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*Ce mémoire intitulé*

**The Manifestation of the Political in the Gendered Society of Gilead in Margaret Atwood's  
*The Testaments***

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### Abstract

Gender represents one of the most popular topics in discussions of Margaret Atwood's novels. *The Testaments*, Atwood's most recent novel, is no exception. Most of these studies, however, are devoid of a dedicated political study that analyzes the systems and governments and their role in creating the present condition. Hence, the purpose of this study is to take a different approach and focus on the Gilead regime as a political system and analyze it through the lens of dedicated political theory. By choosing the political instead of political, this research can move beyond the action and investigate the incentives and the main driving force behind the actions of Gilead's regime, which are not necessarily gender-oriented. The present research focuses on Carl Schmitt's concept of the political and analyzes friend-enemy relationships and the reasons behind its production as manifested in the novel. Since Schmitt's theory is not enough to cover the multi-dimensional and drastically different understandings about the political, reading *The Testaments* based on Hannah Arendt's definition of the term is necessary. Arendt's definition focuses on the political as a manipulative force and a shared contract between the individuals. She distinguishes the social and the political and explains the function of the political in the public and private space. While gender is not a top priority to read *The Testaments* in this research, it is also discussed based on its relations to the political. The results indicate that, for Gilead, sustaining power and security, as well as the manipulation of private space for securing sovereignty, matters more than gender. Furthermore, the novel, while discussing the gendered horrors of Gilead's religious regime, tries to attract our attention to the importance of studying governments rather than societies and discourses alone.

Keywords: the political, sovereignty, public space, private space, friend, enemy

## Résumé

Le genre représente l'un des sujets les plus populaires dans les discussions sur les romans de Margaret Atwood. *Les Testaments*, le roman le plus récent d'Atwood, n'est pas d'exception. La plupart de ces études, cependant, sont dépourvues d'une étude politique dédiée analysant les systèmes et les gouvernements et leur rôle dans la création de la condition actuelle. Par conséquent, le but de cette étude est d'adopter une approche différente et de se concentrer sur le régime de Gilead en tant que système politique et de l'analyser sous le prisme d'une théorie politique dédiée. En choisissant le politique plutôt que le politique, cette recherche peut aller au-delà de l'action et enquêter sur l'incitation et le principal moteur des actions du régime de Gilead, qui ne sont pas nécessairement sexospécifiques. La recherche actuelle se concentre sur le concept de politique de Carl Schmitt et analyse les relations ami-ennemi et les raisons de sa production telles qu'elles se manifestent dans le roman. Étant donné que la théorie de Schmitt ne suffit pas à couvrir les compréhensions multidimensionnelles et radicalement différentes du politique, la lecture des *Testaments* basée sur la définition du terme de Hannah Arendt est nécessaire. La définition d'Arendt se concentre sur le politique comme une force de manipulation et un contrat partagé entre les individus. Elle distingue le social et le politique et explique la fonction du politique dans l'espace public et privé. Bien que le genre ne soit pas une priorité absolue pour lire *Les Testaments* dans cette recherche, il est également discuté en fonction de ses relations avec le politique. Les résultats indiquent que, pour Gilead, le maintien du pouvoir et de la sécurité, ainsi que la manipulation de l'espace privé pour garantir la souveraineté, importent plus que le genre. De plus, le roman, tout en discutant des horreurs générées du régime religieux de Gilead, tente d'attirer notre attention sur l'importance d'étudier les gouvernements plutôt que les sociétés et les discours seuls.

Mots-clés : politique, souveraineté, espace public, espace privé, ami, ennemi

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## Introduction

There have been different forms of reading fiction discussing politics such as Marxist point of view. Readers with different political views—from the traditional Marxist perspectives to postmodernism and postcolonialism—shed light on one aspect of the described political conditions in the novel. In this regard, gender has added to the complexities and possibilities of speculating a political condition or re-reading these conditions and paving the way for the emergence of different approaches that combine gender with the grand narrative of Marxism or other approaches like postcolonialism. The differences between the ways of reading political literature can be integrated into other theories too, which sometimes causes the process of politicizing to be lost. Sometimes the problems of gender and race are considered to be the shaping force of politics, rendering the reader unaware of what politics consist of.

This perception of political fiction is one of the main incentives behind this research, which intends to discuss the political as the essence of politics. Political reading can go beyond economic systems like capitalism, which Marxists focus on. Moreover, while many are interested in paying attention to the more reformist points of view, totalities still exist, including state. Hence, this research argues that by privileging the political over politics, through Schmitt's theory it is possible to offer a political reading of Margaret Atwood's *The Testaments*. *The Testaments* happens in a religious and conservative country called Gilead, which the revolutionary militias established after a regime change in the United States. Just like in *The Handmaid's Tale* the inspirations from Iran's 1979 revolution are evident and were helpful to shape Gilead (Guillemette). Like most dictatorial regimes in the Middle East, the Gilead regime is a misogynist system with a brutal religious jurisdictional system that heavily controls women's reproductive rights. Women in this novel try to fight the regime and recognize it as a barrier to their freedom, individuality, and future.

Therefore, the primary focus of this research is Carl Schmitt's theory of the political. The significant point in Schmitt's theory is a clear distinction between the political antagonism of friend and enemy (Schmitt 22), which offers the theoretical foundations to centralize the political instead of politics.

An investigation of the clear distinction between friend and enemy helps to prepare for discussing the reason behind the tendency to read *The Testaments* based on the political rather than on the politics. One should ponder about Marxism's dominance in the current space of literary politics, creating a need for non-Marxist approaches in the political readings of literary works. The logic of privileging Marxist variants of critical theory in reading literary works has limits. The most crucial drawback in centralizing Marxist variants of literary theory is depoliticization, which could be explained as believing in the possibility of building a world based on ultimate peace and equality (Schmitt 52). Schmitt believes that focusing on equality, permanent peace, and order is an otiose idealism, and politics will be protected by maintaining the political, distinguishing friends from enemies (52).

Believing in the idea of democratic solutions in a society like Gilead, and focusing on empathy and reciprocity, is an idealized view of human sociability (Mouffe 2). Such optimism is because of the few pieces of research that anthropologically analyze the ambivalent character of human sociability. The result of resistance against Freudian psychoanalysis in political theory gives us strong lessons about the ineradicability of the antagonism (Mouffe 3). Therefore, because of the above-mentioned problems in the Marxist readings of literature, political readings of literary works are potentially subjected to depoliticization and might fail to fully embrace the political in their analysis. To support this statement, the concept of Realpolitik should be considered. In Realpolitik, the governments and political systems rely on hard and practical decisions which

sustain their power, and for that, they may undermine their cultural agenda, ideology, or any kind of morality and consideration of humanity (Hirsch et al.324). Being a former member of Germany's Nazi party, Carl Schmitt is among the political theorists who emphasize Realpolitik. The direct influence of focusing on Realpolitik in theorists like Machiavelli or Schmitt, as Fredric Jameson writes, is to shatter the utopian and idealistic principles in public opinion or the optimism about dictatorships in research (5). Schmitt shapes his idea of Realpolitik by defining the political based on friend-enemy relationships. In this vein, the political is the space that makes the practice of Realpolitik possible. For Schmitt, humanity does not exist without the political, and it is the political that defines what it means to be a human being in the modern world (Schmitt XVI). Despite its harshness, the political provides a profound understanding of how power is exercised and for what purposes. Therefore, by focusing on the political, the research can explain that the ruthlessness in Gilead regimes is not a deviation from their religious doctrine or ideology but a natural aspect of political thought that political systems practice to sustain their sovereignty.

Hence, the purpose of this study is to avoid a Marxist reading of literature, which blames the economic superstructure on the formation of social order. Alternatively, the focus will be on the political and political theory to offer a more profound political analysis of *The Testaments*. Speaking of political analysis, the choice of theories will serve the aforementioned purpose too. As Carl Schmitt and Hannah Arendt are both political theorists, their ideas will broaden the analysis of Margaret Atwood's *The Testaments*. Religious fundamentalism could be defined as the language grounded in a conservative religious outlook, characterized by absolutism, a divine hand in history, and a sense of American manifest destiny. It also takes on a precise political expression application (Nabres and G. Patman 169). The religious outlook in the Gilead regime creates what Chantal Mouffe names the constitutive outside, facilitating the distinction



between friend and enemy (2). On the other hand, the other forces, such as handmaids, are an aggregative force that could fuel the political because of their sharp contrast with the regime. Since gender and religion are among the forces which form the political, and can divide people into friend and enemy in the novel, this research intends to investigate the role of gender in the formation of the political in *The Testaments* as one of its purposes.

To be precise, this research intends to explore the role of the political in shaping Gilead and the handmaids' worldviews. The research question highlights the political in the context of Gilead and the role of gender in the way that the political functions.

The significance of the present study lies in the implication of the political to extend the political approaches *regarding* *The Testaments*, but it does not ignore the importance of narrating women's experiences in Gilead. By the rise of postmodernism, pluralism and the multiplicity of voice have been introduced as one of the necessities of contemporary human societies to make them diverse and more inclusive. The point is that focusing on the multiplicity of voice excessively might make us forget the antagonisms at the core of a political argument. It is necessary to understand that the nature of the political is founded on antagonism and depoliticizing it under the name of pluralism cannot deny its reducibility (Mouffe 1). While the multiplicity of voice is one of *The Testaments'* features, the research focuses on the existing irreducibility of the political in the novel and the fight against the misogyny of Gilead. What makes this research distinctive is that focusing on the political does not negate the multiplicity of women's lived experiences or their perception of patriarchy in the gendered society of Gilead. However, it does recognize Gilead as a state which has sovereign authority, and this sovereign authority affects women's lived experiences. This notion will add to the practicality of reading the novel politically and fill the gaps which neglecting the political and ignoring the function of Gilead as a sovereign state

generates in readings of *The Testaments*. Women in *The Testaments* do not just perceive patriarchy as a discourse. They also deal with it in the form of a sovereign state. Schmitt also argues against focusing only on a multiplicity of voices and pluralism because the role of states as sovereign and decisive institutions becomes undermined (12). Mouffe differentiation between politics and the political is also considered based on this irreducible antagonism (2). The enmity, and the negating of the enemy's existence, work as the constitutive outside for women in *The Testaments* (Mouffe 2). It is safe to say that concentrating on the enmity as a part of the political allows the research to see how this constitutive outside can shape such lived experiences.

Many types of research discuss *The Testaments*, but the central theme among many of them is the excessive attention to the women's experiences in Gilead. Some try to draw on politics partially. For instance, the article, *Rewriting Politics, or the Emerging Fourth Wave of Feminism in Margaret Atwood's The Testaments*, claims that *The Testaments* wants to return to women's movements' political rigor because submitting to post-feminism values (Gheorghiu and Praisler 91). The article says that the postfeminist movement in the 21st century fails to respond to the events of the late 2010s. As a result, *The Testaments* calls for a new wave of feminism that can react to the actual problems of women (Gheorghiu and Praisler 88). Hence, it could be concluded that *The Testaments* distances itself from postfeminist values and views politics more practically.

*First Things, Atwood's False Testaments* tries to present Trump's administration as an example of the persistence of patriarchy. However, Tausz claims that Trump's administration put the *Handmaid's Tale* in the dichotomy of women against men. Tausz goes on to say that Atwood tries to change this view in *The Testaments* because the novel presents a myriad of narratives showing many in-betweens surrounding the struggles among women when it comes to the sexual liberation and theocracy (1).

In her *Book Review—Margaret Atwood, The Testaments*, Halina Adams views *The Testaments* as an instrument that can enrich the cinematic adaptations of the *Handmaid's Tale* (37). While one of the main purposes of some of Atwood's novels, such as *The Handmaid's Tale*, have been to question gender inequality, the novel prioritizes the Hulu series in its plot and forgets the sensitive examination of how quickly women's rights can deteriorate (Adams 37). However, the novel depicts the lives of wives and aunts and shows the process of their conversion in the fundamentalism of Gilead, detailing the tactics the regime uses (Adams 37). One of the primary points that Adams shares about *The Testaments* is the question of truth, which, unlike *The Handmaid's Tale*, *The Testaments* does not seek. Instead, *The Testaments* tries to manipulate the narratives without offering a clear ending (Adams 37). Therefore, *The Testaments* does not offer a truthful and vigorous narrative for uncovering the gender oppression in Gilead.

