The Scientific, Economic and Political Exploitation of the Female Body in Marge Piercy's *Woman on the Edge of Time* (1976), Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985), and P.D. James' *The Children of Men* (1992)

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

for the Degree of Master of Arts

by

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Submitted on the 20th of June

Acknowledgements

First and foremost, I would like to offer a special thanks to my thesis supervisor Dr. Evert Jan van Leeuwen for his patient guidance, constructive and insightful feedback, and his positive outlook and confidence in my research. In these past six months he has fueled my enthusiasm and expanded my knowledge of women's dystopian fiction and has facilitated my research on the social developments that threatened women's bodily authority in Britain and the United States during the second part of the twentieth century.

I must also express my gratitude to my mother. Not just for being willing to proofread countless pages of this thesis, but more importantly for teaching me that as a woman, I am capable of being and doing whatever I choose.

Lastly, I wish to express my admiration for the courageous women throughout history who have shattered gender barriers, changed laws and have broken new scientific ground. I thank them for fighting to assert themselves as individuals, and for empowering other women to stand up to inequality.

Table of Contents

Introduction

During the 1960s and 1970s, the genre of science fiction saw an unprecedented interest in "female experience and feminist concerns" especially due to the influence of New Wave feminist authors such as Joanna Russ and Ursula K. Le Guin (Rubik et al 149). Gender and sexuality became areas of exploration for many women science fiction writers, and according to Ritch Calvin, the subgenre of feminist science fiction emerged as a result (17). Whereas, during the 1960s and 1970s, many of the stories of feminist science fiction writers explored different potentially utopian futures in which "gender will not be so limiting as in their own experience" (Donawerth et al 4), from the 1980s onwards, women's dystopian fiction became increasingly popular as a direct response to the conservative political climate that had emerged in the United States and England (Calvin 54; Tolan 145).

Ronald Reagan's presidency was perceived as "a dark time politically and socially" for feminists (Rossinow 134; Coste 2; Chappell 116), as Reaganites' idealization of traditional gender roles, their dismissal of gender- and income inequality and their anti-abortion views increased tension with the contemporary feminist movement (Coste 2-6). Similarly, various scholars argue that Thatcherism in England "did not pursue women-friendly policies" (Pervis 1016) and that the Party's agenda was just as uninterested in the issues of gender- and income equality as its counterpart in the United States (Pervis 1016; Kent 222; Jackson & Saunders 115).

In both countries, women's loss of bodily control as a result of the growing authority of science and the economic exploitation of the female body were two other major topics of concern reflected in contemporary dystopian fiction (Merchant 149). A number of prominent feminist scholars at the time express a sense of unease about the impact of science on the female body and unanimously trace the roots of this troubling phenomenon back to early modern times (Jacobus et al 3-4; Keller 7; Merchant 149). They believe that "scientists viewed nature as a

passive, female body to penetrate and violate by male reason for the pursuit of knowledge" (Walters 34). As a result of advanced reproductive technology, women's bodies remained equally susceptible to scientific exploitation – if not more – than ever before (Jacobus et al 34). Moreover, according to many feminists, the partnership between the systems of patriarchy and capitalism lies at the core of late twentieth-century issues such as the underrepresentation of women in executive functions, job segregation by sex and consequently the pay gap between the sexes, and the sexual objectification of the female body (Witz 13; Mies 125; Hartmann 138). The above will be elaborated on in the next chapter.

Marge Piercy's *Woman on the Edge of Time* (1976) is a renowned work within women's dystopian science fiction that reflects a wide range of the concerns mentioned previously. Piercy introduces two contrasting versions of the future: the utopian community of Mattapoisett in the year 2137, where inequality has been eradicated, but where women have had to sacrifice their power to reproduce in order to achieve this, and the alternative dystopian future of New York, governed by multinational corporations, where the non-wealthy are forced to live in isolation, people's bodies are owned by the state, and a Big Brother-like system is used to track and monitor citizens (Seabury 140). This misogynistic future bears some resemblances to the dystopian society presented in Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985). The totalitarian regime of Gilead is extremely concerned with the creation of viable Caucasian offspring as "pollution, environmental degradation, and other moral sins of the late twentieth century have produced a precipitous decline in fertility" (Calvin 107). Through strict body politics, they are able to facilitate the oppression of citizens and maintain control over their actions (Matthews 638). Especially Handmaids are subject to exploitation, for the continuation of the population depends on the gift only they still possess: childbearing. Infertility also threatens mankind in the dystopian future of P.D. James' *The Children of Men* (1992), as there have not been any children born since the year Omega, 1995, and humans seem to have become

incapable of producing offspring (James 1.6). The Warden of England, Xan Lyppiatt, and his Council commission medical experts to perform physical examinations and tests in the hopes to find fertile individuals, because "the medical and scientific community has been unsuccessful in utilizing technology to restore fertility or to reproduce through artificial means" (Wilson 90). As is the case in the societies that were previously mentioned, people have lost ownership over their own bodies and any sign of rebellion can have fatal consequences.

In the first chapter, various feminist theories on the exploitation of the female body will be examined, specifically focusing on the impact of the political and economic system and scientific developments at the time. It will analyze the political climate in the United States and England from the late 1970s to the early 1990s, and consider to what extent women's bodies became a tool for political exploitation. Moreover, it will examine how the growing authority of science affected women's autonomy over their bodies. Lastly, it will explore how the system of patriarchal capitalism emerged in England and the United States, what the consequences were for the labor market, and how it helped to sustain the economic exploitation of the female body throughout the late twentieth century. From the second chapter onwards, I will critically explore the three central works. For my analysis of the scientific exploitation of the female body, I will primarily build on seminal feminist theories concerning the relationship between science and women's identity and experience developed in *The Death of Nature: Women, Ecology, and the Scientific Revolution* (1980) by Carolyn Merchant and *Body/Politics: Women and the Discourses of Science* (1990), which was edited by Mary Jacobus, Evelyn Fox Keller and Sally Shuttleworth. For my analysis of the economic exploitation of the female body, I will build on several different theories on patriarchy and capitalism from a number of scholars, but especially that of Maria Mies and Silvia Federici in *Patriarchy and Accumulation on a World Scale: Women in the International Division of Labour* (2014) and Heidi Hartmann in her article "Capitalism, Patriarchy, and Job Segregation by Sex" (1976). Lastly, for my analysis of the

political exploitation of the female body I will similarly build on theories developed by a range of feminist scholars, but especially the works of *Sexism in America Alive, Well, and Ruining Our Future* (2009) by Barbara Berg and *Gender and Power in Britain 1640-1990* (2002) by Susan Kent.

