because of failures to care — powerful divisive and dehumanizing narratives squelched empathy, imagination, and caring actions on a large scale. … Yet, ultimately, humans must choose to act. Caring is always a choice. Sometimes it is easy to care, as with family and friends,

but in other instances the time and effort needed to care for unfamiliar others is daunting.

(Hamington, "Politics" 274)

Caring, in Gilead, is a daunting task. The regime works really hard to undermine caring acts

through their dehumanization, and their isolation of its citizens, particularly the Handmaids.

Gilead works hard to promote the idea that anyone can be a spy (an Eye), thus one cannot really

trust in anyone else. The important point Hamington makes is that, despite all these obstacles,

one has to choose to care. In the case of Atwood's novel, Offred constantly shies away from

choosing to care: she rejects Ofglen's attempts to get her help with the resistance; and she is

incapable of empathizing with Janine, even though they suffer through the same circumstances. I

will look at two instances of the failure of care: how Gilead as a state fails to provide adequate

care for its citizens; and how Atwood's Offred fails to choose to care about/for the other

characters in the novel by shying away from taking responsibility.

First, Gilead as a state fails to care for its people. Gilead is a veritable example of a

paternalistic state. Paternalism, in essence, "entails the coercive interference with an individual's

liberty for the sake of her own well-being" (Smiley 96).[73] Its Commanders believe that they have

all the knowledge to make the necessary decisions on behalf of everyone else. Essentially, they

think that the USA went wrong, because people were unsuited to make the right decisions for

themselves. When left to their own devices, people make choices that were not in their best

interest,[74] but the Commanders knew better, so they were more qualified to choose for everyone

else. Of course, this paternalistic attitude is widely regarded as wrong since it limits people's

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[73] For a widely accepted definition and discussion on paternalism, see Dworkin. For a critique of 'traditional' libertarian/liberal conceptions of paternalism and its connection to care ethics, see Smiley.

[74] According to the Historical Notes at the end of novel, the reasons for the declining birth rate included: "the widespread availability of birth control of various kinds, including abortion, in the immediate pre-Gilead period" (349), meaning the Commanders believed that preventing pregnancy, for instance, was a choice individuals should not be allowed to make on their own.

autonomy over their own lives (Smiley 98). Moreover, paternalism involves a power dynamic in which some dominate (the paternalists, that is, the Commanders), and others are subordinated (wards, namely, everyone else in Gilead, particularly the Handmaids). The result is a hierarchy that privileges the Commanders and maintains the rest of the population with a "lowered status in the community," that results in the "recipients of paternalism [experiencing] their roles as child-like incompetents" (Smiley 103). This is evident in the case of the Handmaids that are treated as house pets, unruly children, or mere things, but hardly as adult women. For instance, Offred says "I wait, washed, brushed, fed, like a prize pig" (Atwood, HT 79), as if she is an animal that needs to be cared for by others in all aspects of her life; in the TV adaptation, a Wife offers June a cookie and another Wife proceeds to interject, "You shouldn't spoil them. Sugar is bad for them" ("Birth Day"), as if June was a child that could be spoiled by something so insignificant as a cookie. The interaction between the Wives and June serves to highlight Gilead's hierarchy and how the Wives, even though subordinated to the Commanders, can still act as superior to the Handmaids and treat them in paternalistic ways that regard them as incompetent even to decide for themselves to eat a sugary treat.

One of the main tenets of care ethics is that caring is a particularized act and needs to put the cared-for at its center. The Commanders, however, take a generalized approach to care in which they consider everyone to be similar and to need similar things. There is no individual in Gilead, so there should not be any individual needs they should meet as caregivers. In the case of the Handmaids, it is clear that Gilead believes them all to be the same generalized individual who is able to reproduce. As such, their needs are very limited, they need food, shelter, clothes, and some exercise. Nothing else is provided for them. They are assumed to have no emotional, intellectual, or personal needs. They are treated exactly the same and receive the same share of

things. Obviously, individuals are not exactly the same and thus their needs are not all the same.

Even if we consider the need for nurture that seems to be pretty universal, it is not exactly the

same for everyone: for example, there should be a consideration for food allergies, different

caloric needs, and health conditions that require a special diet. A wholesale approach to care will

undeniably leave a lot to be desired on an individual level. And that is not to mention all other

aspects that Gilead completely neglects, like emotional needs of community, friendship, and

intimacy, but that are still needed.

Second, on an individual level it is hard for people to choose to care for one another under

extreme duress. In Atwood's novel, Offred is not able to empathize with Janine, even though they

are both Handmaids trained at the same time in the Red Center, which means they underwent the

same brutal indoctrination and live fairly similar lives. The very first time Janine is introduced in

the novel, Offred clearly states she dislikes her: "As I pass she looks full at me, into my eyes, and

I know who she; is. She was at the Red Center with me, one of Aunt Lydia's pets. I never liked

her. Her name, in the time before, was Janine" (Atwood, HT 30). The reason seems to be because

Janine is favored by the Aunts, which would make her complicit with Gilead. As the story

progresses, we learn that Janine (like the other Handmaids) is constantly abused and tries to

please not just her captors (the Aunts) but also her companions at the Red Center. Instead of

being someone's pet, Janine is more likely just trying to please them in order to survive and to

stop the constant abuse at the hands of both these groups. In a flashback sequence, Offred recalls

her time at the Red Center and how they were forced to confess to their "sins" from their life

before. Janine tells the story of being gang raped as a teenager and the other Handmaids are

forced to blame what happened on her as a way of God to teach her a lesson. Instead of feeling

empathy for Janine or wanting to remind her that she not in fact to blame, Offred recalls feeling

revolted by Janine's suffering:

> Last week, Janine burst into tears. Aunt Helena made her kneel at the front of the
>
> classroom, hands behind her back, where we could all see her, her red face and dripping
>
> nose. Her hair dull blond, her eyelashes so light they seemed not there, the lost eyelashes
>
> of someone who's been in a fire. Burned eyes. She looked disgusting: weak, squirmy,
>
> blotchy, pink, like a newborn mouse. None of us wanted to look like that, ever. For a
>
> moment, even though we knew what was being done to her, we despised her.
>
> Crybaby. Crybaby. Crybaby.
>
> We meant it, which is the bad part.
>
> I used to think well of myself. I didn't then. (Atwood, HT 82-3)

Offred is aware of the abuse she was inflicting on Janine, but she still felt repulsed by the other's

suffering. Instead of the suffering eliciting some empathy from the others, it had the effect

intended by the Aunts of devising the women. Even though Offred has enough self-awareness to

realize that her own attitudes were abusive and wrong, she does not find a way to bridge the gap

between her and Janine to care for the other Handmaid. On an individual level, Atwood's Offred

fails to care about someone who is in the same situation as her, preventing the possibility of the

process of care to happen.

Offred shows a lack of responsiveness to Janine's suffering that prevents any caring from

happening. The closest Atwood's Offred ever gets to sympathizing with Janine is at the Birth

scene, in which she reflects: "Her eyes are squeezed closed, and this way I can almost like her.

After all, she's one of us; what did she ever want but to lead her life as agreeably as possible?

What else did any of us want? It's the *possible* that's the catch. She's not doing badly, under the

circumstances" (Atwood, HT 135). However, her realization that they are under the same circumstances still does not lead Offred to act in a caring manner towards Janine. Their relationship is much more developed in the show, and they are actually friends to one another. In the show, their friendship is instigated by the care June performs for Janine.

4.2.2 Caring about and Taking care of

The first step in the caring process, for Tronto, is "caring about," which means recognizing that care is needed. Furthermore, Tronto explains, "[c]aring about will often involve assuming the position of another person or group to recognize the need" (*Moral Boundaries* 106). In other words, caring about can be said to require that an agent has empathy for others which will prompt them to understand another in their own circumstances. In the TV adaptation, June has a vastly different attitude towards Janine: she empathizes with her, and this results in them forging a caring relationship as friends. This provides a stark contrast to Atwood's Offred who never initiates the caring process, despite her brief aforementioned realization that Janine's situation is much like her own. June and Janine's relationship is a significant departure from the source material, but one that is characterized as "[s]ome of the smartest moments in the show — like Ofglen's story, and one featuring a Handmaid named Janine — … making a passive plot active" (Nussbaum n.p.). Caring about Janine has several repercussions to the plot of the TV adaptation that reflect Tronto's caring process. It all gets started with June caring about Janine during her delivery at the very beginning of the season.

Emotions are morally important to the ethics of care, because they can serve as a way to initiate caring about someone. In contrast with other more traditional moral theories that value rationality above all else, care ethics believes that emotions are morally important and can be used to guide moral actions. Held explains that:

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Not all emotion is valued, of course, but in contrast with the dominant rationalist

approaches, such emotions as sympathy, empathy, sensitivity, and responsiveness are

seen as the kind of moral emotions that need to be cultivated not only to help in the

implementation of the dictates of reason but to better ascertain what morality

recommends. (10)

Emotions can and should serve to guide our moral compass. Feeling sympathy or empathy can

help one direct their attention to another person in need, and thus prompt an agent to action. Both

Tronto (1993) and Sevenhuijsen (1998) identify attentiveness as one of the main elements of

care. Attentiveness can generate empathy, since it requires the agent to pay attention to the

circumstances of others. If one is being inattentive (or ignoring), there is no possibility of needs

being recognized and thus met. By being attentive to others, one can be attuned to their

environment and identify needs that should be met and the best possible way to act, if one is able

to do so.

In episode 1.2 "Birth Day," there is a clear example of June feeling empathy for Janine

and thus starting to care about her. This episode creates a parallel between June and Janine by

alternating scenes of the present with Janine giving birth to her daughter in Gilead, and scenes of

the past with June giving birth to Hannah pre-Gilead. This parallel serves to connect these two

women through their childbirth experience. More poignantly, however, the episode connects their

experience of having their babies taken away from them shortly after birth. In the case of Janine,

as soon as she gives birth to her daughter, her baby goes to the arms of the Commander's

Putnman's Wife, Naomi (Ever Carradine), who lays in bed as if she was to one who gave life to

this baby girl, who she names Angela. In June's case, she gave birth to her own daughter pre-

Gilead, but the seeds of the regime were already present in this flashback: the maternity ward is

empty, and Hannah was the only baby that survived past the first few hours of birth. June wakes up to her daughter's empty bassinet next to her, since a grieving mother had snatched Hannah claiming it was her deceased baby. Ultimately, June is able to get her baby back. In Janine's case, unfortunately, seeing her having to hand-over her baby against her wishes puts the cruelty of Gilead's regime on full display for all the Handmaids and the viewers: these women are not allowed to mother their own children. In this moment, June finds ways to empathize with Janine, even though June's baby girl was returned to her, Gilead still found a way to separate the two of them years later when June attempted to escape with her family. In the case of Janine, June was attentive to the other one's suffering once she was separated from her newborn. June's sensitivity to the moment of separation and her capability of empathizing with the birthing mother, made her aware that Janine was in a very vulnerable situation that needed to be attended to, even if June was incapable of providing her with what she really needed, that is, to hold her newborn baby.

The contrast between this birth scene from the novel to the TV adaptation can be boiled down to a difference between empathy and sympathy. Empathy and sympathy, despite being similar, are not exactly the same emotions. Held regards both as valuable emotions to guide moral decisions. But Michael Slote insists on making a distinction between them, since the author concludes that empathy is more significant in driving care and moral action than sympathy is. According to Slote:

> empathy involves having the feelings of another (involuntarily) aroused in ourselves, as when we see another person in pain. It is as if their pain invades us, and Hume speaks, in this connection, of the contagion between what one person feels and what another comes to feel. However, we can also feel sorry for, bad for, the person who is in pain and positively wish them well. This amounts, as we say, to sympathy for them, and it can

happen even if we aren't feeling their pain. But perhaps an even better illustration of how

sympathy can take place in the absence of empathy would be a situation where one felt

bad for someone who was being humiliated, but in no way felt humiliated oneself. (13)

In a nutshell, empathy implies that we feel like another person at a determined point, which can

be feeling pain when they are in pain or feeling joy when they are joyful. In contrast, sympathy

means we can feel for the other person pain, or joy, but we do not necessarily feel in ourselves

the sentiment that they have in that moment.