Some articles, such as *Women Objectification in The Testaments by Margaret Atwood (2019)*, focus on the objectification of women. In this article, the researchers draw on Martha Nausbam's theory of objectification. According to the article, in *The Testaments*, women are objectified through an institutionalized system of oppression that prohibits them from choosing their lifestyle freely and heavily regulates their sexual activities, leaving them no choice but to obey the rules of the system (Quaran and Anwar 14).

Van Dam and S. Polak write, “Gilead is too totalitarian to really have either a truly public ‘public sphere’ or a private ‘private sphere,’” (182) in their *Owning Gilead: Franchising Feminism through Margaret Atwood’s The Handmaid’s Tale and The Testaments*. I am going to disagree by discussing Arendt’s notion of the political. The expansive control of private life in Gilead does not indicate the nonexistence of public-private distinctions. On the other hand, the regime has exertive control of private life and regulates it. The harsh forms of totalitarianism can exist without

meddling with private life, such as the eastern European communist regimes, which guaranteed the private niche in exchange for securing their reign (Zizek). Furthermore, by relying on Arendt's notion of the political and surplus power as the research goes on, I will detail how public and private life are handled. In totalitarian regimes like Gilead, the more the regimes exercise power in the public realm, the more surplus power is created, and they have to find a way to manage it because of the existentially dangerous political unrest it creates (S.Wolin 17). In the next step, since the surplus power hides in the private space, they manipulate the private life. Hence, the private life is not destroyed in totalitarianism, but the regime carefully handles it. The present study is distinctive because of detailing the implication of the political in managing public and private spaces. In fact, the dismissal of detailing the political and its relation to public and private life explains the relations between the political and the private life manipulations.

*The Owning Gilead: Franchising Feminism through Margaret Atwood's The Handmaid's Tale and The Testaments* relies on a feminist reading of *The Testaments* and dedicates a section entitled *Politics and The Testaments*. The article discusses Aunt Lydia's political role at length.

Aunt Lydia is one of the crueler executors of the Gilead regime's plans for fertile women in *The Handmaid's Tale*, and in the sequel, she turns out to be the main designer and dominant force in the strictly separated 'female sphere' of Gilead. Aunt Lydia and Commander Judd, in the process of designing Gilead's totalitarian regime, discuss the implementation of 'separate spheres' in Gilead, aiming to reinstate a gendered segregation that they accept as having existed in the fabled American past. As Commander Judd proposes to her: "We want you to help us to organize the separate sphere – the sphere for women. With, as its goal, the optimal amount of harmony, both civic and domestic, and the optimal number of offspring. Aunt Lydia immediately recognizes this as an opportunity to claim maximum power within the patriarchal system (over other women, of course). (Van Dam and S. Polak 182)

The above quote shows that the authors investigated Aunt Lydia as the agent of the regime to manipulate female bodies and female life. However, Arendt's the political and the Realpolitik of Schmitt are dismissed here, allowing me to investigate Aunt Lydia's

misogynist actions in a broader scope of maintaining the government's sovereignty and stability. In fact, focusing on the political paves the way to show that the political does not manipulate women for the sake of religion or even the white supremacist American conservatism, but it is a context, like any other context, which should serve the government's longevity. Consider this with the notion of surplus power and the necessity of manipulating the private sphere in totalitarianism. Gender has a strong presence in the private matter, especially when it is oppressed in the public space. The political targets gender, not essentially because of being a threat to Christianity and morality, but because of its potential to nourish the surplus power and become a danger to the regime's longevity and stability. The research clearly puts feminism in a political context, which is enlightening, but by avoiding the political consideration of Realpolitik, it views gender as a tool for moral and sexuality-oriented purposes, not systematic and long-term political goals securing a system of power.

While all the research above drew on a specific aspect of *The Testaments*, none of them draw on the nature of the political as the core of politics. This thesis distinguishes itself by focusing on the political through the lenses of Carl Schmitt and Hannah Arendt and reads *The Testament* from an entirely different political view of some theories, including post-feminism or Marxism. Such differentiation is made by considering totalities and governmental systems which is based on friend-enemy perception of the political or manipulating the public space.

In his *Social Theory of International Politics*, Alexander Wendt writes that literature cannot solve global problems, such as ending wars or third-world poverty, but it sheds light on how these problems could be understood (90). The present research investigates how the political functions in a novel discuss the severe gender discrimination in Gilead. Focusing on the political

offers a more comprehensive view in comparison to Marxism since the political considers different forces, such as religion and gender, and links them to the power of the state (Schmitt 23).

The political can aggregate different social forces and direct them to be part of the antagonism between friend and enemy. It is located at the core of what we call politics. The main difference between the political and politics is that the political is a combination of antagonisms leading to institutional manipulations, regulations, and dealings, which are called politics (Schmitt 30). It is the political, which is the root of all the competitions, tactics, and practices. The institutions perform are directed by the concept of the enemy and antagonistic forces which are not necessarily immoral or evil, but they are a possible potential for conflict. These friend and enemy relations as potential sites of conflict justify neglecting the enemies' existential rights.

The enemy need not be morally evil or aesthetically ugly. He does not need to appear as an economic competitor. It may even be advantageous to engage with him in business transactions. But he is, nevertheless, the other, the stranger. It is sufficient for his nature that he is, in an especially intense way, existentially something different. As a result, in extreme case, conflicts with him are possible (Schmitt 27).

One might question the role of dialectics in discussions about the political. As inspired by Hegelian philosophy, Marxism centralizes dialectics, which means not only should the thesis and antithesis be considered, but also the synthesis. The political is not dialectical despite the presence of thesis and antithesis in its framework. One reason is that the political does not discuss solutions and outcomes. The other reason is encompassed by Schmitt's critique of the philosophy. Schmitt disagrees with the Hegelian and Marxist thought on governing and politics because of their exclusively scientific view and neglect of the social forces, which ignores the ways in which the friend and enemy are created within society (Schmitt 23). Refusing social forces and considering

the state as an independent entity, as it is in the Hegelian and Marxist political philosophy, is a sign of depoliticization, causing errors in liberal democracy (Schmitt 24).

However, while Schmitt's theory of the political is one of the main theories in this research, theorists, such as Chantal Mouffe, embrace Schmitt's understanding of the political. This political theorist subscribes to the notion that ideas, such as good governance, civil society, and establishing a world beyond left and right, are all anti-political, leading societies based on flawed premises (Mouffe 2). Mouffe tries to privilege evil instead of goodness in her understanding of the political and therefore her ideas could be helpful in analyzing Gilead's regime as it tries to keep order in the country while being unable to overcome the challenges posed to them in the context of friend-enemy relationships.

Despite her radically different understanding of the political, Arendt believes the rise of the political politicizes the public life as well as the personal maintenance of life (Arendt 28). Arendt's beliefs regarding the disappearance of the borders between public and private life fit this dissertation's argument as Gilead's regime tries to penetrate its ideology into the most private aspects of people's lives. Subjection to the political, according to Arendt, does not bring justice, but creates equality with one's peers and not with the state, which places the state as a potential enemy of people and functions as what Mouffe calls "the constitutive outside" (2). On the other hand, Gilead's authoritarian regime also sees the handmaids as outside and facilitates the formation of friend-enemy relationships. Overall, Arendt's ideas can supplement Schmitt's ideas by allowing them to discuss different ways that the political functions in a totalitarian society like Gilead.

The first chapter of this dissertation will focus on Carl Schmitt's ideas on the political and how friend and enemy relationships function in Gilead. The second chapter investigates the issue of gender within Gilead's regime through the lens of Hannah Arendt's theories of the political.

Both chapters include a close reading of the text beside a character analysis. The second chapter intends to investigate how the political affects the most private aspects of people who are struggling with the tyranny of theocratic regimes like Gilead. In the end, a conclusion will summarize the points and discusses the findings.



## Chapter 1: The Political and The Testaments

One of the critical points of Schmitt's theory is that it includes different aspects of society in his theory of the political. Unlike the dialectical view of society, Schmitt does not see the state as a separate domain. Instead, Schmitt argues that the state is involved in constant interactions with society and its different sections to sustain the concept of friend and enemy (Schmitt 23). The friend-enemy grouping is one of the pillars of religious dictatorship in Gilead. This chapter intends to analyze the political in Gilead's regime instead of focusing merely on gender oppression. Such analysis is mainly done through the lens of the political theorist Carl Schmitt whose theory of the political is formed to explain the function of governments and their sovereignty. One of the domains in which regimes practice the political is the realm of morality. Since religion, or morality, act as one of the pillars in fundamentalist narratives in Gilead, this chapter aims to begin with the function of morality in the formation of the political, which relies on the friend-enemy relationships. This chapter then goes on to discuss other aspects of the political.

From the early pages of the novel, the regime's authority is combined with morality and religion to unify the lifestyle and thoughts of its people. Schmitt believes that the political is the quality of referring to an internal system of belief or an existential intervention (xiv). The idea manifests itself within the teachings of the Aunts, who indoctrinate the necessity of faithfulness to the sovereign, which is called God (Atwood 24). Indeed, there is no God in its religious or spiritual form, but God works as a reference to the system, and to plot against the system is sinful. Aunt Vidala's teachings show that political activism brings rebellion, and rebellion makes men traitors and women adulterous (Atwood 24). Hence, by centralizing a sovereign and a God, the Gilead regime establishes the borders of being a friend and an enemy and explains the sides of this dichotomy to the children's school through its agents, including Aunt Vidala.

Using religion as a criterion for defining friend and enemy is not limited to the educational system, or Aunt Vidala's words as the teacher. It goes further within the family. In a Gileadian family, the indoctrination continues with an emphasis on faithfulness, arguing against the treason of men and adultery of women. It manifests itself in any context and not necessarily only through political debates among the commanders. For instance, a commander's wife is admired because of her commitment to Gilead's God, or its moral references, leading to her recognition as a friend within the system and not a disobedient, adulterous woman deserving of execution. This is why a commander's wife is appreciated. She is "a model wife" who "has endured her suffering without complaint" (Atwood 27).

Nevertheless, morality in Gilead can be asexual. Some simple actions, such as chores, are viewed through the lens of care and obedience to the fundamentalist regime. For instance, Gilead is in a war, and as a result of the military combat, there is a permanent electricity shortage. Marthas, who are responsible for housekeeping, must control the electricity consumption in the house and avoid using the dishwasher (Atwood 27). Schmitt explains that both sides of political adversaries refute the political truth and present them under the name of some autonomous disciplines to justify the malfunctioning political systems. Therefore, using a dishwasher or eating a special kind of food can become immoral, unscientific, and uneconomical (Schmitt xvi). It should be noted that removing sexuality from disobedience, and becoming an enemy to the system, does not eliminate the religious interpretations, as the system can define the enemy based on the crises it creates under the badge of disobedience and treason. On the other side, the resistance and protests against such assumptions happen within the same religious code. For instance, when Marthas complain about the unending enmities and wars, they refer to religion and describe it as Ezekiel's Wheel since it is unreasonable and without any significant interests. It could be inferred that Marthas have already

been disobedient to the war and are already aware that the commanders are hiding the political truth of the malfunctioning system. In fact, in *The Testaments*, both sides understand and interpret the presence of the enemy through religion and moral values. For Schmitt, the political and keeping the enemy is devilry, but devilry is worthy of combating for (Schmitt xvi) since it allows the regimes to remain. Moreover, the political is parallel to ethics, economics, science, and religion, not ordinary human beings, but it is an inquiry to the human world and order of human things (Schmitt xvi). It is safe to say that maintaining friend-enemy relationships and keeping society in crisis, even though the subjects are suspicious about reality, help fundamentalist theocracies such as Gilead last longer.

Gilead is founded based on fighting against secularism. In All the friend-enemy relationships, the enemy—people who are secular— are concrete and maintain the political (Schmitt 27). Therefore, in a chapter called Hymns, the Aunts, who are the propaganda agents of Gilead for domestic purposes, remind this enmity by mentioning the secularity of Canada, and in the form of religious gatherings for saying prayers.

And bless Baby Nicole, stolen away by her treacherous Handmaid mother and hidden by the Godless in Canada; and bless all the innocents she represents, doomed to be raised by the depraved. Our thoughts and prayers are with them. May our Baby Nicole be restored to us, we pray; may Grace return her. Per Ardua Cum Estrus. Amen (Atwood 33).