Due to the fact that the three central works used for this thesis were published in different decades, it is necessary to explore this phenomenon in the 1970s, 1980s as well as the early 1990s. The second, third and fourth chapters regard the exploitation of women's bodies in the three central works. This thesis will argue that *Woman on the Edge of Time* (1976), *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985) and *The Children of Men* (1992), from different perspectives, ranging from feminist to Christian traditionalist, castigate the British and American authorities' scientific, political and economic exploitation of the female body in the 1970s, 1980s and early 1990s. The novels are specifically concerned with the decreasing autonomy of women in reproduction. Hopefully, my research will be able to provide a broader perspective on the issues that concerned the feminist movement from the late 1970s to the early 1990s and the ways in which these female writers addressed them at the time.

1 Feminist Theories on the Exploitation of the Female Body

In this chapter I will examine various feminist theories on the scientific, economic, and political exploitation of the female body. The first section will explore the conflicting relationship between science, nature and the female body. The second section will analyze how the latter arguably becomes increasingly vulnerable to exploitation as a result of the medicalization of childbirth in the nineteenth century, and the emergence of assisted reproduction technology (ART) in the second part of the twentieth century. The third section will delve into the histories of patriarchy and capitalism, and explore their ideologies and core values, which many feminists consider the source of the oppression of women's bodies. The fourth section will examine to what extent they jointly reinforce the economic exploitation of the female body. The fifth section will briefly consider the political debates that emerged in pre-industrial Britain and the United States around women's bodily authority, and examine how, during the 1980s until the early 1990s, the Reagan administration in the United States, and, during the late 1970s until the early 1990s, Thatcher's Conservative Party in Britain, employed strict conservative measures, which negatively impacted women's ownership over their bodies according to many feminists, in an attempt to stabilize society.

1.1 Feminist Criticism on the Masculinization of Science

In her groundbreaking work, *The Death of Nature* (1980), historian of science and eco-feminist Carolyn Merchant argues that the roots of the scientific oppression of nature and women's bodies lie in the worldview developed by the founding fathers of modern science (149). She explains that "up until the sixteenth- and seventeenth centuries the earth was widely perceived as "a living organism and nurturing mother" and consequently any act that might potentially cause damage to it was considered unethical (3). However, as a result of a series of technological developments that commenced in the fifteenth century, the Scientific Revolution,

it became impossible to maintain the traditional attitude towards "mother" nature (XVI) and, as Floris Cohen adds, instead "artificial means" became men's weapon to "compel nature to display its properties" (131). Merchant's theory inspired various second-wave feminist scholars, including Maria Mies and Vandana Shiva, Mary Jacobus et al and Evelyn Fox Keller, who similarly attributed the exclusion of women in scientific discourse and the exploitation of women's bodies for scientific purposes to the masculinization of science (Jacobus et al 3-4; Mies & Shiva 176; Keller 33). They argue that this development, led by scientists such as Francis Bacon, who considered science to be the "preserve of men" (Keller 33), forced middle- and upper-class women into a passive social and reproductive role (Mies & Shiva 177-178).

The occupation that arguably was the most significantly impacted by the growing autonomy of masculine science is that of the midwife. Helen Varney, Maria Segal and Leslie Reagan argue that up until the seventeenth century in Britain and the eighteenth century in America, the midwife profession was the domain of women (Varney 35; Segal 55). Over the course of a few centuries, the majority of midwives were replaced by male physicians. This was due to the exclusion of midwives from newly obtained "medical and obstetrical knowledge" (Varney 35), the lack of national training schools for midwives (Segal 64), and the "anti-midwife antiabortion campaigns" (Reagan 90), which suggested that midwives were in fact specialized abortionists and therefore untrustworthy (90-91). At first, this development took place mainly amongst middle-class and upper-class circles, but eventually amongst the lower class as well (Varney 41). Merchant had previously argued that "women began to lose control over midwifery and thus over their own reproductive functions" (154). It can therefore be concluded that Varney's, Segal's and Reagan's research supports that of Merchant.

1.2 Science in Modern Britain and the USA: From the Medicalization of Childbirth to Assisted Reproductive Technology

Mary Jacobus et al argue that "the medicalization of childbirth" that followed in the nineteenth

century only increased scientific authority over the female body (4). A wide range of second-wave feminist scholars have expressed similar concerns regarding this issue and this has resulted in a ""natural" versus "medical" birth debate" that continued throughout the twentieth century and is still ongoing at present (Corradi 218-219). The main arguments of those who oppose to the process of medical birth in the 1980s and early 1990s are that it "enhanced men's power and women's dependence" (249), that most childbirths require little medical intervention (Beckett 256; Jacobus et al 6.3) and that "many women have expressed their dissatisfaction with traditional obstetric care" (Jacobus et al 6.4). And yet during the first half of the twentieth century, feminist campaigners actually supported the "increase in hospital provision" (Davis 84) and according to (inter)national field research that has been conducted by a number of scholars including Benyamini et al, Robbie Davis-Floyd, and Bonnie Fox and Diana Worts, most women in The United States and Britain have continuously preferred "medical birth" over "natural birth" due to the security it appears to provide (Benyamini et al 425; Corradi 220).

Although some feminist scholars claim that the medicalization of childbirth enables physicians' exploitation of women's bodies, Angela Davis argues that "historians of women's health have shown how the relationships between women and medicine are considerably more nuanced" than their analyses make you believe (106-107). According to her, women's attitudes towards medical birth are ambivalent, and their experiences are largely dependent on a variety of related factors, such as how they were treated by the medical professionals and whether they were included in the decision-making process of potential procedures and technical interventions that were carried out (107). She explains that, naturally, women who felt content with their treatment and experienced a sense of involvement throughout the entire process have a different attitude towards medicalization than those who did not. Davis' research is supported by that of Benyamini et al, who have found that "there seems to be a continuum of attitudes towards medicalization and every woman is somewhere along this continuum" (425).