The contrast between sympathy and empathy can be demonstrated by comparing this

same scene in the novel and in the TV adaptation. While in the novel, Offred feels sorry for

Janine's circumstances of having to deliver a baby that will never truly be hers, she does not feel

the pain as Janine feels it. In consequence, Offred never really cares enough about Janine to

identify the needs of the other and take action towards meeting them. In the TV adaptation, June

is framed as feeling exactly like Janine is through the flashback sequences that show her going

through labour and "losing" her child to a stranger. This empathic connection leads June to assess

Janine's needs and try her best to alleviate the other's suffering. It is important to note that

"[e]mpathic identification … doesn't involve a felt loss of identity but, according to Hoffman, it

does involve feelings or thoughts that are in some sense more 'appropriate' to the situation of the

person(s) empathized with than to (the situation of) the person empathizing" (Slote 14-5). In this

episode, June feeling the pain of losing her child is not necessarily the appropriate feeling for her,

because she has already lost her daughter, and it is not something that is happening to her at that

moment in time. For Janine, however, it is very appropriate to feel the pain of loss as the baby

she just gave birth to is taken away from her. June's pain mimicking Janine's pain signals that

June feels empathy for the other and can truly share in the emotions that are arising for Janine.

The next step in the caring process is "taking care of," namely, "assuming responsibility for the identified need and determining how to respond to it" (Tronto, *Moral Boundaries* 106). Once an agent becomes attentive to the needs of others, they can assume responsibility for that need. Thus, responsibility springs from attentiveness to others, as Barnes puts it,

> The expression of responsibility is related to attentiveness – which can be understood as an openness to understanding the circumstances and needs of others, and a preparedness to take action on this basis. Attentiveness to the circumstances of others involves recognition of issues of vulnerability and power and the necessity of giving voice to the perspectives and experiences of those who are often marginalised or stigmatised. (102)

Responsibility is another important value to ethics of care. Tronto distinguishes responsibility from obligation (*Moral Boundaries* 131-2). For care ethics, the agent needs to constantly evaluate if the need they perceived is actually a need that they can or cannot meet. In this sense, responsibility, for care ethics, is akin to Haraway's "response-ability," namely, one has to assess if they have the ability to respond to a need, and if they are the best person to do it. Obligation, on the other hand, would mean that the agent always has to respond to a need that they have recognized. In cases of oppression, not everyone is capable of attending to the needs of others due to scarcity of choice, resources or even knowledge. Similarly, some people might need specialized care that cannot be met by just anyone who identifies their need. Hence, care ethics is sensitive to the context in which needs arise and who can actually assume responsibility to meet them.

Figure 21: 1.2 "Birth Day," June offering support to Janine.

Figure 22: 1.2 "Birth Day," all the Handmaids holding Janine.

When June empathizes with Janine and becomes aware of her need during the birth scene, June also assumes responsibility for the other Handmaid. Because both June and Janine are Handmaids, and thus severely limited on what they can do, there are also real impediments to how June can help Janine in that moment. June clearly identifies Janine's plight: to be with her newborn baby. However, June is incapable of meeting that particular need as she is also powerless in face of the Wives and the Aunts that took that baby away from Janine. From an ethics of care perspective, June is not responsible for meeting Janine's need at that moment since she cannot really take any actions to mitigate it. Similarly, the other Handmaids in the scene do not take any action at all, as they too are incapable of doing anything (even if they had also perceived Janine's needs). But June takes responsibility for a different need: helping her friend cope with the separation from her newborn. Even if she is incapable of giving Janine back her baby girl, she is still able to help her friend endure that difficult situation, which is how she takes care of Janine in that moment. June's action is also small, showing that being attentive and taking responsibility does not necessarily demand big gestures. June tells Janine repeatedly, "Look at me. She is beautiful," comforting Janine that her daughter is alive and healthy, even if Janine cannot hold her herself ("Birth Day"). June also touches Janine's face and finally embraces her friend providing a shoulder for the other to feel safe and supported (figure 21). Even though these gestures do not bring Janine's baby back to her, they are within June's means at the time to give this little solace to Janine. Despite being severely restricted in her position as a Handmaid, June finds a way to be there for Janine in a manner that both comforts her friend, and also does not break Gilead's strict rules, keeping them both safe.

June taking care of Janine inspires the other Handmaids to also support her. As June embraces Janine, the others see that they are also capable of taking responsibility for soothing

Janine in the manner that June is doing: by embracing her and demonstrating that they too understand her grief (figure 22). It is a powerful moment, because it represents that they can all take care of each other, regardless of the limitations imposed on them. To emphasize the importance of this moment of solidarity between the Handmaids, Morano makes the scene visually beautiful by:

> shift[ing] to that from-up-above point of view and captur[ing] a sea of crimson and white as her fellow handmaids, dressed in their usual garb, embrace the women [Janine] to provide comfort. It is such a beautiful, distinctively feminine, pointillist image. Up close, you see every individual woman hugging one another, forming a circle. From a distance, they are collectively a flower putting its petals back together. (Chaney n.p.)

The aerial point of view of the scene serves to highlight that the Handmaids are all similar, that is, they are undergoing the same circumstances. While in some instances these aerial shots serve to drive home the point that they have lost their individuality, for instance, when they are walking in formation to the Particicution, they appear as a homogeneous sea of crimson. In the birth scene, as they are performing a caring act for one of their own, it shows that they are all capable of caring for each other in their reduced circumstances. In a very literal sense, the scene shows that they have each other's back in defiance of Gilead's attempts to prevent them from bonding with one another.

The qualities of paying attention, taking responsibility, and acting on behalf of others that are important to care ethics are also valuable to friendships. Commenting on Lawrence Blum's analysis of friendship and morality,[75] Bowden writes:

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[75] Bowden offers extensive commentary on Blum's book, *Friendship, Altruism and Morality* (1980).

Blum insists that this deep-felt care and affection is an active learnt achievement in which

cognitive and emotional dimensions of understanding inform each other (FAM 12– 15ff.).

It involves a responsive grasp of the other's condition or of what the good for the other

might be, as well as being affected, touched and motivated to take action to address that

condition. The movement into action, although it is direct – in the sense of not requiring

consultation with universal principles – is deepened with learning and experience, rather

than being an instinctive reaction. A person brings to the relationship their compassion

and habits of sensitivity and attention to others: 'what to notice, how to care, what to be

sensitive to', developing and learning from their responsiveness in each new situation.

Judged by the most rigorous standards of rational theory, the responsiveness that is

integral to friendship is a moral achievement – though one that does not rely on impartial

and generalizable precepts. (78)

June empathizing with Janine's loss motivates her to act on behalf of the other providing

whatever comfort she can. Displaying the qualities of care also means she is acting as a friend to

Janine at that moment. Through this first caring act, June and Janine begin to solidify their

friendship, through trust and sensitivity to each other. As the season progresses, June also

progressively becomes more attuned to her friend, being able to respond to the other in a more

particularized manner that serves at once to meet the other's needs more accurately, and to

maintain their relationship.

4.2.3 Care-giving and Care-receiving

Continuing with Tronto's care process, comes "care-giving," which refers to the

necessary labour of caring. As the season advances, June and Janine's relationship also deepens.

They begin trusting each other and being more intimate. Caring for one another provides them

with the opportunity to establish a friendship, as much as such a relationship is possible in Gilead. Throughout season one, June becomes committed to Janine, which "involves some readiness to be attentive to her, to take her seriously, and to act on her behalf" (Friedman, *What are friends for?* 194). These qualities of a good friend also mirror the qualities for caring.

In 1.3 "Late," June has the opportunity to visit Janine after the birth of her daughter and talk to her privately in her room, a luxury rarely afforded to Handmaids. June heard through Serena that Janine had bitten Mrs. Putnam's hand and was attempting to talk some sense to her friend. Instead, she finds that Janine is quite frank with her, "Well, she is a cunt" ("Late"). The camera turns back to June where the viewer sees her trying really hard to contain a smile. The crass language Janine uses to describe Mrs. Putnam would not be tolerated if overheard by an Aunt, another Wife, or even a Martha. June realizes that speaking this freely with her, an opinion that the viewer, who is privy to June's internal monologue, knows that she shares, means that Janine trusts her enough to express herself in this manner. Above all, Janine trusts that June is not an Eye and would not report her for improper behaviour. Then, Janine asks for June's trust, saying "Can I tell you a secret?" ("Late"). Sharing secrets is a mark of trust between people, as one is vulnerable sharing a piece of delicate information with someone else. It relies on people believing in someone else not being disloyal and breaking the trust. Janine confides in June that, because of the baby she generated, and now has to feed, she is immune to Gilead's abuse and can get away with biting a Wife or speaking badly about her. For the time being, Janine is protected by her status. For example, Janine gets to eat ice cream and uses that privilege to share it with June, even if it is only vanilla ("Late"). Trust helps them solidify their friendship as Janine knows June to be trustworthy enough and not to report her to the authorities, meanwhile, June realizes that her friend is not a puppy to the regime, as Offred in the novel claims her to be.

As they become more acquainted, June also learns more about her friend and, in turn, becomes better equipped to respond to Janine. Tronto links the step of care-giving with the value of competence, that is being able to provide proper care. With practice, one can become proficient in care-giving. As Tronto explains, "Caregiving also makes us competent. If we are expected to monitor a patient's blood pressure, then we need to know how to do it. Competence is not simply a technical measure; for most people, it becomes a measure of their excellence." (*Who Cares?* 8). In essence, being capable of providing care can improve someone's confidence in their own abilities. In 1.9 "The Bridge," June is awakened in the early morning to try to talk Janine out of committing suicide by jumping off a bridge while holding her daughter. By asking June for help, Gilead recognizes that June is a friend of Janine and that their relationship has at least some value: to save Janine and the baby. As she arrives at the scene, Commander Putnam asks Aunt Lydia, "What is this girl doing here?" to which Aunt Lydia replies, "They're friends" ("The Bridge"), signaling that she admits that June and Janine have a connection. At this point, June has become a much more capable caregiver and knows that she can talk to Janine, but not under the existing circumstances. She asks the Putnams to give them some space, and the Putnams reluctantly agree since up until that moment nothing they said helped Janine off the ledge. June's growing confidence as a friend and caregiver to Janine in that moment is signaled by her request for some privacy between them. The request is at odds with traditional Gilead custom, as the Handmaids are hardly able to speak freely among themselves, even as shopping partners. June, however, has enough knowledge of her friend to understand that she can provide better care if the Putnams are removed from the conversation. Janine is upset because Commander Putnam had promised her that they would somehow become a family after her baby was born, which was obviously a lie.

To try to convince Janine not to jump, June begins by validating Janine's feeling that she is not crazy to act the way she does. Under their circumstances, June says, "It's a wonder we're not all crazy. In this place, you know?" ("The Bridge"). June speaks forthrightly with Janine as she knows her friend also does not agree with the current regime. The ready-made sentences the Handmaids are supposed to use when speaking, do not convey any negative emotions like anger, sadness or dislike. It would be impossible for June to connect to Janine, who is clearly suffering, if she had to say one of the few approved slogans like: "We're brought good weather." Instead, June tries to convey to Janine that she should live because Gilead cannot last forever, "Change is coming. There's hope. All of this, it's all gonna be over one day. And everything is gonna go back to normal. And we're gonna go out drinking. You and me" ("The Bridge"). Wishing Gilead to succumb, goes against their current status quo, but within their relationship they can foster this hope.

Friedman argues that friendships provide a safe space for identities and values contra the status quo to emerge, for example, LGBTQIA2+ identities. According to Friedman, "The evolution of instinctive values and pursuits may lead friends to shared perspectives that generate disloyalties to existing social institutions. This gives friendship disruptive possibilities within society at large. Out of these disruptions may emerge beneficial social change" (*What are friends for?* 219). June and Janine share beliefs that go against the doctrine of the regime. Their desire to go out to a bar and to sing karaoke, although mundane for current standards, are seen in Gilead as truly deviant. But because they are two Handmaids who have these desires, they can also assume there are others who share it with them, and thus the possibility of change that June speaks of becomes viable. Janine, unfortunately, is not fully persuaded. For her, the only way to be free from Gilead is to jump. Janine hands her baby to June, who promises that the baby will know her

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mother loves her, and then jumps off the bridge. Despite the odds, the next scene shows Janine in a hospital bed, having survived her suicide attempt.