Schmitt believes that the ultimate consequence of the political is war and physical killing, although the states try to avoid that and the political by no means encourages war thoughtlessly (33). This statement allows the political to function differently in liberal democracies like Canada, wherein the enemy is disappeared. Here, they are looking to establish a pluralistic society. Liberal democracy's solution to the disappearance of the enemy is not to live without the enemy, but to

create adversaries whose existence is legitimate and can be tolerated (Mouffe 4). The antagonism is inherent to liberal societies as well, but until the democratic values are respected, it can be replaced with what Mouffe calls agonistic pluralism (4). Consequently, the manifestation of the political is vastly different in the portrayal of Canada in *The Testaments*. Unlike Gilead, the state has a faded presence in the novel, and the social groups and public reactions matter the most. Gilead also uses this opportunity and follows its political goals by sending different lobbyists and groups that advocate for Gilead's purposes both publicly and secretly. An example is a group called pearl girls, who wear silver dresses with white hats and claim to do God's work for Gilead (Atwood 44). Gilead is aware that governments are under pressure to support individual rights and strengthen their presence by establishing rational consensus (Mouffe 119), leaving space for practicing religious campaigns. Therefore, through the narrative of religion, the Pearl Girls follow Gilead's political plans to attract support from Canadians.

They always appeared in twos. They had white pearl necklaces and smiled a lot, but not real smiling. They would offer Melanie their printed brochures with pictures of tidy streets, happy children, and sunrises, and titles that were supposed to lure you to Gilead: "Fallen? God can still forgive you!" "Homeless? There is a Home for You in Gilead" (Atwood 45).

In addition to the Pearl Girl's ideological purposes, the displacement of enmity in the liberal democratic interpretation of the political helps Gilead to keep the Baby Nicole crisis at the center of public spaces in Canada. Pearl Girl street campaigns pass out Baby Nicole brochures that say "Give Back Baby Nicole!" and "Baby Nicole Belongs in Gilead!" (Atwood 45). The public space in Canada also uses democratic law to put pressure on its adversary. Therefore, there are reports in the novel that schools set anti-Gilead protests.

She was an icon for us too: every time there was an anti-Gilead protest in Canada, there would be the picture, and slogans like BABY NICOLE! SYMBOL OF FREEDOM! Or BABY NICOLE! LEADING THE WAY! As if a baby could lead the way on anything, I would think to myself (Atwood 45).

It could be realized that there are two groups in Canadian society, as depicted in the novel. First, Gilead's agents like the Pearl Girls, who are required to spread the regime's propaganda, and second, the Canadian people who resist them by public protests or being rude to them (Atwood 45). Such an atmosphere shows the unifying quality of the political. Schmitt believes that "the phenomenon of the political can be understood only in the context of the ever-present possibility of the friend-and enemy grouping, regardless of the aspects which this possibility implies for morality, aesthetics, and economics" (Moyn 295). It is clear that the politics in Canada work more implicitly compared to Gilead, as the friend-enemy grouping is done under the individual rights and freedoms of speech, keeping the role of government hidden and reducing the hostility of possible confrontations between the two countries. On the other hand, the friend-enemy grouping in Gilead is done through state direct involvement, which is one of the differentiating features in dictatorial regimes.

In the previous paragraphs, I pointed to the reducing the possible hostility of friend-enemy grouping and another layer of the political, which is having an adversary instead of an enemy to suit the liberal democratic tradition. The reason is that, while the ultimate consequence of the political is war and "war is the existential negation of the enemy" (Schmitt 33), countries are strongly prohibited from entering a war because there is no rationality, legality, or social norm that justifies killing another human being (Schmitt xvii). The prohibition of war and reducing the hostility of the political while maintaining friend-enemy relationships, become evident in *The Testaments*. During the protests, the slogan is "ALL THE GILEAD BABIES ARE BABY

NICOLE” (Atwood 51), signifying the existence of a social element to unify people against the adversary or the enemy.

Furthermore, the protestors shout more decisive slogans, which make the border between friend and enemy clearer. Slogans such as “DOWN WITH GILEAD FACISTS” (Atwood 51) negate the existential rights of the enemy without escalating the tensions leading to the support of the war. Sanctions and political pressure campaigns are also evident in the protests, which the novel narrates. The demands to sanction Gilead and to halt the trade with them (Atwood 48), paves the way for the strategic and decisive decisions for the states since they realize the potentials and public acceptance of such decisions (Meierhenrich 176).

The enemy in Schmitt’s theory is not necessarily foreign. The enemy can also be within the state. The corruption of authorities in Gilead, such as Aunts and Commanders, is part of the sovereign theory by Schmitt in which people lose their subjectivity in pursuit of power and enter a suspended zone in which the continuity of their naked life only depends on the system’s life (Balke 642). The aunts have lost their subjectivity because they are engaged in a set of laws that outdraw themselves (Butler 85). Therefore, they begin to keep the secrets of the commanders’ corruption and buy safety for themselves. The commanders keep the regime safe and as long as the regime is safe, they can hide their corrupt activities and work with aunts.

But there are three other reasons for my political longevity. First, the regime needs me. I control the women’s side of their enterprise with an iron fist in a leather glove in a woolen mitten, and I keep things orderly: like a harem eunuch, I am uniquely placed to do so. Second, I know too much about the leaders— too much dirt—and they are uncertain as to what I may have done with it in the way of documentation. If they string me up, will that dirt somehow be leaked? They might well suspect I’ve taken backup precautions, and they would be right.

Third, I'm discreet. Each one of the top men has always felt that his secrets are safe with me; but—as I've made obliquely clear—only so long as I myself am safe. I have long been a believer in checks and balances (Atwood 62).

*The Testaments'* approach towards fighting against Gilead is from a partisan point of view. The MayDay girls, who are the handmaid's fighting against Gilead, represent a type of partisan. The nature of the partisan is complex, as it refuses to be fully armed or openly carry weapons (Balke 647). MayDay's partisan nature poses some difficulties to Gilead and Aunt Lydia in terms of defeating them due to their irregularity of combat. The Commanders and Aunt Lydia plan to conduct a military operation and eliminate them. Thus, they need to declare an outlaw against them (Schmitt 46). In this outlaw, the MayDay group is called a terrorist group and, naturally, all those who help them are treacherous and deserve to be annihilated (Atwood 65). The problem posed to Gilead is not from the domestic space, as they face no reaction or opposition to stop what they call "purging waves" (Atwood 65); however, it is the response they receive from the international society.

Right then, however, Commander Judd was all smiles. "Indeed, they are Pearls of Great Price. And with those two Mayday operatives out of commission, there will be less trouble for you, it is to be hoped—fewer Handmaids escaping."

"Praise be." "Our feat of surgical demolition and cleansing won't be announced by us publicly, of course."

"We'll be blamed for it anyway," I said. "By the Canadian and international media. Naturally."

"And we will deny it," he said. "Naturally" (Atwood 65).

Why is international society sensitive to Gilead's behavior with Handmaids? Interestingly, it is not about human rights per se, but the new world order that Canada is a part of. When Aunt Lydia is concerned about the international media, it serves as a reminder of an instrumentalized morality and "crippling the so-called bestial, criminal, and rogue states" (McCormick 274). Gilead, nevertheless, has no choice but to deny the oppression of handmaids because it is not a part of the

commercially successful nations. Therefore, Gilead cannot be open about its moral values because they are located outside of the world order.

The creation of an internal enemy is necessary for establishing a regime. There is evidence that demonstrates practicing the political by the Gilead's militia at the time of the coup in the United States through misogyny. In the political discussion, Schmitt explains that in a state emergency, the ontological status of an individual is suspended (Balke 642). The newly born regime of Gilead suspends the individual's subjectivity by setting specific misogynist rules rooted in Christianity.

We need to get out of the country. There's something happening." "Well, of course—the state of emergency—"

"No, more than that. My bank card's been cancelled. My credit cards—both of them. I was trying to get a plane ticket, that's how I know. Is your car here?"

"What?" I said. "Why? They can't simply cut off your money!"

"It seems they can," said Katie. "If you're a woman. That's what the airline said. The provisional government has just passed new laws: women's money now belongs to the male next of kin" (Atwood 67).

The abovementioned rules create a sense of wonder due to the sudden change in the rules. Part of this state of wonder is caused by abrupt changes to the constitution and the new rules under the name of the state of exception, which "take the place of intersubjectively comprehensible and judicially verifiable grounds that could warrant the declaration that one lacks any rights" (Butler 75). Rules such as depriving women of a bank account, or any kind of property could arise under the state of exception.

By describing the actions of Gilead military forces, *The Testaments* states that deciding about the political is not just ideological and must be taken to a military or institutional level. Therefore, we see that Gilead forces suspend the constitution and have a robust military presence in the cities, offices, or airports. Gilead's coup d'état targets the state because the very purpose



of creating an emergency state, and eliminating the constitution, is to eliminate the state and set the new forces as the sovereign, who, according to Schmitt, are the only ones with the power to make a state of exception (Balke 642).

“My arrest came shortly after the Sons of Jacob attack that liquidated Congress. Initially, we were told it was Islamic terrorists: a National Emergency was declared, but we were told that we should carry on as usual, that the Constitution would shortly be reinstated, and that the state of emergency would soon be over. That was correct, but not in the way we’d assumed. It was a viciously hot day. The courts had been closed—temporarily until a valid line of command and the rule of law could be reinstated, we were told. Despite that, some of us had gone into work—the freed-up time could always be used to tackle the document backlog, or that was my excuse. Really I wanted company” (Atwood 66).

Hence, it is safe to say that the novel clearly shows how the political could be prepared with the help of military power, eliminating the constitution or reinstating a new one, to pave the way for deciding the friend-enemy relationship. The women are broadly targeted as the enemy through the process of othering. The process of creating an internal enemy is not necessarily the negation of his or her existential rights, although the sovereign keeps the rights to do so. On the other hand, the Gilead regime starts an operation of social inclusion of the Other, which Schmitt calls *Buribunks* (Balke 642). The social inclusion of the other is based on detaching the individual from any of his or her unique characteristics (Schmitt, *The Crisis of Parliamentary Democracy* 268). The process of internalizing the enemy, and the social inclusion of the Other, may target different aspects of the enemy. However, in *The Testaments*, Gilead targets gender as the main instrument to create the enemy and internalize it. For instance, all women are considered a potential threat and might be disobedient based on a generalized conception by dissecting them from their individuality as one of the political requirements. Such an idea is shown in the novel when a Gilead soldier says, “‘Good. A fearful one, maybe she’ll do as she’s told.’ ‘Fat chance

any of them will,' said the third man. 'They're women.' I think he was making a joke." (Atwood 69).

*The Testaments*' story is about the formation of Gilead and the coup starts investigating the biopolitical discussions in Schmitt's theory of the political. While Schmitt is considered a right-wing and conservative political theorist, there are some similarities with Foucault's theory of biopolitics. Both Schmitt and Foucault agree that when the foundation of friend-enemy grouping is done, the power becomes more interested in the individual cases (Balke 644). Foucault also endorses Schmitt's idea and knows the disciplinary power as the result of the expansion of the political to police observation of "everything that happens (Foucault 191). The change to the power structure is necessary because exercising the political through friend-enemy grouping alone cannot help establish state sovereignty. There are examples in the novel that clearly show the transformation of power through biopolitics. The bold take in this part is that for Gilead, women are the enemy. Therefore, they are the most suitable target for practicing biopolitical programs.

"Who's the pregnant one?" he said. The three of us looked at one another. Katie stepped forward. "I am," she said. "No husband, right?" "No, I ..." Katie was holding her hands protectively in front of her stomach. She'd chosen single motherhood, as many women did in those days. "The high school," the leader said. The two younger men stepped forward. "Come with us, ma'am," said the first. "Why?" said Katie. "You can't just barge in here and—" "Come with us," said the second younger man. They grabbed her by her arms, hauled. She screamed, but out she went through the door nonetheless. "Stop that!" I said. We could hear her voice outside in the hall, diminishing.

As evidenced in the quote above, the use of force in targeting the enemy happens at the early stages of establishing the state. *The Testaments* depiction of the early days of Gilead shows that establishing the political, and preparing for exercising it in the long term, creates a vague space in which "it is no longer possible to distinguish between constitution, law, and measure, which

have simply been transformed into so many methods for the permanent transformation of values” (Schmitt, qtd in Agamben 463).

For Schmitt, the political means giving order to space by securing one from the other (Rogers 194). While he talks about the other through lenses such as enmity, adversary, and internal enemy, his ideas about the political are related to the jurisdictional aspect of the society. In *The Testaments*, the novel narrates the immediate changes which target the jurisdictional part of the society. The jurisdictional system is one of the first places that Gilead changes. The first action for the Gilead forces is to delegitimize the jurisdictional principles of the previous regime. Hence, due to the fundamentalist and misogynistic nature of the new order, they target female judges, discrediting them by using derogatory language, and send them to a prison, which is in a former stadium.