An even more controversial topic that divided feminists in both countries throughout the second part of the twentieth century was assisted/artificial reproduction (Jacobus et al 6.35; Mies & Shiva 185; Richards et al 298). Procedures such as in vitro fertilization (IVF), egg donation and surrogacy emerged in the late 1970s (Rosen & Twamley 156; Richards 290; Jacobson 19), but would not be regulated by the British government until 1990, and although the American Congress supposedly imposed on all US clinics that perform ART procedures to provide annual data from 1992 onwards (Jacobson 22), there was and has been "little regulation at state level" according to Martin Richards et al (93) compared to in Britain. What alarmed a substantial subgroup of feminists even before these procedures got regulated, is that, similarly to nature, the female body seems to have become an object ready to be dissected by masculine science. This group includes eco-feminists, who are particularly concerned with the connections between women and nature (Jacobus et al 6.34-35; Woliver 123; Corradi 254-258; Mies & Shiva 184; Beckett 259). From their perspective, the fact that sex has been separated "from reproduction and genetics from gestation" allows medical experts to establish the domination of technology over the female reproductive organs (Phillips 66). Consequently, rather than remaining a natural process, motherhood becomes a controlled synthetic process.

Although most feminists acknowledge the benefits of assisted/artificial reproduction, some fear that these procedures have been developed in order to erase women from reproduction and childbearing altogether in the future (Jacobus et al 6.34-35). Others are concerned about the (potential) side effects. The former group hints at the possibility of a future in which children are produced through the use of "an artificial womb" (Jacobus et al 35; Corradi 258), also referred to as ectogenesis. The latter suggest that we have to reconsider the ethics of assisted/artificial technology, as the procedures can cause women to experience traumas and anxieties, or can lead to complications (Corradi 260; Richards et al 37; Mies & Shiva 187) such as the ovarian hyperstimulation syndrome.

There are in fact very few feminist scholars "to date [who] have articulated other than the most negative attitudes towards "reproductive machines" (Aristarkhova 52). Therefore the suggestion made by radical feminist scholar Shulamith Firestone in *The Dialectic of Sex* (1970) that perhaps ART and ectogenesis will become the solution to the scientific exploitation of women's bodies and will free them of their reproductive responsibilities (10.11) is extremely significant in this discussion. From her perspective, women do not have to endure the pain of conceiving a child and bear the responsibilities of the continuation of the human race on their own (Gelfland & Shook 116). Debra Kirkley explains that in the future Firestone envisions, "reproduction would be achieved technologically, children would be raised by a collective group of adults, and the tyranny of the biologic family would be broken" (461). This potential future reality is explored by Piercy six years after Firestone's work was published in *Woman on the Edge of Time*, in which she indirectly addresses the arguments of Firestone and those involved in the discussion who oppose to artificial/assisted reproduction.

The above shows that the opinions on the medicalization of childbirth and the emergence of ART are extremely divided. To me, the medicalization of childbirth appears to be a positive development in the sense that women feel more comfortable knowing that they are closely supervised before, during and after giving birth, and medical experts can immediately take action once they foresee potential complications. At the same time, I understand feminists' concerns about the lack of bodily authority women can experience during the process. I am equally divided when it comes to the discussion on ART, as the future envisioned by radical feminists such as Firestone does not appear to give women more autonomy over their bodies, and instead strips them of their exclusive bodily capacities. However, I do believe women who are incapable of conceiving without assistance should have access to alternative methods of becoming pregnant such as IVF, egg donation and surrogate motherhood At the same time I also endorse the view of critics that these procedures can

facilitate the exploitation of women's bodies. In short, I occupy a neutral position within these debates.

1.3 Economics in Pre-Industrial Britain and the USA: the Emergence of Patriarchy and Capitalism

For a long time scholars unanimously believed that in pre-industrial Britain and the United States the division of labor[1] within private family life prevented the majority of women from actively engaging in public life (Witz 15; Freedman 24). They argued that men took it upon them to provide for their families economically. Therefore, the public world became their domain, while women's role revolved around childbearing and mothering and therefore they were confined to the private sphere (Hartmann 141). Individual men's control over women in their families became "sustained by social institutions, such as the state and religion" and this way the patriarchal system was established in both countries (see Hartmann 146; Dubois 23-24; Mutari & Figart 47). Radical feminist scholar Kate Millett explains that at the core of the patriarchal ideology lie "policies with regard to temperament [the formation of human personality along stereotyped lines of sex category ("masculine" and "feminine")] role [code of conduct, gesture and attitude for each sex] and status" (2.6). It is due to the existence of the second category, role, that women became "arrested at the level of biological experience" (2.6) Over the course of the twentieth century, however, many scholars have found that although the separate sphere ideology was promoted by Christian fundamentalists, it was not as strongly engraved in society as was previously believed and although "our private spaces and our public

[1] Scholars believed this division originated from prehistoric times, as the transition from hunter-gatherer societies to agrarian societies led people to start living in permanent communities (Weisdorf 561; Olsson & Pike 199; Bowles & Choi 36). Whereas men became the providers in these small family based groups, women's social role started to revolve around the family (Iversen 19). There are scholars such as J.J. Bachofen, Lewis Morgan and Frederick Engels who believe that around this time prehistoric matriarchal society developed into a patriarchy (Ruether 21). It is essential to mention, however, that there is disconsent amongst scholars regarding this topic, as not everyone is convinced that matriarchies actually existed (Bennett 38; Ruether 22; Beauvoir 2.5).

spaces are in many important senses gendered" (Davidson et al 55), the notion that these spheres were separate and fixed is simply inaccurate (54-55). As Stacy Braukman and Michael Ross explain, non-wealthy families "needed the wages of both spouses in order to survive" and consequently both men and women oftentimes were forced to enter the labor market (60). In short, women's control over their bodies was not as threatened by social institutions as scholars had initially claimed.