June and Janine's relationship illustrates how caring and becoming friends are interconnected processes with larger social implications. Hamington asserts that "[a] phenomenology of care reveals how caring performances are embedded in relationships and entangled in identity formation, knowledge creation, political negotiation, and of course ethical action" ("Politics" 282), all of which can be seen in their friendship. June's relationship with Janine is a space where she can develop her care-giving abilities and ethical actions by taking responsibility for her friend. In turn, Janine trusts June with her honest opinions on her life as a Handmaid and demonstrates to June that a way to gain further freedoms in Gilead. Even if it seems counter-intuitive to give Gilead babies as a way to actively resist the regime,[76] the condition of a pregnant or breastfeeding woman seems to offer more room to actively resist the regime without fear of consequences (for example, Janine does not get further bodily punishments for attacking Mrs. Putnam, which would have happened had her not been needed to feed her newborn). Throughout the season, June becomes more politically savvy, actively paying attention to the power structures around her, learning to manipulate them, and joining the resistance, Mayday. For instance, she realizes that being pregnant in Gilead, beyond being allowed to eat ice cream, offers her opportunities to actively disobey the regime and decides to take full advantage if it becomes the case.[77] Finally, June grows confident in her abilities as a

[76] Janine does not take full advantage of her position as a breastfeeding woman. Although biting Mrs. Putnam's hand is a very aggressive way to show her discontent with her situation, it is a very limited act that does not offer wider political implications.
[77] In 1.3 "Late," June gets interrogated about Emily with a cattle prod. As soon as Serena realizes what is happening, she stops the interrogation just on the fact that June might be pregnant. The mere possibility of pregnancy prevents June from enduring further interrogation techniques.

friend in Gilead, being able to bond not just with Janine, but also Emily, Alma, the second Ofglen, and Nick.

One of the biggest acts of resistance one can take in Gilead is refusing to participate in the regime. In 1.10 "Night," the Handmaids are called to be in a Particicution, that is, a public execution. The event itself is also in Atwood's novel and its name is a clever juxtaposition of participation and execution. At once, the event serves as a state-controlled way for the extremely oppressed Handmaids to release their emotions, and as a way to further implicate them into the regime. This event bookends the series, being in the very first and last episodes. In 1.1 "Offred," the Handmaids are called to execute a man convicted of raping a pregnant Handmaid who died along with her unborn child. The scene shows close-ups of the Handmaids' angry faces as they take out their frustrations on this man who might not even have committed the crimes they accuse him of. They do not seem to hesitate to execute this person they do not know. The opposite happens in 1.10 "Night," when they find out they have to execute Janine, who has been convicted of child endangerment.

When Janine comes out between two guards and is placed at the center of a circle of Handmaids all ready to carry out the execution by stoning, the music intensifies and the camera travels showing the Handmaids' confused and appalled reactions. Janine, after all, is one of them. Besides, Janine is their friend, and as such "[f]riendship requires one to show care, loyalty, assistance, and so on, at some inconvenience to oneself, surpassing what is owed to others in general" (Friedman, *What are friends for?* 212). The guard in 1.1 was someone the Handmaids did not know and so risking their safety to disobey Gilead's orders to kill him would be a big compromise for all Handmaids. Janine, however, is someone they all are familiar with; thus, it becomes harder to carry out the sentence passed by Gilead. They would be responsible for the

death of their friend which goes against the very nature of friendship as a relationship. Instead, they choose to remain loyal to Janine and disobey Gilead. According to Howell,

> Events like the 'Prayvaganzas' and 'Particicutions' are designed to confirm and display Gileadean control over the Handmaid body, while simultaneously providing an emotional release-valve for a cruelly repressed population. Yet they also, inevitably, afford agentic opportunities, moments of real community and real rebellion, most notably in 'Night' Episode S1:E10 where Handmaids unanimously talk back to Gileadean tyranny, refusing to stone to death one of their own, the emotionally frail Janine (Madeline Brewer), who has been charged with the crime of child endangerment. As each drops her stone, intoning the prescribed, 'I'm sorry, Aunt Lydia', it is a ritual of collective submission remade as a new ritual of collective rebellion, voicing civil defiance. (226)

The refusal to stone one of their own also shows Gilead where their loyalties truly lie: not with the regime, but with each other. Like June remarks at the beginning of this episode, "It's their own fault. They should never have given us uniforms if they didn't want us to be an army" ("Night"). Gilead underestimated that the Handmaids would be able to form alliances among themselves.

The first Handmaid to refuse is the second Ofglen, who says, "Aunt Lydia, come on. We can't do this" ("Night"). She is told to comply, but refuses again, "Guys, this is insane. No. I'm not gonna do it. I'm not gonna kill Janine, ok?" ("Night"). Her disobedience is not tolerated by the guard that hits her with the butt of his rifle. Even Janine, who is about to be stoned, is concerned for her and asks, "Are you ok?" ("Night"), which serves to show that Janine is also loyal to the other Handmaids. Ofglen's punishment should have been enough to discourage the other Handmaids from refusing to carry out their orders, but the Handmaids all stand there in a

circle unable to do as they are told. June looks at the stone in her hand and realizes that she is in a privileged position to refuse to do Gilead's bidding: since she is officially pregnant, she would not have to endure the harsh punishments that would ensue from disobeying direct orders. Consequently, June is able to continue caring for her friend, by refusing to stone her, and also to publicly defy the regime. As June drops the stone that should be used to murder Janine to the ground, she says, "I'm sorry, Aunt Lydia" ("Night"). The other Handmaids follow suit, dropping their stones and murmuring the same apology. The guards are powerless to persuade so many Handmaids to do as they are told, because the Handmaids are the single most precious resource Gilead has. Janine, on her part, is overcome by emotions that her friends would stand up against Gilead on her behalf.

This scene is a complete departure from Atwood's novel. It frames resistance as an overt public act. Amy Boyle writes that "from the novel to the television series, the acts of feminist resistance have migrated from private to public feminisms" (853). In the case of the novel, Offred's resistance is limited to her immediate sphere, which is largely private: "Offred's acts of resistance in the novel are mostly contained to her narration and her private interactions with Fred and his driver Nick" (Boyle 853). In this last episode, the resistance moves onto the public realm. The public execution of Janine is halted when the Handmaids refuse to do it. Not only do they achieve real change, that is, Janine will walk out of there alive, but also they demonstrate to Gilead that they can exert power simply by refusing to cooperate with the regime. The repercussions are also broader once you are overtly defying the political institutions, because it sets precedent for other forms of resistance.[78] It also serves to show Gilead that their oppression techniques can only go so far, but that people will always retain some power: "the handmaids

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[78] For example, in 2.6, "First Blood," the second Ofglen acts as a suicide bomber at the opening ceremony of the new Red Center.

demonstrate the dual nature of power and realize their potential collective power (Foucault 1977),

as Gilead's regime relies on their compliance" (Boyle 853).

In terms of care-giving, all the Handmaids were able to give care to Janine at that

moment. They realized that they could not act against the best interest of their friend, despite the

consequences that they might suffer. Their relationship with Janine and each other prevailed over

the social imposition of Gilead to have them blindly obey every command, demonstrating that

friendships are spaces that allow for people to question the ruling status quo. Friedman explains

that

> Modern friendships have the option of evolving their own shared values since they are not
>
> bound by friendship rituals to participate in a community-wide allegiance to, and pursuit
>
> of, a communally defined good. It is precisely this unaffiliated nature of modern
>
> friendship that gives it the potential for supporting independent standpoints and
>
> unconventional pursuits, which may, in turn, disrupt other social institutions in
>
> progressive ways. (*What are friends?* 221)

The Particicution is a community-wide event that solidifies Gilead's grip over the Handmaids.

Their bond to each other allowed them to see this event as an immoral act that could not be

carried out on one of their own. In Gilead's strict society, this refusal disrupts the status quo and

opens the possibilities for further acts of resistance. Caring and being a friend ultimately serve to

guide a very political action against Gilead. For Tronto, "[e]veryday life is political because all

caring, every response to a need, involves power relationships" (*Who Cares?* 9). Through caring

and cultivating friendships, June and the other Handmaids find the opportunity to oppose Gilead

publicly and overtly with a concrete act of disobedience.

Finally, the last step in the caring process is "care-receiving," namely, determining that needs were satisfactorily met. Care is a dialogical process that continues after the need is met, because both the caregiver and the care-receiver can find ways to improve the quality of care in the future by providing feedback and actively listening to each other. Furthermore, once one need is met, usually others might pop up as caring is never truly finished. Janine was well taken care of by her friends. She enters the circle to be stoned asking meagrely, "Not too hard, ok?" ("Night") but is able to leave the circle still alive. After having been able to look after Janine, the Handmaids leave the Particicution to the tune of Nina Simone's "Feeling Good," highlighting that the overall morale among them is high. Tronto clarifies that "[care-receiving] requires looking again at the situation and the resources assigned to improve it. And, often, looking again will lead to recognizing new needs, and the process repeats. Endlessly. Needs never end until we die. Care is always present, rarely visible, always requiring something from us" (*Who Cares?* 7). Having successfully taken care of her and opposed the regime, each Handmaid can probably identify other areas that demand care and initiate the process again, further aiding their cause of being free from Gilead's control.

4.3 Conclusion

Throughout the season, June transforms from a defeated person at the very first episode, to a political activist capable of maneuvering tricky situations to achieve her means. She also develops relationships to improve her life and sense of self. Even her relationship with Commander Waterford, if not entirely voluntary, she is able to use to her advantage by asking him to intervene when Serena confines her to her room, for example. The most significant relationships are the ones she forges with the other Handmaids, like Janine, Emily, Alma, and the second Ofglen. What June realized is that, even if it is tricky, she has to be able to trust others to

survive and fight against the oppression. Erica A. Holberg writes that "June's recognition of her dependence upon others and the inescapability of the need to trust others are inseparable from her insistence upon the power and dignity of herself as an active agent" (170). June trusted Ofglen/Emily not to report her when they were having incriminating conversations along the river in the first couple of episodes. Later, she trusted Alma to be a member of Mayday and not an Eye and to carry out Mayday's mission of retrieving a package from Jezebel's without knowing the contents of said package. These friendships aid June in giving her strength to find ways to resist Gilead's control. Andrew Sayer remarks that "the quality of people's lives depends hugely on the quality of the social relations in which they live, and on how people treat one another" (7). Treating others with care and being treated likewise in return, makes life in Gilead more bearable to June. In the case of June and Janine's friendship, through caring about Janine, June was able to forge a relationship with the other Handmaid, but above all else, she was able to maintain Janine alive in a society that disregards women's lives and only considers them useful if able to reproduce.

5. BBC America's *Orphan Black* (2013-2017)

Orphan Black is a Canadian science fiction television show created by screenwriter Graeme Manson and director John Fawcett.[79] The show aired on BBC American (USA) and Space (Canada) premiering on March 30, 2013 and concluding on June 10, 2017. It totaled 5 seasons each with 10 hour-long episodes. *Orphan Black* received a lot of critical praise during its airing, winning several Canadian Screen Awards; the 2014 Peabody Award; the 2014, 2015, and 2016 Writers Guild of Canada Awards for Television Drama; and many other awards through the duration of the show.[80] The show also sparked a devoted following from viewers who discussed the episodes regularly through social media using the #CloneClub hashtag.

Unlike the other works discussed in this thesis so far, *Orphan Black* was created, produced, and written mainly by men, instead of by women. However, unlike most television shows, *Orphan Black* focuses on female characters very exclusively, which makes it an ideal choice for analysing female bonding and friendships. In this chapter, I will analyze how the main characters in *Orphan Black*, Sarah, Alison, Cosima, and Helena, are able to form strong bonds of friendship through caring about and for each other. Only by developing a community for themselves that they can fight against the corporation that oppresses them, Neolution. First, I will offer a summary of the show and discuss some of its key themes. Next, I will bring back notions of autonomy to show how these character's circumstances are different from both *The*

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[79] While the show was produced and filmed in Canada, mainly in Toronto, the story never reveals the city in which most of the action takes place. According to Goulet and Rushing, it becomes impossible to analyze *Orphan Black* as specifically Canadian SF: "Any attempt to explore ways that Canadian science-fiction might differ from US science-fiction is somewhat impeded by the fact that *Orphan Black* seems at pains to create a diffuse and generic 'North American' setting for the show, likely to facilitate its export and distribution in other countries" (12).

[80] For a complete list of all the award the *Orphan Black* has been nominated and won, see: "List Of Awards And Nominations Received By *Orphan Black*."

Handmaid's Tale and *Bitch Planet*. Finally, I will describe how the characters go through the process of caring to forge their friendship, which allows them to resist the control of Neolution.