Where’s the other two so-called lady judges?” said the leader. “This Loretta? This Davida?” “They’re on lunch,” said Anita. “We’ll take these two. Wait here with her until they come back,” said the leader, indicating Tessa. “Then lock her in the box-store van. Then bring the two lunch ones.” “Box store or stadium? For these two here?” “Stadium,” said the leader. “One of them’s overage, they’ve both got law degrees, they’re lady judges. You heard the orders.” “It’s a waste though, in some cases,” said the second one, nodding towards Anita. “Providence will decide,” said the leader (Atwood 69).

*The Testaments* shows the function of the political at a micro level, which Schmitt discussed through the lens of internal enemy and adversaries. Foucault also expanded his interpretation of the political in a similar way, based on the adversarial nature of every human subject towards governments, both in totalitarian and democratic regimes (Rogers 191). Hence, the democratic values, which female judges and lawyers in the novel believe, are a threat and part of the internal war between the previous order that women advocate for and the new order, which tries to legitimize itself by removing the threat of the enemy from its institutions, particularly the jurisdictional system.

To pass the time I berated myself. Stupid, stupid, stupid: I'd believed all that claptrap about life, liberty, democracy, and the rights of the individual I'd soaked up at law school. These were eternal verities and we would always defend them. I'd depended on that, as if on a magic charm. You pride yourself on being a realist, I told myself, so face the facts. There's been a coup, here in the United States, just as in times past in so many other countries. Any forced change of leadership is always followed by a move to crush the opposition. The opposition is led by the educated, so the educated are the first to be eliminated. You're a judge, so you are the educated, like it or not. They won't want you around (Atwood 116).

Elaborating more on the quote above shows that the regimes do not just exercise the political to keep themselves safe against international tensions or wars, as Schmitt believes. Foucault shows that states exercise the political as a punishment and mechanism to regulate everyday life based on the internal war they have. Therefore, imprisoning the female judges (Atwood 70) is a strategy to ensure the ordered circulation of everyday life (Rogers 192).

This extreme form of regulating life does not eliminate the need for the political and friend-enemy grouping. On the contrary, it constantly reproduces it and allows the regimes to constantly redefine enmity, its rules, and functions, while reinforcing the presence of the sovereign (Balke 645). The religious schools, which are known as the Vidala Schools because Aunt Vidala controls them, are a prominent example of the reproduction of the enemy through narrating different stories. The stories work as a deterrence narrative due to their high level of physical violence, such as cutting a Concubine into twelve pieces (Atwood 78). The story of Concubine is threatening, but, at the same time, it is regulative, as Aunt Vidala describes cutting the woman into twelve pieces as a just punishment (Atwood 78). The critical point about the story of the Concubine is the story's collective characteristics. The individuality is ignored, and the notion of security is only attributed to a collectivity of believers. The story reiterates the necessity of securing a collective from the enemies—encompassed by whoever is disobedient to the religious principles of Gilead. Therefore, when she justifies murdering

the women, she says, “Think of all the sufferings she made to other people” (Atwood 78). Gilead’s agents, such as the Aunts, warn the girls that disobedience to the law of God brings harm to many people. They establish the idea that fighting the enemy is done on behalf of all people, and the war with the enemy is not to defend a name, but to defend the existence of public values (Foucault, *The Will to Knowledge: The History of Sexuality* 137).

The very point of the story is that Aunt Vidala is to exercise the disciplinary power and recognize Gilead’s sovereignty through the narrative of religion, emphasizing that disobedience leads to enmity and the physical annihilation of the enemy. Hence, it is safe to conclude that when exercising the political in totalitarian regimes, the disciplinary power sits next to the sovereign power and does not necessarily replace the sovereign’s right over people’s life and death (Balke 646).

One of the main tasks the Vidala Schools do to sustain the political is to keep the memories alive by repeating them. Just like the Iranian regime, or other similar forms of governance, the politics in Gilead are exercised through the schools, and students must repeat the system’s political ideology every day. Aunt Vidala requires girls to pray for Baby Nicole every day and try to make a product out of the potential enemies, in this case, women. However, no one has the right to question the task and the foundations of this schools (Atwood 77) In these schools, refraining from keeping Baby Nicole's memory alive is considered to be abusing a common intellectuality desired by the regime. Therefore, they must be punished or eliminated (Schmitt qtd in Balke 646).

Biopower in *The Testaments* creates suspicion about the regime’s discourse to keep the potentiality for creating enemies. Therefore, no child in the Vidala Schools trusts Gilead wholeheartedly, but they do not dare to question the affairs. The teachings directly link the

body to the Gilead's religious politics, and the Aunts do not explain the reasons behind their education, keeping the suspicions alive but under control.

We'd been prepared for such things at school—Aunt Vidala had presented a series of embarrassing illustrated lectures that were supposed to inform us about a woman's role and duty in regard to her body—a married woman's role—but they had not been very informative or reassuring. When Aunt Vidala asked if there were any questions, there weren't any, because where would you begin? I wanted to ask why it had to be like this, but I already knew the answer: because it was God's plan. That was how the Aunts got out of everything (Atwood 78).

Gilead's treatment of its border hints at the perception of the political among the regimes with less developed urban life and infrastructure. The political dynamic's dynamism is bound to social development and can change from state-territory-security to state-territory-population (Rogers 192). To ensure the security, the totalitarian regimes militarize the urban lifestyle more than the liberal regimes. Thus, the military operation has more influence on the governing process (Rogers 193). The security projects in totalitarian regimes like Gilead involve law (Schmitt, qtd in Levinson 205), and that is why the Aunts in Gilead suggest new projects to control the Handmaids, such as imposing law and military forces on Gilead's territory and borders. This project, which is called Operation Dead End, controls the borders and uses military forces to ensure the process. Moreover, torture is always considered in these operations, although they might be temporarily suspended without public notice.

Quite recently, Aunt Elizabeth, Aunt Helena, and Aunt Vidala came up with a detailed plan for better control. Operation Dead End, it was called. A Plan to Eliminate the Female Emigrant Problem in the Northeastern Seaboard Territories. It outlined the steps necessary for the trapping of fugitive Handmaids en route to Canada, and called for the declaration of a National Emergency, plus a doubling of tracker dogs and a more efficient system of interrogation. I detected Aunt Vidala's hand in this last: it is her secret sorrow that fingernail ripping and evisceration are not on our list of chastisements (Atwood 113).

As explained above, the military operations in Gilead are to secure the sovereignty of the regime and its territory. However, the presence of Christian theology is evident in almost all

actions of the system. Even though the institutionalism in Gilead seems to be modern with modern equipment, the philosophy behind the regime is based on fundamentalist Christianity. Schmitt notes that all modern concepts of regimes are the secularized theological concepts (Schmitt, *Political Theology: Four Chapters on the Concept of Sovereignty* 36). Gilead's council, which is called Ardua Hall, is a great manifestation of such an approach.

Gilead perfectly follows Schmitt's formula when he criticizes liberal democracies. The inability to decide is one of the most significant flaws in liberal democracies (Schmitt 71). By practicing tyrannical and religious totalitarianism, Gilead can make swift decisions based on its political theology. Therefore, strategic decisions are made during meetings in Ardua Hall by Aunts and Commanders, and they immediately put them into action. For Gilead authorities, the main principle of strategic decision-making is to ensure that everyone is serving God and serving his divinity (Atwood 113).

Gray believes that governments' persistence in obeying God's commands and building a religious governments are rooted in Martin Luther's days (185). While Luther prohibited the governments from interfering in the realm of God, he advocated for the notion of The State, which holds the sword of God and gives it a divine right to wield the sword (Luther, qtd in Gray 189). Gilead's political theology is a strong defender of Luther's political theology. *The Testaments* does not hint towards Catholicism or Protestantism in Gilead, but the overall notion about the relations between the government and its people, or land, is similar to what Luther supports. When Aunt Vidala tells the story of Concubine in her classes, she mostly considers its early aspects by saying God always fits the crime with the punishment (Atwood 79). Furthermore, Gilead is more worried about wielding the sword within the human realm, rather than the afterlife, which means the regime concentrates on setting strategies to guarantee its religious and political authority within a specific

territory. For instance, Ardua Hall is worried about the emigration rate from Gilead, reasoning that such an escape rate, especially by the handmaids, can make Gilead notorious for its inability to keep its citizens, or the substantial deviation of people from the religious life the system tries to establish as a theocratic, totalitarian regime. Naturally, accusing the enemies of heresy is one of the most common actions taken among the religious regimes, including Gilead.

Gilead has a long-standing problem, my reader: for God's kingdom on earth, it's had an embarrassingly high emigration rate. The seepage of our Handmaids, for instance: too many have been slipping away. As Commander Judd's analysis of escapes has revealed, no sooner is an exit route discovered by us and blocked than another opens up. Our buffer zones are too permeable. The wilder patches of Maine and Vermont are a liminal space not fully controlled by us, where the natives are, if not overtly hostile, prone to heresies (Atwood 112).

Schmitt explains that the political, in this theological way, changes both the nature of politics and religion, as political theology ceases to be pure politics or religion and becomes a combination of the two (Gray 189). The transformation of religion, theology, and institutionalism produce a unique form of Christianity in Gilead. Naturally, as Schmitt states, the Church and the state must accept their mutual legitimacy and show some levels of civility (Gray 190). However, Gilead follows an entirely different pattern. Instead of a church outside of the existence of the state, Gilead combines the two institutions, playing the role of government and religious institutions at the same time. Through the absence of the religious tension between the government and the Church in Gilead, the regime can introduce itself as a god-like sovereign and expedite the great abuse of power. Even though Gilead is a religious regime, the elimination of the Church and the replacement of the balance between the Church and the state with an absolutism is what Carl Schmitt calls "re-paganized theology" (Gary 195) Re-paganizing political theology helps Gilead to practice Schmitt's political, which means the regime is able to secure its existence and sovereignty through eliminating the enemy. By removing the Church from institutionalism, there



is no one to remove the kings or governors because of heresy, which happened in the Middle Ages. In *The Testaments*, the absolute control of accusing someone of heresy is in the hands of Ardua Hall, a committee of Aunts and Commanders. They feel free to remove their enemies or any political threat. Aunt Vidala suspects Aunt Elizabeth of helping the handmaids to escape and plots against her by saying “‘I believe she’s preparing to denounce you. To divert attention from herself and her disloyal activities. She may be the traitor within us, here at Ardua Hall—working with the Mayday terrorists. I have long suspected her of heresy,’ said Aunt Vidala” (Atwood 181). Schmitt discusses the necessity of making decisions about the enemy to save political existence.

Each participant is in a position to judge whether the adversary intends to negate his opponent’s way of life and therefore must be repulsed or fought in order to preserve one’s own form of existence... [T]he morally evil, aesthetically ugly or economically damaging need not necessarily be the enemy; the morally good, aesthetically beautiful, and economically profitable need not necessarily become the friend in the specifically political sense of the word. Thereby the inherently objective nature and autonomy of the political becomes evident by virtue of its being able to treat, distinguish, and comprehend the friend– enemy antithesis independently of other antitheses (Schmitt 27).

The quote above has one hidden point: the dynamism existing in making decisions about how to treat the enemies. There have been numerous cases that talk about the creation of enemies, but the point is that destroying the enemy is not always the goal. The enemy needs to justify the existence of some political forces, and any party can exist if the nature of conflict is preserved (Schmitt XVII). Aunt Vidala is one of the Aunts who considers this point and tries to counterbalance her relations with her enemies who want to remove her from power or take advantages. As a result, she plans to deal with her enemies in order to protect her political existence, saying “Keep your friends close but your enemies closer. Having no friends, I must make do with enemies” (Atwood 181).

With the collapse of the United States, one of the symbols of democracy has diminished. *The Testaments* examines the democratic order without the United States. The weakness of democratic order is evident when the novel discusses Gilead's relations with other countries, such as Canada, the independent Republic of Texas, and Germany. The novel states that because of the regime's military power, there has been some war with autonomous regions or independent countries like Texas and California (Atwood 196). Along with Gilead's diplomatic pressure on other countries, these wars have inscribed a narrative of danger. One of the main points about the political in the international sphere is the danger from the enemy, even though the danger can never be materialized (Campbell 69). Thus, Gilead has been able to establish deterrence against potential adversaries and save the enmity without entering a war.