And yet the impact of religious discourses must not be underestimated, as they convinced many religious women that their reproductive organs made them "more interior" beings than men (Fessenden 470) and that they were "the more physical, lustful and material side of human nature, contrasting with the more spiritual, rational and intellectual male" (Schmidt & Voss 92). Those who were fiercely dedicated to their religion, nuns, would voluntarily spend their entire existence behind the closed doors of the monastery, to prevent their bodies from becoming corrupted by the temptations of society Their mutual goal was to "conquer and contain their physicality" (Schmidt & Voss 92). Significantly, radical feminist Mary Daly adds that nuns, by distancing themselves from women's reproductive purpose, were able to take on the masculine role (208-209) and perform male duties within convents.

The rise of European capitalism throughout the fifteenth to eighteenth centuries initially appeared to be a threat to religious, patriarchal values (Hartmann 138-139; Mutari & Figart 47; Neal & Williamson 505), as "capitalist employment relations […] first developed in areas of female employment", which led to an increase in female employment (Johnson 197). However, it soon became evident that women's position in the wage-labor market was "as limited by capitalism as it was by patriarchy" (Hartmann 152). Not only were women still paid significantly less than men, they were confronted with sex segregation in the workplace and remained incapable of attaining leadership functions (Walby 185). It is important to keep in mind that the system of capitalism did not emerge in the United States until well into the

nineteenth century (Engerman & Gallman 470), but American women at the time were faced with similar issues in the workplace as in Britain (Neal & Williamson 19). In short, in both Britain and the United States, women's bodies were treated as empty vessels useful for masculine authoritative figures to gain economic profit.

Feminist scholars are divided when it comes to the relationship between the oppression and exploitation of women and their bodies and the systems of patriarchy and capitalism (Witz 13; Johnson 195; Kent 218). Some, mainly radical feminists, argue that "capitalism is a product of patriarchy" (Johnson 195), and they believe that the exploitation of the female body stems primarily from the patriarchal structure of society (Millett 2.2; Beauvoir 2.10), whereas others, mainly socialist- and eco-feminists, argue that capitalism and patriarchy are two separate systems that form a "partnership" to dominate women's bodies (Witz 14; Hartmann 139; Walby 54; Mies 126; Oksala 221; Eisenstein 27), referred to mostly as "capitalist-patriarchy" or "patriarchal capitalism". Without going into an in-depth analysis of this discussion in an attempt to determine which alternative is more plausible, I will continue by analyzing to what extent the systems of patriarchy and capitalism regulate the exploitation of the female body in the 1980s and early 1990s according to feminist scholars.

1.4 Economics in Modern Britain and the USA: The Consequences of Patriarchy and Capitalism

In the 1980s, female citizens in the United States were promised "equal economic opportunity" by the federal government (Chappell 117), but were left disillusioned when they refused to actively "promote gender equality" (117). The same can be said for female citizens in Britain, as the British government was equally unconcerned with the issue of "equal pay" (Purvis 1016; Kent 222; Jackson & Saunders 115). Moreover, several women reportedly experienced discrimination at work or resentment "when making leave for family related commitments" such as maternity leave (Karsten 110). On top of this, many women who were employed,

particularly low-wage workers were – and still are – reportedly exposed to violence and/or harassment at work (Kristen et al 170-171). In short, although women were accepted participants of the labor market, they still faced gender discrimination and their bodies remained the site of exploitation. According to Hartmann, the economic exploitation of the female body in the 1980s and early 1990s is the direct result of both the patriarchal- and capitalist systems (167), a claim which is acknowledged by Maria Mies and Silvia Federici, who explain that these issues will continue to exist until we eradicate "capitalist-patriarchal man-woman relations" (Mies & Federici 132). Chappell also agrees with Hartmann, but highlights that working class- and ethnic/racial minority women in both countries were even more vulnerable to exploitation than those who belonged to the middle- and upper classes of society (Chappell 117) as they also faced discrimination and abuse based on the color of their skin.

Another topic of concern, as was already mentioned in the previous section, was the technological and medical advancements that resulted in the emergence of the artificial/assisted reproduction market. What has not been addressed, however, is feminists' concerns about the marketization of artificial reproduction "and its implications for women" and their bodies (Jacobus et al 6.35; Rosen & Twamley 159; Corradi 263). Martin Richards et al and Heather Jacobson explain that with the emergence of the global AR market it became impossible to regulate the execution of these procedures (Jacobson 19) and consequently especially women in poorer countries were susceptible to exploitation as their bodies became a potential source of income for male relatives (Richards 44). It is not difficult to see why some feminists "draw parallels between the ability to earn through use of one's body in prostitution and in surrogacy" (Rosen & Twamley 159). The majority of feminists at the time disapproved of this phenomenon for it appeared to be just another opportunity for capitalist-patriarchal men to economically exploit the female body (Mies & Shiva 200), but there are others who, as long as it is done voluntarily, consider it women's free choice to engage in these procedures.

1.5 Politics in Modern Britain and the USA

In the nineteenth- and early twentieth century, women's lack of bodily autonomy in marriage (Dubois 169), together with a wide range of related issues became increasingly critiqued and became a topic of (inter)national political debate (Brown 8; Griffin 80, 100; Hall & Rose 121). These issues ranged from the fact that women were not allowed to vote and were therefore not acknowledged as autonomous individuals (Freedman 25; Dubois 23) to the illegality of abortion (McBride 247). Ben Griffin argues that in Britain, politicians were "reluctant to accept […] changes to women's rights" (109), especially because they refused to acknowledge that women's criticism applied not only to the average man, but also to themselves (109). Anne Costain believes that the previously mentioned issues also challenged American politicians, and actually divided the Republican and Democratic parties (114). Equal rights- and pro-choice activist groups at the time such as the National Federation of Business and Professional Women's Clubs and the National Association of Women Law were either "formally or informally allied" with the former, whereas Democratic supporters were generally against embedding these rights to women (116). In this section I will explore how, throughout the second part of the twentieth century, in both the United States and Britain, political debate regarding women's bodily authority intensified and abortion would remain a controversial topic of state concern.