Orphan Black stands in contrast to a long tradition of SF film and television that either depicts strong female characters who have no other women to relate to or relegates women to the sidelines. For instance, the critically acclaimed *Alien* franchise (1979-1997) has the very strong and very much alone Ripley. Similarly, Sarah Connor in *The Terminator* (1984) mainly interacts with Kyle Reese.[81] In television, *Star Trek* had in its pilot episode actress Majel Barret as a second-in-command to Captain Pike (which was later changed to Captain Kirk); however, test audiences were skeptical of a woman in such a position of command, which lead the creators to replace her with Spock as second-in-command (Johnson-Smith 80).[82] Even a show like *Battlestar Galactica* (2004-2009) that has been acclaimed as "one of the most feminist TV shows" (Belec n.p.), leaves much to be desired. Juliet Lapidos notices that "the main female characters are all dying, dead, or not human. … In isolation, none of these cases has much significance. But taken together they suggest a troubling, if unintentional message: Women—the human ones, anyway— just can't hack it when the going gets rough" (n.p.). Even more significantly for this thesis, *Battlestar Galactica* fails to portray friendships between its female characters, with "the women bicker[ing] among themselves, forming unhealthy rivalries rather than supportive partnerships," which is exacerbated by the fact that the men indeed form strong friendships (Lapidos n.p.).[83]

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[81] For an analysis of the role and space given to women in American SF films since the 80s, see Kac-Vergne.

[82] According to Jan Johnson-Smith, "it seems that audiences could cope with an alien man as a second-in-command more readily than a human woman" (80). Only in 1995 *Star Trek* audiences seemed ready for a woman in command, with Kathryn Janeway (Kate Mulgrew) as the first female Captain in the franchise in *Star Trek: Voyager* (1995-2001), see Dove-Viebahn.

[83] As Lapidos argues, "the male characters on the show not only have a better chance of survival; they're also more likely to improve their quality of life through friendship. Adm. Adama and Col. Saul Tigh have an intensely loyal, decades long relationship; so intense, in fact, that a favorite fan-boy pastime involves splicing together the pair's intimate moments and putting them on YouTube" (n.p.). See Ladipos for further problems with the gender representation of *Battlestar Galactica*.

More recent examples have similar issues, like Canadian SF show, *Killjoys* (2015-2019), that follows the space adventures of Dutch (Hannah John-Kamen), the strong female leader, and her two male side-kicks, John (Aaron Ashmore) and D'avin (Luke Macfarlane), and Netflix's hit *Stranger Things* (2017-) that only introduced another young female character to interact with Eleven (Millie Bobby Brown) in season 2. Even some mega productions, like HBO's *Game of Thrones* (2011-2019) or *Westworld* (2016-) that do have a lot female characters in positions of power have a hard time depicting these same characters as truly friends. Some SF shows that do succeed in showcasing female friendship usually concentrate that to one or two pairs of female friends, such as, *Buffy: The Vampire Slayer* (1997-2003) with Buffy and Willow's friendship, and Marvel's *Jessica Jones* (2015-2019) with Jessica and Trish's sisterly bond. Hence, *Orphan Black*'s wide cast of female characters and their varied relationships and friendships offer many avenues of analysis for this thesis.

Orphan Black is a veritable feminist tv show. As Graeme J. Wilson puts it: "It remains relatively rare for a dramatic series to be headlined by a woman, and even more so for a dramatic series to feature a multitude of complex female characters in its ensemble" (5). Not only the women figure at the center of the action, but the men, for once, take on the sidelines being in supporting roles rather than driving the plot. Valerie Estelle Frankel describes that:

> Sarah and her clone sisters are the heroines, saving each other but almost never rescued singly by a man. In fact, the men are bumblers (Donnie), objectified eye candy (Paul), gentle supporters (Felix), laughably impotent bullies (Vic), oblivious nerds (Scott), terminally glitching constructs (the Castors) or even babysitters to be used or dropped as needed (Cal). Matriarchs and patriarchs alike are villains, which the clone team take down one by one. (*Faces* 2)

In short, women are front and center in *Orphan Black*. It is their stories and their relationships with each other that constitute most of the plot.

The main science fiction element in the show is human cloning. In order to portray it correctly, creators Fawcett and Manson brought in a scientific consultant, Cosima Herter, to the team to help them with the science. Herter ended up not only serving as the model to one of the main characters in show, Cosima Niehaus (Tatiana Maslany), but also providing key insights into the political and feminist themes of the show. As Manson explains in an interview, "The biggest and strongest realization — I mean it was fundamental and it happened early, and it was reiterated again and again by Cosima — was that biology and genetic science are always political" (Hamner n.p.). Moreover, early on the project Herter had to point out that by choosing to have a female lead, the show would have to essentially deal with a lot of feminist topics. In another interview, Manson recounts that the creators had not initially understood how their concept was geared towards feminism: "John and I didn't set out to do a show that managed to encompass a massive spectrum of feminist themes … We didn't set out to do that. But the women close to use [sic] were going, 'Guys, you know what you got here? Do you know what you're doing?' So, very early on in the process we made that a part of our understanding" (Duca n.p.). According to Manson, as soon as they brought Herter into the project, she was very excited about the feminist and political ramifications of the show, claiming: "Don't you realize you're playing with a feminist bomb?!" (Duca n.p.). So, despite being conceptualized by men, *Orphan Black* counted with expert advice, like Herter's, that helped shape the show to highlight the feminist, political and scientific themes.[84]

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[84] Herter was also responsible for naming all the episodes in the show. Season 1 was inspired by Charles Darwin's *On the Origin of Species*; season 2 by Francis Bacon's *ouvre*; season 3 by Dwight Eisenhower's farewell address; season 4 by Donna Haraway's work; and season 5 by Ella Wheeler Wilcox's poem "Protest."

Orphan Black tells the story of a group of women who find out they are clones, and it follows their investigation into their origins to uncover who is behind the illegal genetic experiments that created them. All the clones are portrayed by one actress, Tatiana Maslany, who won the 2016 Emmy for her outstanding performance in the show.[85] Maslany played 14 on-screen clones throughout the show's five seasons. At the season finale, it is finally revealed that the total number of clones around the world was 276. Despite these staggering numbers, the show focuses on a group of five clones: grifter Sarah Manning, soccer-mom Alison Hendrix, scientist Cosima Niehaus, assassin Helena, and businesswoman Rachel Duncan. As part of a massive human experiment, the clones realize early on they have been secretly monitored without their knowledge or their consent their whole lives.[86] As Frankel puts it, "While the show offers real science, it's also a metaphor: clones as property, women as property" (*Faces* 3). The show revolves around the clones trying to free themselves and regain their bodily autonomy. The show's main point of view is Sarah who up until the first episode had led a life of petty crime and illegal hustles. When she arrives back in town looking to reconnect with her estranged daughter, Kira (Skyler Wexler), she witnesses someone who looks exactly like her, Beth Childs, commit suicide by stepping in front of an incoming train. Sarah initially decides to steal Beth's identity to use her cash and leave her grifter life behind by running away with her daughter, and brother Felix (Jordan Gavaris).[87] Instead, Sarah is caught in the clone conspiracy as she slowly learns that she is only one of many sisters. Soon, she teams up with Alison and Cosima to continue the work Beth had started of trying to find out who has been killing them. Turns out Helena, a brainwashed

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[85] Maslany also won Critics' Choice Television Awards for Best Lead Actress in a Drama Series in 2013, and 2014. For a complete list of Maslany's awards, see "List of Awards and Nominations Received by *Orphan Black*."
[86] Rachel Duncan is the only clone to be raised self-aware and she functions for most of the series as an antagonist to the other four, always advancing the interests of the Dyad Institute rather than the clones' agenda.
[87] Sarah and Felix are orphans raised by Siobhan Sadler (Maria Doyle Kennedy), who is also called Mrs. S throughout the series.

clone raised by religious fanatics, had been tracking down and killing all of the copies of herself (as she is led to believe that she is the one and true original, and that all others are abominations in the eyes of God). By the end of season one, however, Helena rebels against the ones who raised her as she refuses to hurt children or Sarah, who is her identical twin. Slowly, Helena gains the trust of the others and joins their fight becoming a powerful ally.

Meanwhile, another threat starts to lurk: Cosima is terminally ill with an unknown respiratory disease. The cause of her sickness is a genetic defect all clones were designed to have, which was only meant to affect their uterine lining to cause them to be infertile. The sisters learn that there is no cure to their genetic malfunction, since it was never meant to spread to other parts of their body and cause them to be sick; thus, the only way to save Cosima and the other clones is for them to find a cure themselves. Sarah and Helena are considered "defective clones," because they were born without the genetic mechanism to cause infertility. Not only are Sarah and Helena safe from the degenerative disease that affects their sisters, but they are also the only two clones that are able to have children of their own. Their reproductive capabilities attract the attention of both the scientists who created them, the Dyad Institute, and another group of religious fanatics, the Proletheans. While Dyad attempts to secure Sarah and her daughter for extensive testing, the Proletheans kidnap Helena. The leader of the Proletheans, Henrik Johanssen (Peter Outerbridge), marries Helena, and then uses artificial insemination to get her pregnant with his babies.

As the story progresses the Clone Club (Sarah, Alison, Cosima and Helena) learns that they are part of a scientific experiment in human cloning, called Project Leda, developed by the military. Ethan Duncan (Andrew Gillies), one of the main researchers on the team, explains to Sarah, the clones were: "Proof of concept. How everything starts" ("To Hound Nature in Her Wandering"). They cloned them to prove that human cloning could be done successfully, Ethan

continues, "We succeeded – cloned human embryos. What a feat. But an oversight committee declared us an ethical failure" ("To Hound Nature in Her Wandering"). Once the clones were declared an ethical failure, Leda was scooped up by the private Dyad Institute that carried the human embryos to term. In 4.5 "Human Raw Material,"[88] Susan Duncan (Rosemary Dunsmore) tells Cosima that, "I created you, as a beautiful baseline, to unlock the mysteries of the human genome." To which Cosima associates Leda with the OncoMouse, a genetically engineered mouse that is used to test cancer treatments. Parallel to Dyad's cloning program, the military never stopped developing their own branch of it, called Project Castor and spearheaded by Dr. Virginia Coady (Kyra Harper). The military created a male line of human clones (played by Ari Millen), raising them as self-aware brothers trained from birth to be perfect soldiers. The male designed infertility also devolved into a fatal illness that attacked the Castor clones' brains ultimately killing them. Additionally, the male Castors were capable of sexually transmitting their disease rendering their female partners sterile as well.[89] On one hand, the clones were designed to enhance the human genetic pool and sell gene editing technology (Dyad), demonstrating the dangers of mixing capitalism with unrestricted human experimentation. On the other hand, the clones were also developed to serve as soldiers and population control (the military), showing that military power and genetic experimentation can be weaponized.

Finally, the man behind the curtain controlling both Project Leda and Castor is the founder of a transhumanist group, Neolution, P.T. Westmorland (Stephen McHattie). Not only was he pursuing the military and capitalist lines with each cloning project, but he was also responsible for spearheading Topside, a higher up organization embedded within governments around the world that lobbied for scientific patent and laws that benefited Neolution's eugenic

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[88] I will use an abbreviation to talk about particular episodes: ex. Season 4, episode 5 becomes 4.5.
[89] For a discussion of eugenics and the sexually transmissible Castor disease, see Mathiason.

project.[90] Westmorland's ultimate agenda was to tap into a single gene, Lin28a, which he believed was the key to unlock the "fountain of youth" so that he and the few who could afford it would live on forever. In a final confrontation, Sarah kills Westmorland bringing his house of cards down. The Clone Club manages to gather enough intel to go public with Neolution's conspiracies, effectively dismantling the group along with Topside and the Dyad Institute. Concurrently, Cosima finds a cure to the genetic disease that was killing Leda clones and commits herself to curing all remaining clones around the world.

During its airing and beyond, *Orphan Black* has attracted a lot of critical interest due to its capability of approaching hard topics in prime-time TV. Fans and critics alike became invested in the show, which prompted the release of several off-screen materials, including, IDW Publishing comic book series (*Orphan Black: The Clone Club* #1-5, 2015; *Helsinki* #1-5, 2015-2016; *Deviations* #1-5, 2017; and *Crazy Science*);[91] the book *Orphan Black Classified Clone Reports: The Secret Files of Dr. Delphine Cormier* (2017); and a podcast also starring Tatiana Maslany continuing the storyline past the final episode of the TV show, *Orphan Black: The Next Chapter* (2021-present). Likewise, there have been several monographies, anthologies, and articles published on *Orphan Black* and focusing on the diverse themes of the show. For instance, Casey Griffin and Nina Nesseth's *The Science Of Orphan Black: The Official Companion* (2017) discusses the real science behind the show; Gregory Pence's monograph *What We Talk About When We Talk About Clone Club: Bioethics and Philosophy in Orphan Black* (2016) and the anthology edited by Richard Green and Rachel Robinson-Greene, *Orphan Black and Philosophy: Grand Theft DNA* (2016), explore the philosophical themes in the series; Andrea Goulet and

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[90] For a discussion on the history of American eugenics and its intersections with *Orphan Black*, see Comfort.
[91] *Crazy Science* was planned to be another five-issue series, but it was cancelled due to low orders from comic book shops.