A couple of years ago we could have got you out through Saint-Pierre," said Elijah, "but the French have closed that down. And after the refugee riots England's a no-go, Italy's the same, Germany—the smaller European ones. None of them want trouble with Gilead. Not to mention outrage from their own people, the mood being what it is. Even New Zealand's shut the door (Atwood 196).

Through this level of the adversary, it is safe to accept that the political function in the international aspect is to establish boundaries and deterrence by emphasizing the dangers and war (Campbell 69). What Gilead did to the United States created a fixed image of its identity among the countries, which is necessary to practice the political. The fixed identity of Christian fundamentalism, which can invade the neighbors, can secure the sovereignty of the governments and the security of their territories. Gilead benefits from the image of these threats and can sustain its stability through the threat without entering the war. The escalation of these conflicts will benefit Gilead because of its military power and readiness to wage a war. Thus, the other states in different regions even far from Gilead, such as New Zealand, try to avoid any conflict. As Alexander Wendt famously states,

“anarchy is what states make of it” (Wendt 395). Therefore, states try to be at the level of an adversary rather than enmity in their confrontation with Gilead.

Some of them say they welcome woman fugitives from Gilead, but you wouldn't last a day in most of them, you'd be sex-trafficked,” said Ada. “And forget South America, too many dictators. California's hard to get into because of the war, and the Republic of Texas is nervous. They fought Gilead to a standstill, but they don't want to be invaded. They're avoiding provocations (Atwood 196).

Other countries' fear of repeating the conflict with the Other, the enemy, is a fear of iterability (Warton and Still 24). The defeat in a war, or the fear of being defeated or invaded (Atwood 196) represents the memory of the political, which is created by the threat of danger. Thus, such fears may lead to making precise political decisions, either in the form of war with the enemy or peace.

One of the implicit ideas in the novel is how other countries treat female fugitives. First, countries like France, England, Italy, and Germany welcomed the refugees, but because of Gilead's military threats and political pressure, they then refused to accept the refugees (Atwood 195). However, some countries accept refugees, while creating other problems for women, such as murder or sex trafficking (Atwood 196). Such a situation could be analyzed through the concept of responsibility. In an encounter with an enemy, states choose to see responsibility as a one-sided entity and put the refugees in a situation when there is no way forward or backward (Pathon and Smith 63). In this case, as Deleuze puts it, enmity causes the states to abandon their limited sympathy and introduce the idea of extended generosity (Edkins and Zehfuss 283). In this case, as a result of weak decisions in free countries, Gilead survives and oppresses women and puts pressure on other countries through its military threats and invasions. Avoiding the conflict with the enemy and the continuation of suffering for female refugees reiterates the necessity of decisiveness in the political, as shown in Schmitt's theory.

This chapter focused on the problem of Gilead's regime rather than its other outcomes, such as the oppression of women. In this case, it was necessary to draw on a more politically oriented theory rather than the Marxist-inspired theories, which normally do not focus on the influential nature of the political. Such an approach allows one to view Gilead's function through a dedicated political theory and works to show the mindset of a dictatorial regime. Carl Schmitt's concept of the political allows us to digest Gilead's regime beyond its misogyny and point to its international relations. His theory emphasizes the necessity of decisiveness and the fact that states need an enemy to sustain their sovereignty, even for those who do not create multiple adversaries and whose existence is tolerated. There is a plethora of evidence of this in *The Testaments*, as the concept of friend-enemy grouping in Gilead's regime is widely practiced. It could be concluded that Gilead secures its territory by creating enmity in Canada by calling them godless. There are numerous possibilities for accusing different subjects of enmity, including accusations of disobedience and deceitfulness raised against women and handmaids.

One of the interesting conclusions that could be drawn from this chapter is the dynamic form of the politics. The existence of enmity is required to help states transform from the previous form to the new ones and to sustain their authority on their borders and lands. However, as states become more stable, the enmity requires regulation. The institutions, such as Vidala Schools, inscribe this threat and constantly redefine enmity through a religious narrative to suit the fundamentalist regime of Gilead. Moving the attention from direct response to the enmity to the regulative one guarantees the long life of regimes like Gilead. While they hide the truth by pretending to be in a never-ending war, they continue to lie because, according to Schmitt, it is a worthy risk and helps the fundamentalist regime last longer.

Reading *The Testaments* through the lens of the political helped the researcher see that the indecisiveness of liberal democracies against the enemy leads to enmity and harm to the people. However, states can fuel other crimes, such as sex trafficking, by undermining the political. In this case, any responsibility toward refugees becomes one-sided. Therefore, the states will transform their help from a limited sympathy to an extended generosity.

In the next chapter intends to draw more on gender and discuss the private and public matter through the lens of Hannah Arendt. However, just as in the current chapter, the other relevant theoretical views will be discussed to enrich the argument. Even though it is a wise decision to elaborate on the function of the political and analyze the regime, the political can have broader theoretical aspects. The next chapter attempts to cover them.

## Chapter 2: Hannah Arendt, and the Multiple Dimensions of the Political in *The Testaments*

The previous chapter discussed the political representation in *The Testaments* based on Carl Schmitt's concept of the political. Schmitt's theory allowed us to focus on the role of friend-enemy relations in the regime's policies. By drawing on his theory, the research analyzed Gilead's actions as a religious and fundamentalist regime. However, the political can have other aspects, which Schmitt's theory, despite its attempts, fails to highlight. Therefore, there is a need for other theorists, such as Hannah Arendt, to take the political beyond the friendship enmity dichotomy and discuss it through other aspects, such as the social, gender, and private life, while remaining faithful to political theory. *The Testaments* discusses a wide variety of the political's functions. As a result, this chapter intends to continue its discussion of the political. Many theorists discuss gender and the political, some of which will be discussed in this chapter. Nevertheless, the purpose of this chapter is to centralize Arendt's notion of the political.

The central point in Arendt's discussion of the political is her distinction between the social and the political. Arendt believes that the private matter is household maintenance which all are categorized as private life. On the other hand, the public matter is in the realm of the political (Arendt 28). When Arendt reviews Plato or draws on mythology and calls Zeus the protector of the borderlines, she means that the political should not interfere with the private matter (31). The problem begins when these two matters face each other in the social, which is neither private nor public, and while people fight for their freedom, violence and force become the monopoly of the regimes (Arendt 30). When the political interferes with the social, the governments are not the protector of freedom as they should be. The governments regulate people's lives through politics. In this condition:

Under no circumstances could politics be only a means to protect society—a society of the faithful, as in the Middle Ages, or a society of property-owners, as in Locke, or a society relentlessly engaged in a process of acquisition, as in Hobbes, or a society of producers, as in Marx, or a society of jobholders, as in our own society, or a society of laborers, as in socialist and communist countries (Arendt 31).

The political can take an idealistic form to sustain the governmental interference in social and private matters. Therefore, the political has several aspects and deals with determining the society rather than securing it with concepts such as enmity and sovereignty (S. Wolin 6). Such an idea is manifested in Aunt Vidala's character, who represents a significant presence in the novel. Aunt Vidala draws on religion to discipline girls and demonizes men for their lustful nature. For her, the best way to protect women is to isolate them and cover them up in a way similar to the hijab. She considers them to be a danger that must be avoided. Moreover, women are downgraded to their reproductive values.

Whatever our shapes and features, we were snares and enticements despite ourselves, we were the innocent and blameless causes that through our very nature could make men drunk with lust, so that they'd stagger and lurch and topple over the verge—The verge of what? we wondered. Was it like a cliff?—and go plunging down in flames, like snowballs made of burning sulfur hurled by the angry hand of God. We were custodians of an invaluable treasure that existed, unseen, inside us; we were precious flowers that had to be kept safely inside glass houses, or else we would be ambushed and our petals would be torn off and our treasure would be stolen and we would be ripped apart and trampled by the ravenous men who might lurk around any corner, out there in the wide sharp-edged sin-ridden world (Atwood 9).

School is a site for the social. It is neither private nor public, and Gilead's attempts to determine the naturally unregulated space is evident. To discipline a society, the political needs to build a univocal "we" and constitute the required performatives, such as wearing specific types of clothes (Atwood 9). Aunt Vidala demonstrates the necessity of manipulating the social real through politicization to invent performatives. Religion is the best tool for this because God and religion represent the self-evident truth that is irresistible and complete (B.Honing 217). One of

the key points about regulating the social is to make women lesser than what they are. In this case, reducing women to reproductive objects becomes more accessible, and the political has more opportunity to assert itself. In fact, when social resistance is oppressed, the political, which includes the public matter, can interfere with the social and regulate it.

The less we are doing ourselves, the less active we are, the more forcefully will this biological process assert itself, impose its inherent necessity upon us, and overawe us with the fateful automatism of sheer happening that underlies all human history (Arendt, *On Revolution* 59).

To make women less active, the Vidala Schools indoctrinate religious narratives to naturalize women's inability to participate in political decision-making. As mentioned above, religion facilitates oppression because it could be considered a self-evident truth. Questioning this can have severe consequences for citizens.

What my father was doing in there was said to be very important—the important things that men did, too important for females to meddle with because they had smaller brains that were incapable of thinking large thoughts, according to Aunt Vidala, who taught us Religion. It would be like trying to teach a cat to crochet, said Aunt Estée, who taught us Crafts, and that would make us laugh, because how ridiculous! Cats didn't even have fingers! (Atwood 15).

It is safe to say that the mind-control process is one of the critical points in Vidala Schools. Aunt Vidala's authoritarian teachings target individuality and limit the girls' performances. In one of her lectures, she prohibits girls from learning and refers to The Story of Fall in which Eve eats the Apple of knowledge and causes disaster for Adam. In any case, the women's reproductive system is the primary target for regulating individuals. Aunt Vidala states "Forbidden things are open to the imagination. That was why Eve ate the Apple of Knowledge, said Aunt Vidala: too much imagination. So, it was better not to know some things. Otherwise, your petals would get scattered" (Atwood 15).



In Gilead's social system, men rarely appear, unless as commanders, which means the regime largely regulates women's lives to secure the superiority of the political over the social. Consequently, regulation of the social is one-sided because the primary purpose of educating people in this way is to create masses and to lower their standards (Arendt, *The Origin of Totalitarianism* 316).

So men had something in their heads that was like fingers, only a sort of fingers girls did not have. And that explained everything, said Aunt Vidala, and we will have no more questions about it. Her mouth clicked shut, locking in the other words that might have been said. I knew there must be other words, for even then the notion about the cats did not seem right. Cats did not want to crochet. And we were not cats (Atwood 15).

One implicit point in the two quotes above is prioritizing body against thinking and activism. Aunt Vidala's primary intention to prohibit girls from knowing or questioning is to lower the possibility of acting or spontaneous actions (Arendt 40). That is why Aunt Vidala and Gilead, above all, intend to create masses and take distance from any ideology advocating individuality. For Arendt, the social can enter the realm of the political and that is when the people or individuals begin to act (B. Honing 218). In this case, the social enters the realm of the public, or the political, and does not remain in the mixed realm of private and public matter. When the political regulates the social and masses, which are always a danger, the intention is to make people indifferent. Indifference guarantees the life of totalitarian regimes like Gilead (S. Wolin 6). The ultimate concern of the regulated masses is a body and physical concerns, as the need for the body is to obey the social norm and not interfere with the political and participate in a revolution against Gilead. Such revolutions, based on body or food, typically fail because bodily concerns effectively close the political spaces for liberation (B. Honing 218). We see such metamorphosis and regulated personality in Agnes, who is Commander Kyle's daughter.

There were a couple of things about this song that bothered me. First of all, the angels. I knew they were supposed to be the kind of angels with white nightgowns and feathers, but that was not how I pictured them. I pictured them as our kind of Angels: men in black uniforms with cloth wings sewn onto their outfits, and guns. I did not like the thought of four Angels with guns standing around my bed as I slept, because they were men after all, so what about the parts of me that might stick out from under the blankets? My feet, for instance. Wouldn't that inflame their urges? It would, there was no way around it. So the four Angels were not a restful thought (Atwood 18).

To regulate life, Gilead's regimes set a system of tool/task framework. This system keeps the integrity of the individual to the system, or what we call morals (Harré 70). These tasks are partly assigned in schools through religious ceremonies at the Vidala Schools. In all the prayers, the duties of different sectors of society are addressed in prayer. The praying in Gilead focuses on the domination of the female body in the political. The presence of men is not very evident, except as a spectral presence that has a higher control.