Up until the 1960s, the strict laws on abortion that had been "enacted between 1821 and 1880 (McBride 248) remained unchanged, but its defenders, supported by the Catholic church, were faced with criticism from the women's rights movement in the progressive era that followed (Kent 216; McBride 254; O'Connor et al 162). Susan Kent argues that in Britain, both men and women in this particular period experienced new freedom surrounding sex, amongst others due to the availability of contraception (216). Julia O'Connor et al support this claim and add that "[bodily] pleasure and autonomy in [one's] personal life" (162) became central. Near

the end of the decade, the efforts of women's movements payed off and resulted in the legalization of abortion after 1967 (162-163). This was a significant step for feminists who had considered it their exclusive right to be able to request having an abortion (Coste 2). Throughout these decades, women's organizations such as the League of Women Voters and the American Association of University Women "continued to play an important role" in the lives of American female citizens (Blair 12) and the women's movement was in "a full growth stage" (McBride 258). However, amongst British Conservatives and American Republicans "the sense that a general breakdown in morality had occurred" (Kent 216) grew stronger.

From 1979 until 1990, Thatcherism became the political ideology of the British Conservatist Party (Pilcher 493). Their program idealized Victorian patriarchal values, which, as we have learned, base the female body's worth on its reproductive abilities (Kent 215), and emphasized "law and order, ideological coherence, and hierarchy" (Bashevkin 533). Many women rejoiced the fact that Britain had elected its first female prime minister (Jackson & Saunders 121), but over the course of time the party's agenda proved to clash with "many feminist priorities" (526), and various feminist scholars agree that Margaret Thatcher and her party in reality did little to protect the bodily authority of the average British woman (Jackson & Saunders 118; Purvis 1016; Kent 215). Especially the introduction of a number of bills that prohibited abortion at first, and later on allowed it only under special circumstances outraged many feminists and it is during these years that their autonomy declined (McBride 153). However, despite pro-life campaigns led by anti-abortion groups[2] becoming very outspoken during these years (O'Connor et al 169), British feminists could count on European Community

[2] Especially in the United States, the pro-life vs. pro-choice conflict has again become the subject of intense public debate as of recently. American pro-life electors in a number of states have ratified constitutional amendments which limit women's reproductive autonomy. This will be addressed in more detail in Chapter 3.

influence to "circumvent traditional parliamentary politics" to at least some extent (Bashevkin 291) and by the beginning of the 1990s abortion had become more accessible to British women.

Reagan was elected president of the United States in 1980, but as opposed to Thatcher, he had experienced much criticism during his campaign from feminists and women's groups in general (Coste 4). The reforms he introduced during his presidency were "theoretically gender-neutral," but proved to be disadvantageous for especially ethnic women and single mothers (5). During the 1980s, he voted against the Women's Economic Equity Act, refused to promote gender equality (Chappell 117-119) and on top of this, he hired "a number of vocally antiabortion figures to his administration" to please the Christian Right,[3] who had supported him during his campaign (Jeffries 196). This movement idealized the patriarchal separate spheres ideology and the traditional family structure, and organized campaigns against abortion, women's equity and the sexual revolution (Williams 105). Naturally, their agenda outraged and worried contemporary feminists. Similarly to their predecessors, the members of the New Christian Right[4] of the 1980s also aligned themselves with the Republican Party (Williams 195). Barbara Berg claims that during this decade the female body became a site of political exploitation as a result of this alliance (Berg 61-62). Women's bodies were "turned into pawns of Reagan's ideological agenda" (62). Consequently, abortion became a state concern in the United States, and inhabited "a place of political importance" until well into the 1990s (McBride 247; Jeffries 212). Tension between pro-choice organizations such as the National Organization for Women and NARAL Pro-Choice America (Staggenborg 126; 130), and pro-life supporters such as members of the New Christian Right increased near the end of the 1980s, as many feminists realized women's reproductive rights became increasingly threatened and

[3] The Christian Right was a loose network of religious organizations and pressure groups that had emerged in the United States immediately following the Civil War, but began to rapidly gain support from the 1970s onwards. (Wilcox 54-55).

[4] During the late 1970s, "a new set of organizations on the Christian Right were formed" (Wilcox 47; Mckeegan 128), which resulted in the emergence of the New Christian Right in the 1980s (Wilcox 48).

they could not expect any state support (McBride 289). As a result, feminists' activities began to revolve around the upcoming elections (Freeman 98), and the early 1990s were marked by a sense of relief, as the Democratic Clinton administration lifted several of the restrictive abortion policies that had been implemented by the Reaganites (O'Connor et al 177) and the Christian Right started to experience "repeated setbacks" (Williams 214; Lienesch 3) which threatened their authority.

1.6 Conclusion

This chapter has shown that from the 1970s to the early 1990s, the scientific, economic, and political climate in Britain and the United States underwent some fundamental changes. Over the course of this period, many feminists became increasingly concerned about the potential consequences of the emergence of assisted reproductive technology for women's bodily health. Furthermore, a substantial group of feminists expressed their anger about the ways in which those in charge of the capitalist labor market continued to subjugate women's labor and their bodies for their own benefit, and how the international artificial/assisted reproduction market became a lucrative industry to make money by commodifying women's wombs. In addition, the rise of right-wing politicians in both countries threatened women's bodily authority, as due to their alliance with Christian fundamentalist movements such as the American Christian Right, they began to advocate the patriarchal separate spheres ideology and attempted to deprive women of their exclusive right to have an abortion. The contextual material presented in this chapter is essential for understanding the novels that will be analyzed in this thesis, as the writers, from different perspectives ranging from feminist to Christian traditionalist, critically engage with the contemporary developments in society.