Robert A. Gushing edited an anthology on performance and biopolitics, *Orphan Black:*

Performance, Gender, Biopolitcs (2018); Janet Brennan Croft and Alyson R. Buckman edited an

anthology, *Sisterhood, Science and Surveillance in Orphan Black* (2019), that covers topics like

eugenics, surveillance and motherhood; and Valerie Estelle Frankel has two books on feminism

in the show, *Orphan Black and the Heroine's Journey* (2017), and *The Woman of Orphan Black:*

Faces of the Feminist Spectrum (2018).

Notions of reproductive rights, eugenics, bodily autonomy, and surveillance place *Orphan*

Black in direct dialogue to Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*. While in *The Handmaid's Tale*

anyone can be a secret Eye snitching to the totalitarian regime, in *Orphan Black*, Alison's frantic

search for her monitor shows that, until proven otherwise, any close relationship could potentially

be spying on her and reporting back to Dyad. The clones' frequent health tests and screenings

(often in the middle of the night and without their consent) mirrors Offred's monthly visits to the

doctor. Goulet and Rushing write that:

> Indeed, control over women's bodies, health and reproduction is absolutely central to
>
> *Orphan Black*. Everyone wants the clones – to destroy them as religious abominations
>
> (one sect of Proletheans), to use their reproductive capacity as a glorification of a cult
>
> leader (a different sect of Proletheans), as examples of transhumanist philosophy made
>
> flesh (Dr Leekie, the Neolutionists and the Dyad Institute), for military uses (Project
>
> Castor), for corporate exploitation of genetic engineering (Topside), for the
>
> commercialization of in utero genetic modification (BrightBorn) and more. Effectively,
>
> the show has found a narratively engaging way of describing what is a commonplace of
>
> women's lives – the constant attempts to control, monitor and regulate their bodies,
>
> particularly their reproductive capacity. (7)

Both Gilead and Westmorland are obsessed with reproduction, seeking to control it for their own purposes. In Gilead, this translates into forced reproduction of desired Handmaids.[92] In *Orphan Black*, the clones are barred from reproducing, which causes Sarah's and Helena's unexplained fertility to drive much of the plot. Either way, the patriarchal institutions of each storyworld seek to further assert power over women's bodies by removing their choice to or not to reproduce, which brings us back to notions of autonomy that will be the focus of the next section.

5.1 Autonomy

In *Orphan Black*, unlike *The Handmaid's Tale* or *Bitch Planet*, it is not an oppressive regime that curtails people's autonomy, but a shadow group, Neolution, through one of their fronts, the Dyad Institute. This means that within the storyworld of *Orphan Black*, not everyone suffers the lack of autonomy that the clones do. Moreover, albeit powerful, Neolution has a limit to their reach and influence on the clones' lives. Other institutions, represented by the Proletheans (religious) and the Castors (military), also attempt to control the clones' autonomy, resulting in varying threats to their bodily autonomy.[93] Still, the clones manage to have a higher degree of autonomy than Offred or the NCs, which means that the clones are ultimately better equipped to fight off the patriarchal systems that aim to control them by forging friendships based on care.

The show's focus on autonomy becomes even more evident by the end of season 1. In 1.10 "Endless Forms Most Beautiful," Cosima and Delphine (Evelyne Brochu) discover that the clones are patented organisms, and, therefore, literal property of Dyad. Representing the interests

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[92] It is important to remember that although Gilead has a declining birth rate, not every baby is wanted. Gilead's regime is also a eugenic regime. Babies born with disabilities and babies born of women of color are unwanted, which furthers the regime's eugenic program.

[93] The Proletheans by kidnapping Helena, harvesting her eggs, and then using artificial insemination to get her pregnant. The Castors by kidnapping Helena and Sarah and conducting medical experiments on them.

of Dyad, Rachel Duncan and Dr. Aldous Leekie (Matt Frewer), had offered each of the clones a deal: Cosima can have access to the science by working for them; Alison can come in voluntarily for her exams and proceed with her life unmonitored; and Sarah and Kira can be protected from the Protetheans if they agree to cooperate with Dyad. Cosima and Alison take Dyad's deal, even if it means they are not really free from their influence. Sarah comes close to accepting it as well, stopping at the last minute when Cosima uncovers that in their very DNA there is a synthetic sequence which identifies the clones as patented, "This organism and derivative genetic material is restricted intellectual property" ("Endless Forms Most Beautiful"). Panicked, Cosima explains to Sarah that "Any 'freedom' they promise is bullshit. They're liars. … We're property. Our bodies, our biology, everything we are, everything we become belongs to them. Sarah, they could claim Kira" ("Endless Forms Most Beautiful"). For Olivia Belton, "[b]y patenting the clones' DNA, the program clearly positions the clones as subordinate under the law to the corporation" (7), which effectively eliminates the possibility of full autonomy. Sarah refuses to take the deal, since the autonomy Dyad promises is a lie.[94]

The show from that point on becomes about the clones fighting to gain their bodily autonomy and escape their condition as property. David M. Higgins points out that the show's promotional materials for season 3 (figure 23), with tag lines such as "I am not your property," "I am not your weapon," "I am not your toy" and "I am not your experiment," explicitly stresses the importance of autonomy:

> This repeated assertion that 'I am not yours' is one of the show's key gestures, and it is
>
> constantly staged against antagonistic forces that seek to define the clones – and thereby

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[94] For a discussion on *Orphan Black* and real examples of patenting living organisms, see Vint, "Commodified Life."

women's bodies in a larger sense – as materials to be owned, managed, experimented

upon and exploited. (391)

While being constrained on certain aspects of their lives, the clones remain relatively autonomous

and free on others. It is important to understand what kind of autonomy Dyad is able to restrict.

Going back to Mackenzie's multidimensional concept of autonomy, the clones' self-

determination is the most restricted, because, unlike Gilead or the Protectorate, Dyad is less

capable of influencing and impacting the clones' self-governance and self-authorization.

Figure 23: OB's Season 3 promotional material.

To recall, self-determination "involves having the freedom and opportunities to make and

enact choices of practical import to one's life, that is, choices about what to value, who to be, and

what to do" (Mackenzie, "Three Dimensions" 18). At first glance the clones do have the freedom

and opportunities to enact their own choices, for instance, of career, marriage, hobbies, or

friendships. However, the clones cannot choose not to be monitored, not to be medically

examined, or not to be experimented on. Informed consent, that is, sharing all the pertinent

information about medical exams, tests, procedures and treatments, is a tenant of modern

medicine that is not extended to the clones themselves. Even though Alison is self-aware and

signed the deal with Dyad, she still needs to submit herself to medical testing at least twice a year without exception. Sarah is implanted with a robot in her cheek that attempts to give her a genetic treatment to trigger the same genes responsible for making her sisters sick. In order to understand Sarah's immunity to the disease, Dyad will even try to make her sick with it knowing fully well that they have no cure for it. One would be hard pressed to find someone who would voluntarily agree to be made sick with an incurable disease in the name of science.

Dyad's interventions without consent go even further, culminating in outright murder. In 5.7 "Gag or Throttle," we see a flashback of Rachel in which she had a sick clone killed, Miriam Johnson, so that they could perform an autopsy to understand the mysterious illness that had just started affecting the Leda clones. Even Dr. Leekie is shocked by Rachel's decision, but she rationalizes, "While you [Leekie] were sitting on your hands waiting for her to die naturally when we need a cure" ("Gag or Throttle"). For Rachel, and for scientific advancement, Miriam's life was expandable. Rachel deemed that, since Miriam was homeless, she was more important dead than alive. Miriam almost certainly would not have agreed to have her life cut short, because a corporation decided that an invasive autopsy was quicker than waiting for her to perish of an untreatable illness. These few examples demonstrate that the clones are valued, above all, for their biology. As patents of Dyad, they have no say in how their bodies or genetic materials are being used by the institute.

Despite not having full body autonomy, the clones manage to retain their autonomy in the other two dimensions, self-governance and self-authorization. The dimension of self-governance refers to internal conditions of autonomy of competence and authenticity. The clones remain capable of making and enacting their own choices that align with their identities. For instance, even though Cosima understands that Dyad is effectively the owner of the clones and looking out

for its own interests, she decides to work for them because as a scientist she wants to understand her biology better. Moreover, her gift for science is how she can contribute the most to cure herself and her sisters. Even Rachel, who was groomed by Neolution as a self-aware clone, is constantly asserting her self-governance by making her own choices, for instance the autopsy conducted on Miriam. Additionally, when she is told by Evie Cho (Jessalyn Wanlim) that Neolution would never give her a position of true power within their Topside (because she is a clone), Rachel maneuvers her away into exactly that position in order to work side-by-side with Westmoreland.

More importantly, is that even though the Dyad Institute attempted to keep the clones unaware and separate, they managed to find each other, demonstrating that they are also able to exercise their self-authorization, which identifies accountability, self-evaluation and social recognition. Sarah, Cosima, Alison, Helena and Beth all decided that by working together they would be able to resist and potentially topple Dyad and the control it had over their bodily autonomy. By working as a group, they had to keep each other accountable, for example when Sarah (still living as Beth) was asked to return Alison's money, which made Sarah re-evaluate her plan of running away with the money. Being part of the Clone Club also allowed them to self-evaluate, as when Helena came to the realization that she should not kill anymore clones, because they were indeed all sisters. Finally, it also gave them social recognition among the sisterhood, as each has a special skill that contributes to the well-being of the group and aids their goal of gaining independence from Neolution.

As this brief discussion on autonomy shows, the clones are much more autonomous then Offred and the NCs. The advantage of having this autonomy is that they can effectively form the friendships and community that aids them in fighting against the oppressive force that is

Neolution. Unlike Offred, who is curtailed in every dimension of autonomy, the clones are able

to form the necessary emotional connections to care for each and, thus, become friends and

powerful allies. And unlike the NCs, who are only able to find like-minded women in prison, the

clones find each other despite all odds with the goal of caring for all 276 clones around the world.

The appeal of *Orphan Black* and the Clone Club specifically, explains Andrea Goulet, is that: "If

Clone Club feels both new and authentic to the viewer of *Orphan Black*, it may be because its

members inhabit the paradoxical double stance of radical autonomy and radical solidarity" (181).

I briefly discussed how Dyad is able to control the clones' autonomy to some extent, while each

clone remains largely free in at least two dimensions of autonomy. Their fight is to regain the

autonomy that Dyad withholds. In the next section, I will discuss how the clones are able to still

forge an important community of friends and *sestras*,[95] that is, a sisterhood that allows them to

change their status quo with Dyad and reclaim their bodily autonomy.

5.2 Care ethics

In this section, I will discuss the caring process and how it is through caring about and for

each other that clones are able to become friends and allies. First, I will talk about what happens

when an institution, in this case Dyad, fails to care for its members. For the clones, it opened up

the possibilities to unite against their oppression. Next, I will analyse how the process of caring

about is initiated through caring imagination, and then proceeds into taking care of unmet needs.

Finally, caring also demands labour, which is the actual act of caring for someone. To complete

the process, the care needs to be assessed by the cared-for to be deemed adequate. Through this

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[95] Helena uses the Ukrainian word for sister, "sestra," to talk about the other clones, Sarah, Alison, Cosima and even Felix (brother-*sestra*).

caring process, the clones learn to take responsibility for each other, value each other's uniqueness, and to build their friendships.

5.2.1 Failing to care

One of the reasons the Clone Club got together is that Neolution failed to provide the clones with appropriate care. Bowden argues that social institutions are responsible to give adequate care to the people they are responsible for. Think for instance of hospitals, schools, or fire stations; they all need to be able to provide adequate care or they fail to accomplish what they were designed to do. Bowden writes,

> The social relations that hold every group together – whether formal or informal,
> comprised of one or of both genders – have to be created through practices of care that
> preserve each member's identity while holding the group together. To the extent that
> caring relations are absent from social institutions, those institutions fail to fulfil their
> responsibilities to the collectivity. Without any caring relations those institutions would
> collapse. (150)

Neolution was unable to give the necessary care for the clones, which resulted in them becoming self-aware and seeking to free themselves of the institution that hindered not just their autonomy, but also their safety.[96] Before even becoming aware of their status as clones, Neolution allowed several different threats to affect the lives of the clones: the disease, the Proletheans, and even Topside.