As the year unfolds into spring, may our hearts unfold; bless our daughters, bless our Wives, bless our Aunts and Supplicants, bless our Pearl Girls in their mission work beyond our borders, and may Fatherly Grace be poured out upon our fallen Handmaid sisters and redeem them through the sacrifice of their bodies and their labour according to His will (Atwood 36).

The word "labour" and the phrase "sacrifice of their bodies" are notable in Aunt Vidala's quote as they point to the relation between the political and work. If we read *The Testaments* through the lens of Hannah Arendt, then this regime could be considered a city-state, since, by the formation of city-states around the fifth century, the states categorized the occupations based on the amount of work they do (Arendt 81). Ranking is evident throughout the novel, as Commanders can do the work that women are inherently incapable of because of their brain incompetence. Assigning uniforms to each occupation serves another example, whether working as an Aunt, a Martha, or Handmaid. However, it is the Handmaids who use their bodies as labor by giving birth to commander's children. Arendt refers to Aristotle, who believed work that deteriorates the body is the meanest of the jobs (Arendt 82), denoting that childbearing is sexual slavery. Gilead's regime

recognizes this slavery as a sacrifice. They constantly control the bodies by applying religious narratives.

The question here lies in the relation to the bodywork and the political. To reiterate, the political, as the public matter, is the regulator of the social and private matter (Arendt 82). *The Testaments*, and the quote in the previous paragraphs, show the penetration of the political into the public matter as the jobs in the houses are strictly categorized. Individuals, Commanders, Wives, Marthas, and Handmaids follow a hierarchy dictated by the theocratic regime. When Agnes talks to the Marthas, Zila and Vera, she thinks of housekeeping as her duty, but the Marthas oppose, since the housekeeping is their responsibility, and Agnes will be called as mistress of the household.

Well, of course, your Marthas would have to let you do that,” said Zilla. “You’d be the mistress of the household. But they’d look down on you for it. And they’d feel you were taking their rightful positions away from them. The things they know best how to do. You wouldn’t want them to feel that about you, would you, dear?” “Your husband wouldn’t like it either,” said Vera with another of her harsh laughs. “It’s bad for the hands. Look at mine!” She held them out: her fingers were knobby, the skin was rough, the nails short, with ragged cuticles—not at all like my mother’s slender and elegant hands, with their magic ring. “Rough work—it’s all bad for the hands. He won’t want you smelling of bread dough.” “Or bleach,” said Rosa. “From scrubbing.” “He’ll want you to stick to the embroidery and such,” said Vera (Atwood 21).

Zilla and Vera show the layers of the political in the household. Gilead has successfully penetrated the public matter within the social and the private life and has regulated the private affairs of households by the regime’s religious views. Gilead’s religious policies have transferred the categorization of opportunities to private life and extended such categorizations to the individuals within the household. Thus, Agnes will be the mistress of the household, or a citizen, and The Handmaids and Marthas will still be slaves because of the bodywork they do and the physical deterioration of its consequences. The reason to name Wives as citizens and the Handmaids or Marthas as slaves is because of the social representation of their activities.

According to Arendt, in city-states like Gilead, the citizen is the one whose activities are determinative but hidden and done in privacy (Arendt 85). Slaves, on the other hand, do the physical job and experience physical deterioration, like Marthas, or are forced to bear children and go shopping, like the Handmaids.

One might ask then, why does the political in Gilead forcefully regulate the private life and households? By blurring the lines between the public matter and private matter, the governments will be able to form a gigantic and nationwide housekeeping administration. This housekeeping administration, which is managed by the religious views at the core of the regime, controls every political community's formation and puts them in an image of a giant family (Arendt 28). Thus, while individuals seem to be separate and from different families, they all are part of a univocal family, based on religion in Gilead. Such activities create the social, a realm that is neither public nor private, and such gigantic housekeeping helps Gilead's regime transfer from a city-state to a nation (Arendt 29).

In *The Human Condition*, Hannah Arendt discusses the formation of societies during history. Most of her discussions are about pre-modern societies; however, recognizing the similarities between Gilead families and those which Arendt discusses is not a challenge. In both family types, men control the individual's life. The command and the survival of species is a task set upon women, which God naturalizes. That is why obedience, child-rearing, and marriage are strongly advocated in Gilead. Aunt Estee, who normalizes Aunt Vidala's intentions more gently, explains that:

“we and your fathers and mothers will choose your husbands wisely for you when the time comes,” Aunt Estée would say. “So you don't need to be afraid. Just learn your lessons and trust your elders to do what is best, and everything will unfold as it should. I will pray for it” (Atwood 10).

In the next sentence, Agnes tells the readers that while Aunt Estee tries to tone down Aunt Vidala's hardline and authoritative behavior, working as her apologist, only Aunt Vidala's version prevails (Atwood 11). This condition could be interpreted through the relations between the political, speech, and act. The political, the determinant of the private space, prevents women from taking spontaneous actions by nourishing specific identities. For Arendt, the political interference with private life manipulates the household to prevent women, or any target, from experiencing feelings of spontaneity and heroism since when women engage in heroism, the governmentally indoctrinated identities will no longer function (B. Honing 219).

The narrative is one of the key instruments used to achieve that purpose. Gilead's regime exercises it beyond the Vidala schools. Aunt Lydia is a character detailing the role of narrative to control any possibilities that happen in the private matter that might affect the public matter or the country's political space. Aunt Lydia is one of the few characters in Gilead who has access to the country's secret library. In that library, all the texts and the forbidden literary works are archived. The mentioned literary works like *The Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, *Jane Eyre*, and *Anna Karenina* contain narratives that sharply contrast Gilead's fundamentalist and totalitarian religious ideology. The abovementioned novels have female characters, which exceed Gilead's cultural boundaries by declaring women's independence or acting against religion. and engaged in heroic actions. They move from the private matter and confront the political by crossing the borders of speech and entering the realm of action. As Arendt puts it, the unique female personality is only revealed when a woman actively reveals it and goes beyond speech because what can be achieved through speech could also be accomplished in silence (B. Honing 219). Tess baptizes her child without the church's permission. Jane Eyre becomes an independent woman, and Anna Karenina has love affairs outside marriage. All of these actions deviate from Gilead's values.

Finally, I reached my inner sanctum, deep in the Forbidden World Literature section. On my private shelves I've arranged my personal selection of proscribed books, off-limits to the lower ranks. Jane Eyre, Anna Karenina, Tess of the d'Urbervilles, Paradise Lost, Lives of Girls and Women —what a moral panic each one of them would cause if set loose among the Supplicants! (Atwood 35).

Acting against the values of Gilead can also happen within the faith as well, which Gilead strongly prohibits. The regime has considered Catholicism heresy and has banned all signs of it, including the church and books. Cardinal Newman's *Apologia Pro Vita Sua: A Defence of One's Life* is a book that was considered outrageous in the nineteenth century because of its thoughts on individual liberty (Britannica). Spreading opinions on individual liberty from a religious point of view breaks the univocal "we," which Gilead designs by manipulating the private matter through the political. Apparently, Gilead's policies hold the Aunts responsible for any religious deviation or heresy which is why Aunt Lydia fears the consequences.

Once sequestered, I took my nascent manuscript out of its hiding place, a hollow rectangle cut inside one of our X-rated books: Cardinal Newman's *Apologia Pro Vita Sua: A Defence of One's Life*. No one reads that weighty tome anymore, Catholicism being considered heretical and next door to voodoo, so no one is likely to peer within. Though if someone does, it will be a bullet in the head for me; a premature bullet, for I am far from ready to depart. If and when I do, I plan to go out with a far bigger bang than that (Atwood 35).

Although this chapter focuses on the regulation of individuals and private matters through the political, one should note that we do not share a seamless identity with the members of the univocal. Judith Butler has extensively studied Arendt and the problem of rebellion within the private matter controlled by the political. She suggests that the rebellion and the mockery of the univocity of sign create the possibilities for gender transformation (Butler, *Performative Acts* 276). Though the rebellions in *The Testaments* are not central, there are examples from the new generations that are not convinced by Gilead's advertised lifestyle and gender codes. For instance, Agnes has a sharp memory of domestic violence, which destroys the peaceful image of married

life that the Aunts advertise. Such contrasts pave the way for the losing faith in the univocity of the image of an obedient wife and a decent husband.

But despite Aunt Estée's dimples and friendly smile, it was Aunt Vidala's version that prevailed. It turned up in my nightmares: the shattering of the glass house, then the rending and tearing and the trampling of hooves, with pink and white and plum fragments of myself scattered over the ground. I dreaded the thought of growing older—older enough for a wedding. I had no faith in the wise choices of the Aunts: I feared that I would end up married to a goat on fire (Atwood 11).

There is not severe agreement about presenting the regime's desire identity to girls. Aunt Estee tones down Aunt Vidala's version since she believes it would frighten girls away from the married life, leading to more faithless individuals and the failure of the regime to progress with its strategy of regulating marriage. Aunt Estee, who is the girls' favorite teacher, "would say Aunt Vidala was overdoing it, and there was no point in frightening us out of our wits since to instill such an aversion might have a negative influence on the happiness of our future married lives" (Atwood 11).

The excessive penetration of the political into the private leads to the widespread acceptance of political hierarchies. In this case, the regime rules every aspect of private life, including controlling the reproduction of the system and naturalizing the very nature of ruling, instead of basic civic equality (Villa 10). The structure of the family in Gilead, and the strict control of family affairs by the Aunts, show that the regime's desired political hierarchies are widely established and accepted. While the resistance exists and has become partly serious, it is not centralized in the novel. In this case, the story of Agnes, who questions the role of the Aunts in controlling her marriage and sexuality, could be considered a form of resistance for the sake of civic equality.

The strict control of body affairs, one of the most private matters for an individual, shows itself when Agnes' periods begin. . The political function, as an institutionalized, regulatory power, is to turn the female body into a site of political action (B.Honing 226). Agnes explores her female body based on Gilead's narrative, even though her speech shows that, unlike Shuanmitte, she does not totally submit herself to Gilead's religious understandings of the female body.

The adult female body was one big booby trap as far as I could tell. If there was a hole, something was bound to be shoved into it, and something else was bound to come out, and that went for any kind of hole: a hole in a wall, a hole in a mountain, a hole in the ground. There were so many things that could be done to it or go wrong with it, this adult female body, that I was left feeling I would be better off without it. I considered shrinking myself by not eating, and I did try that for a day, but I got so hungry I couldn't stick to my resolution, and went to the kitchen in the middle of the night and ate chicken scraps out of the soup pot (Atwood 83).

The quote above shows that Gilead presents an interpretation of the human body, which emphasizes the bodily representation of women rather than their personality (B. Honing 226). Arendt believes that by physical maturity, a new identity is created (226). In this case, the way society represents the body to the individual signifies the political interference in the private matter and its regulations. As mentioned earlier, the political is the realm of acting and performance, which means the development and maturity of the female body for a person like Agnes is an opportunity to employ the new identity in a performance (Arendt, *On Revolution* 174). Gilead's treatment of the female body, describing it as a treasure that must be kept safe, tries to prevent women from entering the realm of the political. The genuine public realm should be a space for collaboration to create new realities (B. Honing 223). Still, the political function is to manipulate the public realm in a way that no narrative, other than what the regime wants, can prevail.

For Arendt, the political is the realm of performativity and action (Arendt 33). Julia Kristeva's interpretation of Arendt considers judgment as a supreme political action (Kristeva 75). In *Hannah Arendt—Life is a Narrative*, Kristeva elaborates on becoming "who" from being



“what.” Becoming who is a stage in which the individual gains the ability to act. Gilead tries to prevent the individual’s entrance into the public realm and involvement in the political. It is by maturing, and becoming “who”, that one gains the abilities of thinking, willing, and judging that leads the individual to meditations that appear to be philosophical or meditations that dismantle philosophy, just as they do politics themselves. They go on to sketch out a new way of looking at freedom (Kristeva 54). *The Testaments* shows the role of judgment in different forms, one of which is evident in Agnes’ refusal of her classmates’ views about her, and the narrative Gilead reproduces. Agnes narrates that she has to confront two types of narrative: the official religion in Gilead, which manipulates the private matter, and the religion of superstitions, which the ordinary people and the schoolgirls spread.