2 The Exploitation of the Female Body in Piercy's *Woman on the Edge of Time*

Woman on the Edge of Time, written by the American feminist writer and activist Marge Piercy, was published during a time of transition: a time, the previous chapter showed, in which feminists in The United States and Britain were about to be confronted with the potential threats posed to women's ownership of their bodies by societal developments such as the rise of right-wing politicians and Christian fundamentalists, and advancements in reproductive technology. The novel presents three societies: the New York of 1976 and two alternative futures: a utopia in which women are liberated and their bodies are equal to men's and a dystopia in which they become exploited, empty vessels, intended to satisfy the needs of others. In Piercy's narrative "the future depends upon the choices made in the present" (Calvin 52). More specifically, it depends upon the choices made by the poor, middle-aged, Mexican-American protagonist named Consuela "Connie" Comacho Ramos, who is a resident of the New York of 1976. She is confronted with social phenomena such as gender-based violence, scientists and medical experts' experimentation on women's wombs, and lower-class women being driven to prostitution by poverty. Piercy "returns to these themes in the alternative futures" the protagonist visits (Seabury 133) in order to reveal how patriarchy, capitalism and masculine science are jointly responsible for the exploitation of the the female body.

This chapter will argue that *Woman on the Edge of Time* reflects contemporary feminists' concerns about the authority of masculine science and patriarchal capitalism. It simultaneously takes a controversial stance on the feminist debate of the 1970s on women's loss of bodily autonomy by advocating the externalization of the reproductive process, getting rid of gender binaries, and expressing the desire to return to an agricultural, self-sustaining society. I will first briefly explore the two alternative futures, which I well then place in relation

to one another, and to a minimal extent to the present too, although my main focus will be on the representation of these issues in the utopia of Mattapoisett and the dystopia of New York.

It is safe to say that the two future scenarios contradict each other in every way fathomable. Connie initially reports seeing a river, some pine trees, ordinary farm animals and a number of underwhelming, oddly-shaped buildings when she is first transported into the future – her consciousness travels into the future, but her body remains in the present[5] - by an androgynous time traveler and scientist named Luciente (Piercy 3.14-15). Nothing indicates that she finds herself in the year 2137. She reaches the underwhelming conclusion that this low-tech future does not even remotely resemble the high-tech urban society she had envisioned. However, overtime she learns that a number of fundamental scientific, economic, and political developments have occurred which have enabled the community of Mattapoisett to create a moral, technologically-advanced society (Cramer 231). Her visit to the dystopian alternative future of New York becomes an entirely different experience. Connie is unable to explore this society as she is telepathically connected to an anatomically bizarre woman named Gildina, who is rarely allowed to leave her windowless apartment on the one hundred twenty-sixth floor of one of the many skyscrapers in town. But it is through conversing with her, that Connie learns that New York has become a totalitarian society in which "already-existing problems of oppression, environmental destruction, class difference and sexual exploitation" (Booker 340) in 1976 New York have intensified.

[5] Time travel had become one of the most popular tropes of speculative fiction and the scientific film genre by the 1950s and 1960s (Roberts 415; Webb 119). Around this time, hypnotists and psychologists became particularly interested in exploring the human mind and the ability to control the spirit (Genter 165). Their fascination for the human psyche spilled over to the people, amongst others as a result of the publication of the international bestseller *Bridey Murphy*, written by Morey Bernstein (Gravitz 8). This novel "purports to be the account of a young woman, who, under hypnosis, remembers a past life in Ireland from 1798 to 1864" (Lecron 5). According to Robert Genter, this publication led to an explosive interest in "astral projection, soul travel, out-of-body experiences, and past life regression" (167). It was therefore not uncommon for writers to experiment with the concept of time traveling as it fit peoples' interests at the time.

First and foremost, Piercy controversially suggests that the externalization of the reproductive process could liberate the female body from the authority of masculine science (Wilson 91; Rudy 26, 30; Tyler 60; Kirkley 461; Silbergleid 161). One of the inhabitants of Mattapoisett, Luciente, explains that "huge corporations and the Pentagon" no longer control what is worth researching as opposed to in Connie's time (Piercy 14.9). The community's scientific agenda now revolves exclusively around the improvement of bodily health and the overall well-being of the people, and scientists are extremely conscious about their treatment of the human body. In contrast to how science is organized in the New York of 1976, ordinary citizens of Mattapoisett are able to influence scientific discourse by attending and actively contributing in town meetings in which scientists' dilemmas are discussed (Cramer 231; Piercy 14.8). Perhaps the most groundbreaking and controversial scientific achievement that has been realized as a result, is the invention of the brooder, "a type of factory that produces and incubates foetuses" (McBean 49). This invention enables artificial reproduction and thus separates reproduction from sexual intercourse (Trainor 32; Neverow 26). Moreover, according to the inhabitants of Mattapoisett, it combats racism as it breaks the "bond between genes and cultures" (Piercy 5.12). Controversially, it has also resulted in women being completely stripped of their exclusive reproductive abilities.

Bethan Tyler is one of the few scholars to evaluate to what extent Mattapoisett can be considered a utopia. She acknowledges that the concept of the brooder "negates the importance of maternity as a part of womanhood and […] eliminates freedom of choice" (60). By visualizing that which many feminists feared the most, the invention of an artificial womb, Piercy clearly responds to the assisted/artificial reproduction discussion in the second half of the twentieth century (Kirkley 460-461). Connie is initially aghast when she learns that pregnancy no longer occurs inside women's wombs, as she believes that "they [women] had abandoned to men the last refuge of women" (Piercy 7.11). Whereas her opinion on artificial

reproduction mirrors that of feminist scholars such as Jacobus et al, Woliver, Corradi, Mies and Shieva, and Beckett, who similarly argue that science aims to erase women from the reproductive process in order to facilitate the oppression of their bodies, Piercy's utopia resembles Firestone's vision of the ideal future in which artificial reproduction is realized, women will achieve equality and their bodies will no longer be "biologically enchained" (Piercy 5.14; Kirkley 462) by masculine science.