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[96] One current example of institutions failing to provide care is the case of police, which has repeatedly failed to keep POC safe. The result is a strong push back around the world for defunding the police all together and dismantling an institution that is no longer providing the care that citizens need.

The disease affecting the Leda clones was an unintended consequence of the cloning process. As such, it stands to reason that the full responsibility of curing this disease should lie on Dyad as they are the ones conducting the cloning experiment (without anyone's consent). Instead of pulling all resources into finding a cure, Dyad repeatedly fails to give comfort to the dying clones, and even kills them in order to seek answers to the disease. Even when they offer Cosima a suitable treatment, it entails the use of stem cells obtained illegally from Kira, meaning they are incapable of following up with more treatments without harvesting more cells from Kira, who is just a child. In 2.3 "Mingling Its Own Nature With It," we are introduced to Jennifer Fitzsimmons, who was the first clone to develop symptoms. In her video diaries she claims that "Dr. Leekie said that he could help. But he lied … I'm gonna die here," showcasing Dyad's inability to cure the very disease they caused to the clones. In the end, it is Cosima's perseverance to cure not only herself, but all her sisters that achieves what Dyad could not: to find a viable cure.

Neolution is also incapable of keeping the clones from being killed off. First, Helena while working for the Proletheans is able to roam around Europe killing clones almost without barriers. Only when she meets Sarah and realizes that they have a connection that her killing spree ends. Second, Ferdinand (James Frain), a cleaner for Topside, is accustomed to solving problems by killing people. In 3.1 "The Weight of This Combination," Sarah learns that he was responsible for killing 6 clones in Helsinki, alongside their respective families, because they were close to exposing Topside. Ferdinand and Rachel also planned on doing the same thing to the Clone Club. The failure to care for the clones demonstrates that Neolution believed they had total control over them, and that Neolution naively believed that they would not be able to fight back. According to Brandi Bradley, "the *Orphan Black* institutions – led by P. T. Westmorland, the

Duncans, and the Dyad Institute – [do not] account for the *sestra* or the *sestra*-ally bond being strong enough to overthrow their overseers" (114). In their own failure to care, Neolution did not think that the clones would foster care for each other, and that this care could generate the momentum to resist and overthrow their techno-capitalist institution.

5.2.2 Caring about and Taking care of

The first step in the process of care is "caring about," that is, recognizing needs. During the first half of the first season, we see Sarah slowly growing from an individualistic hustler into someone who feels that she has a responsibility towards others.[97] In other words, Sarah learns to care about others as much as she cares about herself. However, the process from her individualistic stance to a caring one is slow and develops over several episodes.

At first, Sarah does not feel that being a clone makes her responsible for her clone sisters. As soon as Sarah learns about her biology, she goes back to Felix's apartment where she insists that this new information does not change her plans of stealing Beth's money and running away:

SARAH: What difference does it make Fee?

FELIX: Last time I checked, human cloning was illegal, let alone impossible.

SARAH: Yeah, leave it out, ok? It doesn't matter.

FELIX: It does matter. Dead Beth, dead German, those two, three other Euros, you. That's eight. And Dreadlocks [Cosima] is going on about her blood samples saying it's life or death. You can't just ignore it!

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[97] When we are introduced to Sarah, she had abandoned her daughter for almost a year, demonstrating that she also had difficulties caring about her own family. As she gets acquainted with Cosima and Alison, she begins to learn how to care about them as well as about her own family that she had left behind, Kira, Felix and Mrs. S.

SARAH: Yes, I can! I'm just me, ok? The song remains the same. We get the 75 grand

back from Beth's partner, we get Kira, and we get as far away from all of this as possible.

("Variation Under Nature")

Felix is quicker to realize that this is something Sarah cannot just run away from. Not only because she has learned about her genetic identicals, but also because the lives of all of them, including Sarah's, are at stake. Sarah, however, does not want to accept the responsibility of being a part of this community yet. She also is hesitant about trying to get answers in order to help the others and, consequently, herself.

Similarly, Alison has a hard time accepting Sarah into their Clone Club, especially after learning of Beth's death.[98] At the start of the show, Alison has difficulties even accepting her own part in Clone Club. Upon meeting Sarah for the first time she asks, "Why, Lord? Why me? I never wanted any part of this" ("Instinct"). Sarah only wants some answers, "Please, just tell me who are we to each other" ("Instinct"). But Alison denies the request claiming, "I am not doing that. That is not my responsibility," even though she knows the answer to Sarah's questions ("Instinct"). The refusal of responsibility shows that both Sarah and Alison are avoiding caring about each other. Alison does not want the conspiracy to affect her "perfect" suburban life, while Sarah cannot allow herself to care about others if she is to succeed in her scam. Avoiding responsibility is a way to avoid caring about each other, and establishing a relationship of friendship.

One way to move away from their individualistic posture of not taking responsibility and towards caring about each other is through caring imagination. Hamington describes caring

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[98] Cosima seems a lot more accepting of Sarah from the start, giving her answers and trying to empathize with her feelings of shock and confusion over learning they are clones.

imagination as what "allows us to bridge the gaps between ourselves and unknown others and helps place our caring in psychosocial contexts" (*Embodied Care* 64). Hamington continues, "Embodied care requires a caring imagination if we are to move beyond caring only for that which we have direct experience. … one of its major aspects is empathy: affective responses to an 'other' that integrates knowledge and emotions to better apprehend their situation and feelings" (*Embodied Care* 62). To better understand others, we should use our imagination to put ourselves in their shoes and thus generate empathy and start the process of caring about others.

The clones use this technique literally as they take each other's place and live in each other's lives for a couple of hours. By pretending to be each other, they are learning about what it is like to be the other, and therefore instigating caring about one another. In the case of Sarah, she has to learn how to be Beth convincingly enough to fool Art and help Cosima and Alison get answers about who is killing them. To convince Sarah to remain in her role as Beth, Cosima first frames the argument as it being her "biological imperative:"

> COSIMA: Who is the original? Who created us? Who is killing us? We need to know, but we lost our cop, so however you managed to get into her shoes, we really need you to stay there.
>
> SARAH: Stay a cop to help you?
>
> COSIMA: To help us. Help us find out who's killing us.
>
> SARAH: How? I'm not a cop. Beth's partner is gonna figure that out. Being Beth is what got me into this mess in the first place.
>
> COSIMA: I know, I know, I get it, I get it. But you can't run away from her. Look, we are your biological imperative now. Ok? Katja's fingerprints will match your fingerprints. ("Variation Under Nature")

By framing the discussion as a matter of survival for Sarah, as her "biological imperative," Cosima is playing into Sarah's individualistic nature. Sarah realizes that if someone is killing clones, which inevitably involves her personally, the best way to protect herself is to find out who is behind the assassinations. The catch is that by playing Beth she learns to empathize with her, and subsequently with the other clones (figure 24). At the end of 1.3, Sarah finally gets back the money she stole from Beth and Alison[99] and is ready to take Kira and run for it. However, she realizes that for her to be a good mother she has to learn how to be responsible. While being Beth, Sarah was able to witness what it would be like to have a stable life: "Sarah pretends to be Beth, and as she does, she learns who she could have been, if she'd finished school and chosen a career in public service" (Frankel, *Faces* 8). More importantly, she realizes what it is like to have people to depend on: a partner looking out for you (Art), people who care about you (Cosima and Alison), and even a steady relationship (Paul). Through Beth, Sarah begins to care about providing a good home for her own daughter. Subsequently, Sarah also learns to care about her sisters enough to fight not only for herself, but also for them.

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[99] In the same episode, Sarah learns that Beth's 75 grand was in fact Alison's money as a way to contribute to Beth's efforts to investigate who created and who was killing the clones.

Figure 24: 1.4 "Effects of External Conditions," Sarah pretending to be Beth while doing police work.

Figure 25: 1.4 "Effects of External Conditions," Alison pretending to be Sarah while visiting Mrs. S and Kira.

In the same manner, Alison has to learn how to care about the Clone Club, including

Sarah. In 1.4 "Effects of External Conditions," Sarah gets stuck doing police work, but she has a

firm date to see Kira otherwise Mrs. S is determined she will never be allowed to get her own

daughter back. The solution is for Alison to impersonate Sarah, so that Sarah can continue to

pretend to be Beth and learn more about the clone who is after them (Helena). Alison has to learn from Felix how to be Sarah well enough to fool Mrs. S. At first, Alison is judgemental and refuses to see Sarah's side, "This is terrible parenting, Felix. I mean, that poor child … I'm sorry, but a request like this? Maybe the child is better off with your foster mother" ("Effects of External Conditions"). Nonetheless, Alison is forced to concede that if Sarah is risking her life to protect all of them from Helena, she can also step up and help Sarah in return (figure 25).

Sarah, who comes from a poor background, and Alison, who is well-off living in privilege, have very different social backgrounds. The gap between Alison and Sarah is a socio-economic one that requires the use of caring imagination for them to see where they both are coming from. Hamington explains how one can use caring imagination to understand someone else's circumstances:

> Extending care into new particularities or new situations often requires a translation, but not the one-to-one correspondence of a phrasebook. When we come to care about that which we have experienced only indirectly or not at all, the caring imagination draws from its wealth of tacit body knowledge to make the connecting leap. (*Embodied Care* 69)

To tap into one's caring imagination, one needs to find something in their own experience that can connect them to the other. At first, Alison seems harsh in judging Sarah, because she assumes Sarah has had the same opportunities in life that she has. Felix helps Alison make a connection to Sarah's reality over the fact that they are both mothers, "Sarah is out there, risking her life, playing cat and mouse with killer clone, so that your kids don't end up orphans, and you think that she should lose her child for that?" ("Effects of External Conditions"). Alison, who has two adoptive children of her own, finally seems to relate to the struggle of motherhood she shares

with Sarah. Moreover, Alison realizes that Sarah, however imperfect, should not be permanently cut off from her child. Being able to think of both of them as mothers, albeit with their differences, aids Alison to pass as Sarah well enough to fool Mrs. S.[100] In the end, Alison succeeds in pretending to be Sarah. In addition, Alison is able to offer words of reconciliation to Mrs. S, and takes the opportunity to set up another date for Sarah to finally see her daughter, giving Sarah back the opportunity she just missed.

By impersonating one another, the clones also take the second step in the caring process, "taking care of." The second step involves taking responsibility for unmet needs and assessing how to best respond to them. In the case of the clones pretending to be each other, we see that Sarah assuming Beth's role, not only allows her to care about Beth and the other clones, but also to take on the responsibility of following through with the investigation Beth started in order to protect them all. Correspondingly, despite Alison's reservations regarding Sarah, she assumes the responsibility of meeting Kira to preserve Sarah's relationship with her daughter. Moreover, Frankel suggests that each time the clones play one another, they also highlight their individual skills: "The part of the story where each substitute for the others, with Sarah borrowing Beth's police powers or Alison-as-Sarah making peace with Mrs. S, emphasizes their different skillsets, used to protect each other and help them achieve their goals" (*Faces* 9). While Sarah's quick thinking and conning abilities allow her to remain pretending to be a cop longer than probably Alison or Cosima would, Alison's social skills enable her to deal with Mrs. S in a reparatory way rather than Sarah's usual confrontational manner. Working together and capitalizing on each other's individual strengths is a prominent theme throughout *Orphan Black*, which is highlighted

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[100] Alison, however, does not fool Kira, who knows immediately that Alison is not her mother. The show portrays Kira as having almost supernatural empathic abilities and being able to feel all of the Leda clones.

when they take care of each other by switching places and putting those skills to use on one another's lives.