At school my position was now worse than it had ever been. I had become a taboo object: our Handmaid had died, which was believed among the girls to be a sign of bad fate. They were a superstitious group. At the Vidala School there were two religions: the official one taught by the Aunts, about God and the special sphere of women, and the unofficial one, which was passed from girl to girl by means of games and songs (Atwood 106).

It should be safe to say that the act of confrontation, even in speech, shows the break within the univocity of the definition of woman, which Gilead expects. The story of Agnes shows how narrative can construct a personality “who” is dynamic and sets its actions and speech in opposition to any attempt at reification or objectification (Kristeva 58). The games, which are explained in *The Testaments*, show the capacity of narrative in regulating the individuals from committing to political action. These games show that human capacity is built concerning others and based on memories (Brockmeier and A. Carbaugh 66), fitting Arendt’s belief on the importance of collective actions in the realm of the political (S. Wolin 16). The Aunts are perfectly aware of the manipulative function of such narrative and embrace them because it gives the schoolgirls a level of self-discipline by repeating the teachings of Vidala Schools.

The Aunts probably thought this game contained a beneficial amount of warning and threat. Why was it “One for murder,” though? Why did murder have to come before kissing? Why not after, which would seem more natural? I have often thought about that since, but I have never found any answer. We were allowed other games inside school hours. We played Snakes and Ladders—if you landed on a Prayer you went up a ladder on the Tree of Life, but if you landed on a Sin you went down a Satanic snake. We were given colouring books, and we coloured in the signs of the shops—ALL FLESH, LOAVES AND FISHES—as a way of learning them. We coloured the clothing of people too—blue for the Wives, stripes for the Econowives, red for the Handmaids. Becka once got in trouble with Aunt Vidala for colouring a Handmaid purple (Atwood 107).

Thus, some of these songs served as the foundation for behaviors, forming the judgments at the service of Gilead and manipulating the collective aspect of the political to prevent people like Agnes from acting effectively.

As this chapter extends its discussion on the relationship between the political and judgment, Aunt Lydia’s character becomes worthy of further elaboration. To link this part to the previous one, it could be inferred that the judgment could be linked to the political and one’s perception about the public actions. In the last part, it was evident that the Aunts employ literature, songs, and games to prevent individuals rise from their “what” to become “who.” In other words, they gain their individuality and fight for their expectations of freedom. Hence, Aunt Lydia seems to be fully aware of the public judgment and involvement with the political.

In *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, Arendt writes an extensive account of the Eichmann trial, in which I found some similarities to Aunt Lydia. Both have helped their regimes operate their plans and oppress people while fully aware of their actions. Aunt Lydia discusses the problem of Baby Nicole and considers her a valuable commodity for manipulating the social, since she could control and inspire the people’s hatred against Gilead’s enemies and promote the narrative that the Handmaids are not trustworthy (Atwood 33). Aunt Lydia thinks about such controlling mechanisms but does not believe in them. For instance, she writes religious hymns

which should be sung publicly and by handmaids to remind everyone about the strong presence of religion and the fundamentalism of Gilead/ However, deep down, she believes that such system of governance is “banal and without the charm” (Atwood 34). Aunt Lydia decided to be part of Gilead, claiming that she had no choice but to lead (36). Eichmann was also fully aware of his actions in helping the Nazi regime during the Holocaust (Swift 57). However, the main difference between Aunt Lydia and Eichmann is that the identity and the awareness of good and evil is still alive in her. Eichmann had totally lost his sense of imagination and therefore his sense of judgment of what he was doing (Villa 75). On the contrary, Aunt Lydia both imagines and remembers her past, as well as the future which she might face if the regime changes in Gilead. She predicts that one day she will respond to her crimes in a just court and might be executed, or remembered as an evil person who destroyed many lives. Aunt Lydia, unlike Eichmann, is perfectly aware of the political and its relation to power. Regulating the public space produces surplus power, which creates potentials in the political to bring new orders (S. Wolin 17). In this case, the political turns into a shared concern for the members of a human society to take care of themselves (S. Wolin 17). This creates the possibility of revolution and regime change.

How will I end? I wondered. Will I live to a gently neglected old age, ossifying by degrees? Will I become my own honoured statue? Or will the regime and I both topple and my stone replica along with me, to be dragged away and sold off as a curiosity, a lawn ornament, a chunk of gruesome kitsch? Or will I be put on trial as a monster, then executed by firing squad and dangled from a lamppost for public viewing? Will I be torn apart by a mob and have my head stuck on a pole and paraded through the streets to merriment and jeers? I have inspired sufficient rage for that (Atwood 31).

Aunt Lydia’s deep understanding of the political could be inferred from the quote above. She considers the hidden aspect of the political—how manipulating the public space creates social forces that might work against it (S. Wolin 17). Thus, she can imagine an issue from different perspectives. This is a prominent feature of political thinking since imagination about the fate of

the political system, or the future of a political system is not about kindness or necessarily peace (Villa, Arendt and Heidegger-the Fate of the Political 104). However, her thoughts about the possibility of regime change in Gilead distinguish her from Eichmann. When Arendt depicts the Eichmann trial, she describes him as an agent of the Nazi regime who has lost the imaginative power to think politically and view a public issue from a different perspective, leading to the loss of his sense of judgment (Swift 59). Such an imaginative power allows Aunt Lydia to escape from the confines of power for a moment. Eventually, she returns to that confinement because she is part of Gilead's regime. All her deeds and speeches were executed in service of the regime to oppress the people of Gilead, especially the Handmaids.

Every man in the State was to be "an acting member of the Common government, transacting in person" according to "his competence." Each would thus feel himself to be "a participator in the government of affairs, not merely at an election one day in the year, but every day (Arendt, qtd in S. Wolin 13).

Aunt Lydia speaks of choice in the chapter dedicated to her story. Her conception of choice fits Arendt's definition of choice. Making a choice is deeply bounded to responsibility and the affirmation or negation of the current state of affairs. Obviously, there is no democracy in Gilead to make a choice about beginning a new life, but it is to take responsibility for the brute fact of our birth, which is when we make a choice (Villa 189). Aunt Lydia is born with the emergence of Gilead. She has no choice but to join the regime because of her efforts as a family court judge. Since choice is made for the sake of the community, which brings mutual agreement and promise (Villa 189), Aunt Lydia agrees to work with Gilead to gain what she has lost in the previous order, being appreciated for her efforts and commitments to the order, such as participation in the social events, working for the government intuitions, like jurisdiction system, and voting in different elections.

I have chosen my title advisedly, for what else am I doing here but defending my life? The life I have led. The life—I've told myself—I had no choice but to lead. Once, before the advent of the present regime, I gave no thought to a defence of my life. I didn't think it was necessary. I was a family court judge, a position I'd gained through decades of hardscrabble work and arduous professional climbing, and I had been performing that function as equitably as I could. I'd acted for the betterment of the world as I saw that betterment, within the practical limits of my profession. I'd contributed to charities, I'd voted in elections both federal and municipal, I'd held worthy opinions. I'd assumed I was living virtuously; I'd assumed my virtue would be moderately applauded. Though I realized how very wrong I had been about this, and about many other things, on the day I was arrested (Atwood 36).

As *The Testaments* shows, Aunt Lydia's choices have become existential. Merging daily life and moving up the ladder in Gilead's political hierarchy has introduced Aunt Lydia to her existential facility, enabling her to assume responsibility for her actions and decisions in Gilead (Villa 189). In this regard, Aunt Lydia saw her path as straightforward to progress and be placed in the minds of Commanders, Handmaids, Aunts and Wives, or as she explains, beyond alive and beyond dead (Atwood 32).

In the ending of *The Testaments*, Aunt Lydia moves from speech to action and attempts to make some genuine political changes. Hannah Arendt knows revolutions as genuine political acts in her political analysis because they help establish new institutions (S. Wolin 11). By sending Nicole and other girls like Becka back to Canada as a Pearl Girl, she refuses the tradition of forced marriage in Gilead, the tradition that she practiced and endorsed for many years.

You and Nicole must leave tomorrow," said Aunt Lydia to me. "As early as possible. A Gilead diplomatic plane will not be possible; Judd would hear of it and stop it. You'll have to take another route." "But we aren't ready," I said. "We don't have our pearls, or the dresses, or the Canadian money, or the brochures, or the silver backpacks" (Atwood 354).

Aunt Lydia changes a lot as the readers get close to the end of *The Testaments* and her changes are relevant to the function of the political. There is hint about the surplus of power in the previous paragraph which needs more elaboration. Aunt Lydia imagines a new order which will

one day prevail over Gilead. She changes the regime and sends the officials, such as Commanders and Aunts to trial. There will be a punishment, and Aunt Lydia subscribes to the notion that the Gilead fundamentalism does not have strong and faithful public support. The surplus of power makes such imaginations possible because it is the political nature to create more power than they need for running the government and maintaining the country's affairs, leading to the possibility of building new orders and political changes in a country (S. Wolin 17). The reason behind the surplus power is the nature of Arendt's understanding of the political in manipulating the private life. The excessive control of the female body and individuals' private affairs in Gilead, encouraged by Aunt Lydia, the Commanders, and Vidala Schools, incites the need for change, especially when one knows that Handmaids have experienced democracy. Therefore, it is safe to say that the excessive penetration of the political into the private life makes the foundation of states possible (S. Wolin 17). Aunt Lydia's call for religious hymns and inciting people against Canada by using Baby Nicole means that she is full of awareness of the consequences of exercising power in this way.

A notable example of such awareness is Aunt Lydia's loss of faith in the mission. The Aunts at the Ardua Hall are surprised by the deviation that one of the most powerful women in Gilead has made. In reading her deviations, it is necessary to return to her reason to choose Gilead. Aunt Lydia joined Gilead's forces because her experience of living in the pre-Gilead United States was not rewarding. As Gilead has excessively become corrupted, she cannot have the expected rewarding experience in the new order too. Therefore, Aunt Lydia conducts a series of genuine political actions that work against the regime.

“Indeed, Aunt Victoria. But as you and Aunt Immortelle have now read a good many of the secret files I have been placing in your way, are you not aware of the deplorable degree of corruption that currently exists in Gilead?” [...] The aims of

Gilead at the outset were pure and noble, we all agree,” she said. “But they have been subverted and sullied by the selfish and the power-mad, as so often happens in the course of history. You must wish to see that set right” (Atwood 337).

While the political is a manipulative force in the eyes of Arendt, one should note that the political is in the realm of freedom, and any action for liberation exclusively happens in the realm of the political (Arendt 31). Therefore, the process of regime changes and rioting against Gilead starts in the political part of the society, such as Ardua Hall. Arendt believes that the initial steps toward freedom are what the Romantic theorists and artists were protesting. They were standing against the conformism inherent in society (Swift 22). Hence, Aunt Lydia begins by helping Agnes, Becka, and Nicole, who have been silenced in Vidala schools. Aunt Lydia breaks this tradition by disobeying Gilead’s traditions and providing the girls, especially Nicole, with her support to escape Gilead as she believes in the collapse of the regime. In other words, she follows Arendt’s notion of political action, which emphasizes subsidizing the democratic actions of those who have the power (S. Wolin 8). What concerns Aunt Lydia, however, is not just subsidizing liberatory political actions. Their quality also matters to her. In her memories, which are written in the Ardua Hall Holograph, Aunt Lydia shows that being remembered is important to her. She leaves the details of her actions, the predictions of her death, and requires the future readers to read her testaments. In the eyes of Arendt, who sometimes draws on Nietzsche, the genuine political action must bring greatness and heroism, and that only lies in the performance itself, not the speech, and not the achievement (Arendt 206). Aunt Lydia, tries to recover part of her corrupted image by subsidizing freedom and having real political performance.

But now I must end our conversation. Goodbye, my reader. Try not to think too badly of me, or no more badly than I think of myself. In a moment I’ll slot these pages into Cardinal Newman and slide it back onto my shelf. In my end is my beginning, as someone once said. Who was that? Mary, Queen of Scots, if history does not lie. Her motto, with a phoenix rising from its ashes, embroidered on a wall hanging. Such excellent embroiderers, women are. The footsteps approach,

one boot after another. Between one breath and the next the knock will come (Atwood 404).