In contrast, the dystopia of New York functions as a warning against the female body becoming increasingly susceptible to exploitation by masculine science. Its agenda is determined by corporations and the elite to the point where it is no longer used as a means to achieve gender- or racial equality as in the community of Mattapoisett. Instead it is used in order to achieve financial gains and to destroy human beings ownership over their bodies – especially that of women (Booker 340; Rzepa 235). As opposed to in Mattapoisett, science strictly remains the domain of scientists in this alternative future and its agenda is minimally concerned with people's physical health or overall wellbeing (Rzepa 233-234). Due to the influence of corporations and the elite, also referred to as "multies" and "richies," medical or scientific knowledge has become inaccessible to ordinary citizens (Piercy 15.8). Moreover, they constantly run the risk of becoming the site of scientific exploitation as those in charge can either use them as "walking organ banks" (15.7) or, in the case of women, as reproductive machines or experimental subjects of body modification (Neverow 24). Connie describes Gildina's physique as artificial-looking: "a cartoon of femininity" with a "tiny waist, enormous sharp breasts, a flat stomach, oversized and audaciously curved hips and buttocks" (Piercy 15.2), and she reports that Gildina seems to experience difficulties walking as a result.

According to Elisabetta di Minico, in this society, "women's identity is destroyed in order to be re-constructed and chained to denigrating values of beauty and behavior" (10). This notion is illustrated by Gildina's confession to having undergone procedures since the age of

fifteen in order to meet the beauty standard for women (Piercy 15.3). This includes operations which gradually bleached her skin, revealing that women of color are perceived as inferior in the eyes of the masculine authorities (Di Minico 10). "Moms" are excused from undergoing these procedures, because their bodies are purely reserved for reproduction (Piercy 15.5). The fact that masculine science has obtained authority over women's wombs suggests that those in charge have realized one of contemporary feminists' biggest fears: women losing their reproductive autonomy.

The system of patriarchal capitalism is dismissed as an evil of the enemy – the corporations and elite of New York – in Mattapoisett, which, *Woman on the Edge of Time* suggests, has enabled the achievement of a moral, self-sustaining economy (Rudy 31; Cramer 231). Money is no longer used as a means of payment, men and women work together to cultivate the land and everyone contributes to the upbringing of the younger generations. As was discussed earlier, the invention of the brooder has enabled the inhabitants to get rid of gender-specific tasks. This revised division of labor is incompatible with the profit-oriented values of patriarchal capitalism (Kirkley 461), which, as mentioned earlier, various feminist scholars in the 1970s and 1980s considered the biggest catalyst of the economic exploitation of women's bodies. Apart from a subtle reference to this system, the inhabitants of Mattapoisett express no interest in concerning themselves with this system any longer (Piercy 3.15; 13.14). Near the end of chapter 10, two of the inhabitants of Mattapoisett, Luciente and Bolivar, evaluate the original state of the labor market and the economic positions of their people:

> "Our history isn't a set of axioms." Bolivar spoke slowly, firmly. "I guess, I see the original division of labor, that first dichotomy, as enabling later divvies into haves and have-nots, powerful and powerless, enjoyers and workers, rapists and victims. The patriarchal mind/body split turned the body to machine and the rest of the universe into booty on which the will

> could run rampant, using, discarding, destroying." Luciente nodded. "Yet I can't see male and female as equally to blame, for one had power and the other was property." (10.29)

Through this discussion, Piercy shares her perspective on the unethical treatment of women's bodies by men who controlled the labor market. Similarly to feminist scholars such as Witz, Hartmann, Walby, Mies, Oksala and Eisenstein, she stresses the role of patriarchy in the creation of a misogynistic economic system in which women's bodies become "property." The fact that there is no place for patriarchal capitalism in the utopian society of Mattapoisett and those who still incorporate this system are depicted as the enemy, suggests that she also endorses Hartmann, Mies and Federici, and Chapell's view that it is an intrinsically evil system. In its absence, potential social injustices such as violence towards women, the wage gap, and the renting out of the female body out of financial need, which concerned feminists in the 1970s and early 1980s, are indeed inexistent in this society as everyone is financially equal and well cared for by the community. As the presence of the scientist Erzulia confirms, individuals of color, as well as their bodily capacities, are equally valued in Mattapoisett (Piercy 8.25). Through her, Piercy "addresses the issue of the absence of black women (and men) in the upper strata of the science profession's hierarchy" in the 1970s (Maciunas 256). By including this character in the utopian society of Mattapoisett, Piercy reveals that she is aware of the real-life concerns of sociologists and feminists (see Chappell 117) about the lack of working opportunities for ethnic/racial minority women throughout the second part of the twentieth century.

Piercy strongly condemns the dystopian society of New York and the patriarchal-capitalist system that lies at its foundation (Silbergleid 158). Here, non-wealthy female citizens are presented with limited working opportunities and the female body is subjected to systematic economic exploitation by avaricious corporate conglomerates (Kirkley 460; Rzepa 234;

Neverow 17). Vara Neverow argues that these corporations "are the manifestation of "patriarchal capitalism" and that "feminism has to struggle against all capitalist-patriarchal relations, beginning with the man-woman relation, to the relation of human beings to nature […] [all of which] are interrelated" (17), a notion which I will come back to below. It is female middle-class citizens whose bodies are the most susceptible to exploitation due to the system of patriarchal capitalism, as the acts of sexual intercourse for the sake of pleasure and for the sake of reproduction have become their social responsibilities, and performing either one of these acts for a living becomes their only way to generate income (Di Minico 8,10). In theory, this means that women are tied to stringent contracts that determine for what particular time period they are expected to serve a certain male citizen and in the case of "moms," they also state the amount of children that must be produced (Piercy 15.3-4). This is a reference to the types of contracts that are concluded by some women in 1976 New York such as Connie's cousin Dolly (Maciunas 252-253), and also to the real-life situation of lower-class women and those living in third world countries who are forced by their male relatives to become surrogate mothers or to enter prostitution in the twentieth century. This is a clear instance in which literature closely mirrors reality, as in all scenarios, the female body is turned into a product to be selected and purchased, and women are subjected to masculine force and violence throughout the process.