The scenes I just discussed are all in the first half of season 1, which means the clones are still getting to know each other. These represent some of the foundations for them to build mutual affection for each and thus their friendships. The show emphasizes that despite being genetic identicals (like identical twins), each clone is also a particular individual with very unique personalities and trajectories in life. By learning to care for each other, the clones also learn to cherish their own individuality. Fernando Gabriel Pagnoni Berns and Emiliano Aguilar, compare *Orphan Black* to second-wave notions of sisterhood, while second-wave feminism aimed at creating a sisterhood that was universalizing, *Orphan Black* presents difference as something positive. The authors claim that "[i]f traditional sisterhood encouraged homogeneity, *Orphan Black* celebrates difference. Yes, even if they are all clones of the same matrix. As Cosima, the nerd clone says in episode ten of season two: 'God, we're so different'" ("Sisterhood is Back"). For Bowden, it is the uniqueness of our friends that attracts us to them:

> While the extent of our affection varies in different relationships, primarily we care for our friends because of their particular individuality: for their specific needs, beliefs, aspirations, behaviour and whole way of being that makes them who they are. We respond to their highs and lows, their successes and failures, their values and interests, because we are committed to them as unique persons, not as instances of generalized rules, holders of universal rights or subjects of institutional obligations. (78)

Through impersonating each other, the clones also learn to value each other's particularities, especially the Clone Club. *Orphan Black* demonstrates that not every genetic identical gets to become a part of the Club, because their individual personalities might clash or their goals might

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be distinct, signifying that it is not because they are clones (or generalized others) that they are deserving of trust, affection, and friendship. For example, Rachel remains an antagonist for most of the series, and, even though she helps them in the end, she is not granted acceptance into the Clone Club. Conversely, Helena, despite hunting down and killing clones, realizes that she is wrong, and then becomes an important member of the group. Caring about each other allows them to form the friendships and bonds that are their biggest asset against Neolution: "As the series progresses and the clones begin to trust each other, friendship comes to replace individualism" (Berns and Aguilar, "Sisterhood is Back" n.p.). Over the course of the following seasons, this friendship only strengthens into a veritable *sestrahood*. As spectators, what we witness is that the stronger they build their community, the stronger each of the characters also becomes.

5.2.3 Care-giving and Care-receiving

The next step in the caring process is "care-giving," namely, performing the labour of caring. As the series progresses, the clones get to know each other and become friends, which helps them to better assist and meet each other's needs. Their different personalities, lives and goals means that they have varying needs that also shift during the duration of the show. For example, Sarah regains Mrs. S's and Kira's confidence, thus her need to make amends to her family transforms into a need to free them from Dyad's influence.

Sarah's role within the Clone Club in many ways mirrors that of Beth: uncovering who is behind Project Leda and exposing them to end their influence in the clones' lives. As the viewer learns more about Beth and witnesses Sarah in action, two pictures of caring emerge. On one hand, Beth was a skilled investigator who was able to uncover much of the mysteries surrounding Leda, but she ultimately succumbed under the pressure and committed suicide. On the other

hand, Sarah stumbles her way into the investigation slowly making progress, but she learns that her skills alone will not get her far and, therefore, she must rely on her full network to pursue answers.

Beth represents individualism, that is, what Haraway understands as "autopoeisis." In biology, "autopoietic systems are 'self-producing' autonomous units" (Haraway 33). Notions of organisms that are self-sufficient and autonomous play into the traditional philosophical notions of autonomy discussed in Part I. Like neoliberal individualism, autopoiesis thinking leads us away from human collectivity, interconnection, and friendships. According to Haraway, "Bounded (or neoliberal) individualism amended by autopoiesis is not good enough figurally or scientifically; it misleads us down deadly paths" (33). Beth's path shows clearly that her individualism led her to a deadly path as she chose suicide over confiding in her sisters. Poignantly, according to Bradley, "The show indicates that one cannot fight back in isolation" (123). The clones need each other.

In 4.1 "The Collapse of Nature," there is a flashback episode about Beth in which we see her trying to give care to all of the clones, Alison, Cosima, and M.K. Unfortunately, Beth's understanding of giving care takes a toll on her, as she seems unable to fully trust the others to share her investigations, taking it upon herself to solve all the mysteries surrounding the clones. Self-sacrificing care, such as the care Beth is giving in this episode, is not considered proper care, because it puts the caregiver in a vulnerable position in which they are no longer able to perform their duties.[101] Moreover, her lack of trust shows that she is both unable to ask for help and that she cannot fully form the friendship and community that is needed for the clones to succeed.

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[101] Eva Feder Kittay discusses this notion as "nested dependencies." In her conception, she uses the example of the postpartum mother who, in order to properly care for her newborn baby, needs someone else to also care for her. See Kittay.

During her investigation into Neolution, Beth pushes everyone away, even though she is spiraling out of control under the burden of caring for all the clones, as evidenced by her drug abuse. Maslany talking about Beth explains that: "She's so complicated and has such a darkness to her, and such a solitariness. She's not like the other clones where they sort of reach out to each other, she sort of peels herself away in a way that her separation is sort of her ultimate demise" ("Going Inside the Beth Episode"). Despite going far in her investigation into Neolution, meeting Aldous Leekie, Evie Cho and even Susan Duncan, none of the other clones knew how far Beth got, because she would not share her findings. In 4.1, we see Beth's friends attempt to reach out to her, while she closes herself off to their advances. Cosima tells Beth, "I want answers, Beth. I know there's a shitload you're not telling us," signaling that she is aware that Beth knows more than she is letting on, and that Cosima would like to be privy to that knowledge as well ("The Collapse of Nature"). Again, while having lunch with Art he repeatedly asks her what is going on, and tells her that she can rely on him, to which Beth replies that, "I don't need you yet. Let me just get a handle of it first. … It's my shit. Don't take it on" ("The Collapse of Nature"). In a different interview Maslany adds that "I knew that there was something that pushed her to do what she did, but seeing the way that she pushed other people away. She wasn't without help, and she wasn't without allies, but she just sort of made a choice to push people away" (Aguilera). Instead of trying to investigate on her own and resolve the clones' problems by herself, Beth could have trusted that her network (Cosima, Alison, M.K, and Art) would help her continue her investigations and share the burden of it with her.

In Beth's attempt to be the caregiver and provide for her sisters, she seems to have forgotten that even caregivers need to be cared for. Beth assumes that she cannot tell the others about her investigation, because it puts them at risk. She laments to M.K, "I should have never

told Cosima or Alison. I dragged my partner [Art] into it too" ("The Collapse of Nature").

However, Beth as the caregiver should have listened to the ones receiving care in order to properly assess what they needed or do not needed on their own terms. Beth simply assumes she knows better as the caregiver forgetting that proper care should be a dialogical process between those giving care and those receiving care. As Cosima and Art demonstrate in the aforementioned quotes, they were both ready to take on the mantle of caregivers from Beth to allow her to be the one receiving some care as well. Ultimately, her attempts at caring also alienate the others, as Alyson R. Buckman explains, "While Beth engages with Cosima, Alison, and M.K., she also keeps herself separate; she realizes the man she loves, Paul, is not in love with her, and investigating the clone mystery wears on her and threatens her sense of self and bonds with the other clones, although she commits suicide in part to protect them" (141). Clearly, Beth feels responsible for her partner and her sisters, but she insists on operating as an individual instead of as a community, which proves to be not only inefficient, but above all dangerous since she ends up killing herself.

When the clones attempt to work alone, the plans seem to backfire or put them all in danger. This is true not only of Beth doing the police work mostly on her own, but also of the other clones attempting to solve problems on their own. For example, Helena isolated by Tomas believes she is the Original and must purge all other clones; Cosima, desperate for a cure after Evie Cho destroys their research, almost implants herself with Sarah's bot, without listening to Scott or researching the viability of such approach; and M.K refuses to get involved with the other clones, except for Beth, which means her hacking talents get under-utilized. Buckman argues that "The clones are at their most vulnerable when they feel isolated and helpless" (141).

Orphan Black highlights again and again with these examples that the clones can only achieve their objectives when they trust and rely on one another.

Sarah, who starts off also as an individualistic person, soon begins trusting the others, demonstrating that there are other ways to do things and achieve the desired results. If Beth represents individualism and autopoiesis, Sarah represents friendship and sympoiesis. For Haraway, "If it is true that neither biology nor philosophy any longer supports the notion of independent organisms in environments, that is, interacting units plus contexts/rules, then sympoiesis is the name of the game in spades" (33). Sympoiesis, according to Haraway, means "'making-with.' Nothing makes itself; nothing is really autopoietic or self-organizing. … That is the radical implication of sympoiesis. … It is a word for worlding-with, in company. Sympoiesis enfolds autopoiesis and generatively unfurls and extends it" (58). Throughout the series, Sarah learns that she is dependent on her sisters, but instead of it being a vulnerability (as Sarah the hustler might have thought), it is a strength. Sarah is effectively the protagonist of the show, but even her role as protagonist gets complicated through her interdependence with the other clones, as Jessica Tanner points out:

> *Orphan Black* critiques that masculinist individualism by entwining Sarah's protagonism with that of her four primary sestras and assorted secondary Ledas, offering a vision of collective subjectivity that reconfigures traditional paradigms of individual (male) subjectivation and social integration. *Orphan Black* is a narrative of formation and deformation in tandem, a narrative of the creation of a community of sestras that profoundly complicates both the primacy of Sarah's protagonism and clichéd notions of solidarity as sisterhood. (129)

The Clone Club works as sympoiesis, as making-with, because it is only together that they are able to succeed both personally, as when Sarah needs Alison to take her place to see Kira, and collectively, as taking down Neolution's influence on their lives.

In 4.7 "The Antisocialism of Sex," Sarah is suffering after Neolution kills Kendall Malone (Alison Steadman), who was the original genome for the Leda clones, and she goes down a dark path believing that Beth was right and that the only way out of their mess might be suicide. Sarah keeps seeing Beth appear for her and even walks towards where Beth killed herself, stopping at a bridge above the train station and contemplating finishing herself off as well. Sarah's version of Beth tells her that, "There's more than biology between us, Sarah. There's something else. You can feel it too. … Bring us together, Sarah" ("The Antisocialism of Sex"). At first, it seems like Beth is enticing Sarah to jump off and bring the two together in the afterlife, however Beth continues, "We need you" ("The Antisocialism of Sex"). The plural stands for all the sisters in the Clone Club, including Beth, they all need Sarah and each other. Indeed, there is more than just the biology of them being clones that keeps them together; there is the care and the friendship they form with each other. Frankel writes that

> Sarah manages to learn from Beth's frustration. Seeking a clearer path, she confides in her sisters with everything she learned and soon trusts Paul as well. Through the five-year show she knows what she wants: a life with Kira and freedom for her sisters. In her mission, Beth, who paves the way, proves a guide (*Faces* 149).

Sarah, unlike Beth, knows that she can rely on her sisters to get them all through their misfortunes.

The following episode, 4.8 "The Redesign of Natural Objects," offers an example of how each of the clones manages to achieve their desired outcomes by working together. If the

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previous episode showed Sarah losing faith in her abilities and reverting back to old individualistic habits (self-destructing, and ignoring her responsibilities), this episode reinforces the strength in the clones' sisterhood. In this episode Alison is the one being tested, Donnie (Alison's husband, played by Kristian Bruun) is arrested by the corrupt Detective Doku who threatens to have Donnie killed in prison if Alison does not tell Neolution how to find Sarah. Alison is faced with a dilemma to protect either Donnie or Sarah. The episode is framed in a way that makes the viewer think that Alison decides to save Donnie and betray Sarah, which would play into the characterization of Alison in season one, who was overtly prioritizing her nuclear family and her suburban life. Felix reminds Alison that no matter what is happening with Donnie, "Your sisters are there for you. Sarah is there for you" ("The Redesign of Natural Objects"). Alison in season four has learned by now that her community extends beyond the nuclear family and into her chosen family of the Clone Club and their allies. Once more, by working together the clones usually succeed in their plans. In this case, it seems to the viewer that Alison is giving up Sarah by telling Detective Doku where Sarah is, but she is actually setting a trap for him. What happens in this episode highlights how proper care-giving can come full circle as each clone is responsible for the other. While Alison needs to protect her husband in prison, Sarah needs to know what Neolution wants with her. By setting up Detective Doku, both sisters manage to achieve their goals which also benefit the group. Alison, in the end, confided in Sarah to let her know she was being blackmailed by the Detective and they were able to devise a plan together to manage their conflicting needs, keeping Donnie safe in prison and Sarah out of Neolution's reach.