Arendt's notion of the political includes a myriad of ideas and aspects, which is why it is inherently vagueness (S. Wolin 6). Still, there are similarities that can be compared to Schmitt. Unlike Schmitt's notion of the political, which is based on the clear distinction between friend and enemy and the necessity of maintaining such relations, Arendt's ideas on the political are more encompassing and complex. The main shared point between the two approaches this research considers is antagonism. Both of the ideas, shown in both chapters, centralize the constitutive outside that considers the rise of the other (Mouffe 2). Arendt and Schmitt both create an antagonistic site, one of which is based on enmity, while the other is based on controlling the private life and preventing it from intervening in the public realm. Thus, in Gilead's regime, whether one looks at it through the lens of Schmitt or Arendt, Aunts can be equal only if they are enemies with Canadians or the disobedient Handmaids (Villa 206).

This chapter focuses on Gilead's regime, like the previous chapter, but through Hannah Arendt's multidimensional view of the political. By drawing on Arendt, the research explains how the political can function in manipulating subjects and individuals' public affairs. This chapter's main distinctive factor was to divide society in two different parts: the private realm and the public realm. The private realm houses private affairs like households and family affairs, while public matters operate in public.

Gilead has taken extensive measures to control the various aspects of the private matter and influence household politics. Controlling the household is very important because it allows the regime to control every individual's affairs and objectify them by arguing that women's mental capacities are naturally inferior to men. Thus, they are forced to obey what Gilead dictates as their natural duties. In this case, the social works as a firewall between the public and private realm,



keeping people away from their individuality and creating a mass society that is indifferent and conformist. The social, consequently, is mainly differentiated by the political because of the low possibility for spontaneous actions (Arendt 40).

While the main purpose of this chapter is not related to the narrative, it cannot be denied that narrative plays an important role in *The Testaments*. The narrative is used in the political to manipulate the subject. Since the political can emerge as a form of culture and human relations to control most private affairs of individuals (S. Wolin 17), the wide presence of different narratives in *The Testaments* is important. Gilead is a good example of the effectiveness of narrative for avoiding the development of individual selfhood. The narratives in these novels, with strong and independent female characters, offer new alternatives to women, other than what Gilead offers to them. Literature is helpful to fuel the antagonism and mistrust among the individuals like Agnes and the Handmaids who have experienced living in the free world.

To elaborate more on the role of narrative in *The Testaments*, it is safe to say that novel shows the implication of narrative in two processes of life-making and self-making. The role of narrative in the Western discourse is to take the self as the most private aspect of an individual to the public and introduce it as a purely negotiable entity (Brockmeier and A.Carbaugh 16). The novel subscribes to this process by connecting each character's past to the present and showing that characters such as Nicole do not resist significantly against the system and show levels of flexibility to grant themselves opportunities. Interestingly, by discussing each character's past, the novel shows a ghostly presence of freedom-seeking the voice of women and places it not as a fragmented but interactive form with the conservative and tyrannical voice of Gilead. We understand such interactive form when Commander Jude narrates the history of women and judges them for their lifestyle before the rise of Gilead.

One marriage?”

“A brief one. It was a mistake.” “Divorce is now a crime,” he said. I said nothing.

“Never blessed with children?” “No.” “Wasted your woman’s body? Denied its natural function?”

“It didn’t happen,” I said, keeping the edge out of my voice as much as I could.

Pity,” he said. “Under us, every virtuous woman may have a child, one way or another, as God intended.

But I expect you were fully occupied in your, ah, so-called career.” (Atwood 171)

Sentences indicating the basic rights of women such as divorce, and the choice of not having children without any regret indicate the existence of a self before the rise of Gilead. On the other hand, Commander Jude does not try to eliminate women’s freedom and the language in which women with similar experiences talk to each other. So, instead of executing women with liberated sexual and social past, he suggests cooperation and says the meaning of being thankful enough is to cooperate with us (Atwood 143). In fact, for some characters such as the abovementioned, Gilead does not eliminate their voice but offers them a tool/task framework to which the subjects submit themselves to preserve the integrity of their identity (Brockmeier and A. Carbaugh 69)

I must contend that the plans that Commander Jude follows is in fact, the actualization of his religious narrative tied to maintaining the state sovereignty. Commander Jude summons Nicole to follow a process of world-making. Forming a life-making narrative and constructing selves required creating opportunities and constraints (Brockmeier and A.Carbaugh 16). Commander Jude believes in constructing the political life-making narrative the system desires by generating opportunities for the women in the society. For that, he asks Nicole, Elizabeth, and Helena to work as a team and help the Gilead regime to expedite the life-making process. This is an opportunity for them because the characters receive this chance as an award of passing a test based to check

their dare to execute a woman (Atwood 173). Besides, the privilege of imposing limitations on other women grants Nicole, Elizabeth, and Helena safety. The function of narrative as a life-making system aligns with Schmitt's notion of the political. For Schmitt, one of the aspects of the friend-enmity dichotomy is to define our willingness to take responsibility for our own lives (Schmitt XVI). Nicole, Elizabeth, and Helena shape enmity with Aunt Vidala (Atwood 177), to save their own life and take responsibility, not murder her.

Yes, Commander Judd," I said. "I have a question." He smiled, though not warmly. "Proceed."

"What do you want?" He smiled again. "Thank you. What do we want from you in particular? We're building a society congruent

with the Divine Order—a city upon a hill, a light to all nations—and we are acting out of charitable care and concern. We believe that you, with your privileged training, are well qualified to aid us in ameliorating the distressing lot of women that has been caused by the decadent and corrupt society we are now abolishing." He paused. "You wish to help?" This time the pointing finger singled out Helena. "Yes, Commander Judd." Almost a whisper (Atwood 173)

The essential point to note in Atwood's *The Testaments* is that the novel's multi-voiced characterization is not always in conflict and in the repeated process of enemy making. On the other hand, even though by the use of violence from the regime, the characters such as Nicole, Elizabeth, and Helena interact and deal with the dominant narrative and shape their social self, which is the result of interaction with the system. In fact, the novel shows that the relationship between narrative and human identity and the question of how we construct ourselves happens in an interactive process (Brockmeier and A.Carbaugh 15). Atwood's *The Testament* shows that the process of being the power's voice to save your own voice is not straightforward and easy. The minorities, women, in this case, accept the opportunities and some self-autonomy to protect themselves from the system and add another aspect to their identity by promoting the system's narrative and committing to its disciplinary practices by generating new laws (Atwood 176)

For a time, I almost believed what I understood I was supposed to believe. I numbered myself among the faithful for the same reason that many in Gilead did: because it was less dangerous. What good is it to throw yourself in front of a steamroller out of moral principles and then be crushed flat as a sock emptied of its foot? Better to fade into the crowd, the piously praising, unctuous, hate-mongering crowd. Better to hurl rocks than to have them hurled at you. Or better for your chances of staying alive. They knew that so well, the architects of Gilead. Their kind has always known that (Atwood 178).

One of the crucial aspects of this chapter was Arendt's belief in the revolutions' ineffectiveness based on physical necessity and bodily needs. Fighting for reproductive rights and abolishing the misogynistic religion in *The Testaments* might seem fit to call for that revolution. On the contrary, this is not the case with *The Testaments* as the novel takes a broader approach by pointing to Mayday, and Aunt Lydia's turning point to supporting the actions against Gilead. I believe that the testimonies in the novel show that the political must be for a higher cause, which can sometimes be evil and can also fail to meet its promises. The narrative of a promised land has made Aunt Lydia one of the pillars of the Gilead's religious tyranny and the deplorable corruption are the primary factor that she fights for the regime's collapse. The narrative of promise plays an important role in any political system by encouraging people to act against the system and cause a regime to collapse from within. Thus, it might be fair to conclude that the political is also a cultural struggle, an open space with shared values which might stop functioning, collapse, and be replaced by the surplus power it creates to make a new order possible.

One question about *The Handmaid's Tale* that came up repeatedly is: How did Gilead fall? *The Testaments* was written in response to this question. Totalitarianisms may crumble from within, as they fail to keep the promises that brought them to power; or they may be attacked from without, or both. There are no sure-fire formulas since very little in history is inevitable (Atwood 417).

## Conclusion

The importance of gender in Atwood's novels has been noted by many scholars. There is a gap, however, regarding the analysis of Gilead's dictatorships through political theory. In this thesis, the purpose of the study is to read Margaret Atwood's *The Testaments* based on the concept of the political through the lens of Carl Schmitt and Hannah Arendt. Most of this study tries to remain faithful to a non-Marxist approach and focuses on governmental acts of oppression, rather than social activities.

Carl Schmitt's concept of the political is based on the clear distinction between friend and enemy. This is one of the points this research wants to highlight in its analysis of Gilead. *The Testaments* show that the Gilead regime practices such distinctions. The novel shows how totalitarian regimes like Gilead use every resource to reproduce friend-enemy relationships. Therefore, every aspect of society, such as ethics and morals, is at the service of friend-enemy relations. The educational system plays an important role, as Vidala Schools notably try to create fear in students and establish a fear of disobedience. Moreover, Gilead's regime casts a shadow over destruction and war on the very routine aspects of life, such as using a dishwasher.

One of the clear conclusions that one can draw from this research is the important role of regimes and political decisions that sometimes have enough power to control women's cultural forces and empowerment. For regimes like Gilead, which define women as enemies and control every aspect of their lives, remaining in power and saving their sovereignty is vital. Therefore, Schmitt clearly focuses on issues such as borders, sovereignty, and security as the major purpose of maintaining friend-enemy relationships. The end of friendship and enmity relations may lead to physical killing. For the sake of remaining in power, Gilead spreads killing and death all over the country. It begins in school with talk about cutting disobedient women into pieces but gets a much

broader form into fighting with Mayday and Operation Dead End. Mayday shows that resistance exists and that people who are oppressed by the narrative of the friend-enemy framework also consider their oppressor an enemy and fight for its destruction, rather than its moderation or reformation. Maybe *The Testaments*' efforts to show Canada as a liberal democracy weaker than Gilead's dictatorship can be seen in the country's avoidance of the political in its extreme forms. By doing so, Canada tolerates Gilead as an adversary, not an enemy. Thus, they can tolerate each other without entering a war. The result, however, is that Gilead can still maintain its pressure because it has been allowed to have a powerful military. Nevertheless, Canada offers its help by accepting the refugees from Gilead, which subsidizes some democratic actions in Gilead.

This takes us to Hannah Arendt's definition of the political, which seems hard to grasp because of its multi-dimensional nature. For Arendt, the political is a regulative force in society, but it is also a culture, a system of human relations. It can transform into a social contract by which people take care of themselves. Her different views helped this research distance itself from Carl Schmitt's military-focused view and go into more details about the role of the political in an individual's private life, gender identity, and political actions. While Arendt's view of the political is drastically different from that of Schmitt, it shares the agonism with it, which means the political has never been a peaceful or neutral space in the eyes of either of the theorists. *The Testaments*, in this case, reveal that oppressing people based on their gender and regulating their private life can secure totalitarian regimes. In the second chapter, regulating the individuals is much more significant. *The Testaments* has many relevant examples. It is safe to conclude that totalitarian regimes regulate individuals, not for biological purposes or the workforce, but for securing political longevity. Hence, *The Testaments* reminds the readers that gender oppression and controlling women's reproductive systems may not have moral or cultural roots, as it appears at

first. Instead, it is deeply political, as the regimes want to secure themselves. Therefore, it makes sense that *The Testaments* does not talk about capitalism because there the novel wants to show the readers the real face of Gilead, with some attempts to keep its face in the international society through The Pearl Girls' propaganda. Isolation is the natural consequence of living in a totalitarian regime like Gilead and all characters in *The Testaments* have extremely limited access to the world beyond Gilead's borders.

However, it does not mean that the regime is immune to collapse from within. The research showed the surplus power in the different aspects of the political creation, manifested in Aunt Lydia. Aunt Lydia shows that failing the promises made by the totalitarian regime can break itself from within. Therefore, she goes beyond speech and thinking and, by liberating the young Aunts and girls, takes genuine, political action, paying the price with her life.

In this dissertation, I tried to shift the attention from the theories that concentrate on subjects and feminism. Not because I object to feminism, but because focusing on dedicated political theorists and the political paves the way for the representation of governments in literature rather than underlying systems, such as capitalism or discourses like patriarchy. I believe that due to Atwood's inspiration from Iran's 1979 revolution in picturing Gilead (Guillemette), paying attention to deceitful governing is more critical than ever because overcoming the main obstacle paves the way to discuss other aspects of women's lives in terms of ecofeminism or queer issues. *The Testaments* indeed include a wide variety of conditions about women. However, the way in which the government regulates gender and systematically oppresses them should tell us that studying institutions and their ways of manipulating society matters since they promote evil and cannot be moderated or negotiated. In fact, evil is bounded to their political longevity, until they collapse.

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