One key element of friendships is reciprocity, which we see in the example above. According to Bowden,

For these feminist discussions, the critical question for the ethical value of friendship is the reciprocity of the relationship. The very lack of formality that produces the ethical possibility for valuing persons as unique particulars rather than as bearers of impersonal rights also presupposes a finely tuned sense of fairness and reciprocity. (91)

Friendships are unstructured relationships that rely on reciprocity, fairness, and trust to function rather than on institutions or formalities (think of medical relations, work relations or even marital relations that are codified and institutionalized). Alison's and Sarah's needs have to be negotiated and balanced so that they can both reach an agreement of what should be done. In this case, they find a solution that works for both of them by trusting each other. Moreover, they are both in the roles of caregiver and care-receiver in turn demonstrating that a caring relationship is also a circular relationship. This stands in contrast with how Beth dealt with her relationships as a one-way street in which she provided care but refused to be cared for. Alison cares for Sarah by not betraying her to Neolution, while Sarah cares for Alison by devising a way to keep Donnie safe.

Once the plan is completed, each woman can assess if their needs were properly met, which is the step of "care-receiving." Alison is rehearsing her musical, *Jesus Superstar*, and visibly nervous waiting to hear back from Donnie. Felix, who is watching the rehearsal, keeps peeking at his phone, until he gets a text from Sarah confirming that Donnie is going to be alright. Felix signals to Alison who immediately smiles and becomes more engaged in her performance. For Alison, care has been adequately given since her goal was for her husband to be safe. For Sarah, her needs were also satisfactorily met: not only did she escape Neolution's clutches, but also by trapping Detective Doku she was able to get some answers over Neolution's next steps to prepare a counterattack. Sarah and Alison demonstrate that caring is a dialogical

process that involves active interaction with one another to negotiate how needs are going to be met, who is capable of providing care, and on giving feedback on the adequacy of said care.

By the end of season 5, the Clone Club is able to defeat Westmorland, expose Neolution to the world and find a cure to the disease that was killing Leda clones.[102] Their perseverance benefits them as a group, and also all the other 272 clones scattered around the globe. Priscilla Wald writes that:

> Throughout the course of *Orphan Black*, the sestras learn that their fate lies not in biology, nor in the courts, nor even in some abstract notion of freedom; that self-knowledge is messy, imperfect and ultimately fluid; that the meaning not just of their lives, but of all life is subject to ever-changing cosmologies. The sestras survive because they come to understand that their fate rests in the bonds they choose to forge, the strength of which inheres in their belief in them. (371)

What Beth failed to achieve, but that Sarah, Alison, Cosima, and Helena develop over the course of the show is the bonds of friendship that allows them to overcome challenges. As I have argued, their bonds of friendship get forged and reinforced through the acts of caring about each other.

5.3 Conclusion

Orphan Black, despite focusing on a fight for bodily autonomy, does not fall into the trap of supporting neoliberal individualism. At the same time, it does not fall into the trap of 70s feminism of supporting homogenous communities. Higgins explains that:

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[102] They do not, however, expose Project Leda to the world, maintaining their identities hidden from public scrutiny. For a critique of the season finale of *Orphan Black*, see Belton.

the 'Clone Club' (a resistance movement among the female clones that consists of Sarah

Manning, Alison Hendrix, Cosima Niehaus, Helena and their allies) resists efforts to turn

them into property by forming a complex network of empowering associations that enable

them to act collectively without subsuming their individual differences into an

overdetermined group identity. But the clones do not conclude the series as heroic self-

owning subjects, as one might expect; they are, on the contrary, richly interdependent,

relying on each other for medical, economic and affective support. They form, in other

words, a complex and richly divergent 'we', and they are able to do so (to a significant

degree) on their own terms. Rather than retreating into the classic liberal position that 'I

own myself', each of the clones embraces something closer to the recognition that 'I am

ours' – they achieve a sense of mutually affirming collectivity, while simultaneously

retaining a vital sense of unique individuality. (392-3)

Individual particularism and a sense of belonging to a group are shown as the ways forward. It is

important we recognize how our lives, no matter how unique, are also intertwined with those of

others, in autopoietic fashion. In the final episode, 5.10 "To Right the Wrongs of Many," Alison

exclaims that their fight was so that they could have their community, their *sestrahood*, on their

own terms: "This is what we fought for, right? To be sisters. It's a good thing." Sarah reminds

her that it is different for each of them, "Freedom looks different to everyone," claims Sarah ("To

Right the Wrongs of Many"). They both are correct, as they have the right to be and need

different things from their newly gained freedom. *Orphan Black* shows how the caring process is

an ever-evolving dialogue and negotiation between caregivers and care-receivers. Needs that are

constantly evolving and demanding attention, and, above all responsibility. By taking care of

each other, the clones forge the community that they desired and that cherished them on their

unique identities. They found their strengthen in this friendship and were finally capable of toppling the all-elusive Neolution that controlled their lives from afar. Their friendship allowed them to resist Neolution's control and ultimately plot and execute a plan that guaranteed their bodily autonomy back. *Orphan Black* effectively shows how autonomy to foster relationships, and care to nurture these relationships can be vehicles to resist the damaging status quo of patriarchy and even flourish in the trouble of present times.

Conclusion

When human exceptionalism and neoliberal individualism become unthinkable, having led us to a very troubled present in the form of the Anthropocene, marked by late-stage capitalism, and hetero-patriarchy, we have to turn to radical new concepts to think with. Thus, to forge friendships becomes indeed a radical act. Female friendships, especially, present a profound shift in the logic of the mushroom men, who are always in competition with one another, presenting instead a way to be with one another. As Haraway writes, to survive our times "becoming-with … is the name of the game" (12). Defying both a homogenizing sisterhood of the 70s, and a capitalist logic of competition, the female friendships discussed in this thesis showcase how women can foster communities that celebrate difference, and challenge the patriarchal status quo. We find ourselves in a troubled present having followed the "old saws of Western philosophy" for so long that now is the time to re-conceptualize how we live in the world. I hope to have presented in this thesis that one possibility is to leave behind boundary metaphors and to form communities of friends instead.

The sociohistorical context of the last couple of years is very different from the one in which Atwood wrote *The Handmaid's Tale*. Women protesting for reproductive justice using Handmaids costumes have made headlines around the world. International feminist movements, such as #MeToo and Time's Up, demonstrate the powerful impact that women sharing their stories together can have. In light of another (or the same one that still gains second and third lives) conservative backlash, women's rights seem to be constantly threatened not only in the United States, but around the world. The small victories, like Argentina legalizing abortion, give the international feminist movement a brief respite to continue pushing forward when there is still much to be fought for. And even this small gain seems to be quickly overshadowed by more

regressive legislation like the one banning abortions after the detection of a fetal heartbeat in Texas. These moments of victory and defeat showcase that the fight against oppression, particularly patriarchy, is a never-ending battle that demands people to form relationships capable of sustaining the will to resist the status quo. Friendships provide a model for how the feminist movement can forge such coalitions, as friends need to be attentive to each other's difference, negotiate responsibility, and learn to bridge their gaps through empathy.

In many ways, the texts I have analyzed provided a brief example of how friendships can function as safe spaces to resist the status quo of oppressive societies. By discussing relational autonomy as an alternative to notions of bounded individualism, I have showcased that we are all embedded in relationships, even if our classical theoretical models do not frequently acknowledge it. Relational autonomy recognizes that we all live within networks of relationships, and instead of those being a hinderance to our freedom, they actually allow us to flourish in our own autonomy. Care ethics provided a framework to understand how relationships can be built in less-than-ideal scenarios, accounting for power imbalances, and vulnerabilities. Care ethics is not only a useful theory to think about and through relationships, but also to re-think how we organize society as a whole. Care ethics, like Haraway's suggestion, is all about becoming-with and making-with. These two frameworks already point us away from the neoliberal logic, and towards communities.

One aspect of my corpus that I have not dealt with is the fact that almost all of the creators are Canadian. Atwood, Nault, De Landro, Graeme Manson and John Fawcett are all Canadians, the only exceptions are Kelly Sue DeConnick and Bruce Miller. This makes my corpus almost exclusive composed of Canadian SF. Despite this shared nationality, it is hard to pinpoint these works as examples of Canadian SF. While Atwood specifically positions Gilead in the US, both

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Bitch Planet and *Orphan Black* shy away from setting their fictional worlds in any specific country. DeFalco argues that Canadian identity, at least on the surface, is more pluralistic than American identity, as exemplified by "the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, introduced in 1982, [that] illustrates the endurance of Canadian communitarianism in its divergence from its American counterpart, the Bill of Rights" (19). For instance, on one hand, the Bill of Rights specifically protects private property rights. On the other hand, the Charter does not outline such protection, but contains more pluralistic approaches through the protection of minority languages, and through a legislative control over judicial power (Manfredi 302). However, this communitarian identity is being challenged by neoliberalism: "[l]ate twentieth-century developments in Canadian politics further challenge the myth of Canada as a caring nation, especially as Canada adopts neoliberal practices that privilege the independent, active, able-bodied, young, wage-earning individual at the expense of the disabled, vulnerable and dependent, aged subject" (DeFalco 20). Many in Canada, perhaps, fear the pervasiveness of neoliberalism without fully acknowledging its role in their own society. Setting these oppressive societies in the US or in unknown countries might function as a way to expose neoliberal logic without coming to terms with Canada's part in it. Atwood recalls the different ways the public reacted to her novel in Anglophone countries:

> The English, having done their civil war, were not in any mood to do it again and so they said, 'Jolly good yarn!' The Canadians, always an apprehensive bunch of people, said: 'Could it happen here?' And the Americans said, 'How long have we got?' It's much closer to a possibility for them – considering the way their politics goes and the extremes of the polarisation that you have right now, some sort of coup is not out of the question. (Tate n.p.)

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Possibly, Canadian creators are still unsure if Canada is an appropriate setting for the type of patriarchal dystopias discussed in this thesis. "Could it happen here?" seems to reverberate through the refusal to explicitly position Canada as an oppressive dystopia, even one set in an alternate future. One thing is for certain, though, neoliberal individualism is seen as threatening enough to inspire creators to imagine truly horrible societies.

A further reason to set Canadian texts in non-descriptive locations can simply be attributed to a marketing strategy. The United States has a considerably larger population than Canada, which also means a much larger audience to consume Canadian texts. By trying to appeal to this bigger market, tv shows like *Orphan Black* deliberately avoid stating that their location is in Canada, maintaining a façade of being a generic North American production. *Bitch Planet* avoids this problem altogether by setting itself in a future timeline where both Canada and the US seem to no longer exist. It would be interesting to see if DeConnick and De Landro ever publish more issues that deal with a flashback of how the Protectorate came to be, and if it will turn out to be an alternative future in the likes of Gilead that indeed spawned from the US.

I have also not fully addressed how the texts discussed in my thesis also prompt real world activism. Most notably is the Handmaid's costume that has appeared in many marches, and protests to signify the dangers of curtailing women's rights. As symbol of protest against patriarchal control, it has a been very compelling way to communicate what the real-world activists stand for: protection of reproductive rights, protection of bodily autonomy, protection of women's equality. The costume serves as an effective juxtaposition of all the rights women have lost in Atwood's Gilead as everything that these activists are trying to prevent. Many of these protests are staged as silent demonstrations with the protesters entering hearings and political deliberations wearing the costumes to demonstrate their disagreement with the political agenda.

Atwood herself, however, never encouraged readers of her novel to take this political stand. In contrast, *Bitch Planet* offers an example of how the creators can instigate political deliberation in its readership. Through the back matter in its single issues, DeConnick and De Landro built a pedagogical space through essays to educate the readership in important topics like hetero-patriarchy, race, intersectionality, and body image. They also established the back matter as a safe space for people to interact through a thoughtful and well-curated assortment of letters, fan art, and such. Unfortunately, the paper trade lost much of this material, but it was replaced by a discussion guide that prompts readers to carefully consider the topics and themes discussed within the collected issues. This type of initiative, although not revolutionary on its own, points towards ways to establish communities of readership through art, while teaching readers to think more critically, and engaging in politics more deeply.

This study is the beginning of what can be said about the political implications of female friendship in speculative fiction. There are many more works that could have been incorporated into my corpus without it being an exhaustive overview of female friendships. For example, the corpus could be expanded to include texts from the UK, Australia, New Zealand or South Africa to consider SF in the Anglophone world. Another significant addition would be to include Québécois texts to better understand how Québec is both similar and distinct from the rest of Canada and the United States in its representations of oppressive patriarchal societies and of female friendships as a means of resistance. This thesis is, thus, a step in understanding the pervasiveness of neoliberal individualism and the means to resist its logic through connections, networks, and friends. We need to make-with, become-with and learn cooperative play to forge these networks of resistance. In other words, we have to be attentive to others, take responsibility

for certain needs, and actively listen to the most vulnerable. Friendships are subversive

relationships that can allow us to survive and thrive in the troubled present.

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