A number of controversial structural reforms have been carried out in Mattapoisett that have enabled a self-governed, egalitarian society in which the female body is freed from its reproductive abilities, and therefore no longer susceptible to political exploitation (Silbergleid 170-172). One of the most significant reforms that the community of Mattapoisett has introduced, is the demolishment of the norm of the nuclear family unit, which had prevailed up until that point, and having it replaced by a family unit consisting of "three parents, of either sex, who [voluntarily] co-parent" (O'Byrne 5; Kirkley 461; Neverow 26). As various feminist

scholars have argued over the years, the traditional family structure facilitated male oppression over individual women and their bodies as the former were granted sovereignty over the latter as the official head of the household, a role division which was supported by the Church (see Hartmann 146; Dubois 23-24; Mutari & Figart 47; Millett 2.6). Moreover, labor was, to a certain extent, divided within these units based on women's exclusive reproductive abilities. In the United States of the 1970s, tension emerged around the "social changes in [traditional] family relations" due to technological developments such as the widespread availability of contraception, social factors such as the "urbanization/suburbanization of the family," and political developments such as the rise of the Christian Right (Pankhurst & Houseknecht 8). Piercy's revised family structure presents a solution to this conflict, as it allows for men and women to share their social responsibilities (Silbergleid 166). As the community is governed by the people, and the religious authorities that used to heavily influence politics have been dethroned (Piercy 14.9-10), the authoritative leaders who used to facilitate the political exploitation of women's bodies are inexistent in this society. The previous chapter addressed the growing popularity of the Christian Right in the United States in the 1970s and reveals that this movement concerned contemporary feminists. The fact that religion is absent in Piercy's utopia, combined with the fact that she has denounced the traditional union of one man and one woman suggests that she, too, was critical of its agenda.

Another reform was the demolishment of "gender institutionalization (Maciunas 249). The community not only got rid of the contemporary gender binaries of male/female and masculine/feminine (Rzepa 232-233), but instead of categorizing the inhabitants, they are "grouped together loosely under the concept of androgyny" (Annas 146). The academic debate on androgyny over the course of the twentieth century brought forward a number of potential definitions for the term. The one that stands out due to the ambivalent responses it has received, is that of analytical psychologist June Singer, who defines it as "a specific way of joining the

masculine and the feminine aspects of a single human being" (22). Some psychologists and feminist scholars would consider this a positive cultural development (see June Singer 27-28; Marilyn Holly 94; Barbara Charlesworth Gelpi 157). Others, mainly radical feminist scholars, believe this development would devalue womanhood and relies on "a masculinist epistemology" (see Megan M. Burke 16; Mary Daly 387; Julia Kristeva 71). It is important to be aware of this discussion, as it places Piercy's thought experiment on the demolishment of gender institutionalization in a larger context and reveals that in this particular work she responded to the contemporary criticism of androgyny. In her fictional utopia, due to the cultural shift towards androgyny, individuals are liberated from the attributes, behaviors, and roles that were previously imposed on humans (Annas 155). Significantly, the female body has even started to resemble the male body (Piercy 3.12.13). Connie reports that those we would consider female based on stereotypical physical features such as the length of their hair or the softness of their face, radiate an unusual masculine air, and are brawnier than the women of her time (3.12.13). In short, in Mattapoisett, androgyny enabled women to transcend the boundaries of femininity and experience newfound bodily freedom and strength as a result.

Together with the reforms that have been implemented by the community of Mattapoisett within the male-female relation, Kim Trainor argues, the revised "decision-making procedures, the councils, the ceremonies" and the lack of a political hierarchy, ensure that the individual becomes protected in Mattapoisett, rather than susceptible to exploitation by those in charge (37). Robin Silbergleid confirms Trainor's claim and concludes that Piercy seems to suggest that "we must consider individualism, citizenship, and social structure through new narrative eyes" (175) if we want to achieve a self-governed, egalitarian society in which the female body is safeguarded.

In the alternative future of New York, "the female body has become a political vessel and an object to promote/impose" the agenda of multinationals that rely solely on traditional

patriarchal authoritarianism (Di Minico 12). Consequently, it becomes susceptible to male-inflicted violence (Duplessis 3). The obscenely wealthy multis that govern society have stripped women of their reproductive rights and they have succeeded in controlling citizens through the introduction of misogynistic body politics (Neverow 17). Their ideology deems non-wealthy women's bodies to be empty vessels, useful for the continuation of the human race, scientific experimentation, the pleasures of men, and for obtaining economic profit. By imposing upon them strict rules that are stated in their contracts, non-wealthy women are excluded from the political narrative – this is also the case for non-wealthy men, but women's bodies are the main focus of political exploitation – and imprisoned within their own bodies as they are stripped of their individuality and become mere numbers to those in charge. (Rudy 37). Apart from damaging the female body through misogynistic politics, the multis indirectly increase the risk of physical abuse of women by evoking aggressive behaviors in male citizens (Duplessis 3). Whereas little is known about lower- and upper-class women's experiences with male-inflicted violence in the future of New York, it is revealed that lower-class women in Connie's time live in poor neighborhoods where "gender-based violence, prostitution, and drugs are common and almost "contagious" (Di Minico 7). Their situation, to a certain extent, mirrors that of middle-class women in the dystopian future as they are exposed on a daily basis to armed male handlers who wiretap their "contracty" at all times. They are programmed to become "fighting machines" through mind control, and we are told that they can be turned into assassins through "superneurotransmitters ready to be released" at any point deemed necessary (Piercy 15.16). As Joanna Bourke explains: "to eradicate women's resistance, dystopia wages against feminine bodies a political war in which "the penis [man] is explicitly coded as a weapon" (379). In short, in the patriarchal society of New York, the female body becomes the ultimate site of exploitation and is often exposed to male-inflicted violence.

All in all, it becomes evident that the two alternative futures presented in *Woman on the Edge of Time* conceal Piercy's criticism of the lack of women's ownership over their bodies in contemporary society. The dystopia of New York reflects the concerns of feminists in the 1970s about the authority of masculine science, patriarchal capitalism and the body politics of upcoming conservative (religious) groups, as the female body literally becomes state property. Piercy demonstrates a world in which corporations, scientists and the elite determine how many children female citizens must conceive in order to gain profit for the state; where women are forced to undergo procedures in order to contribute to scientific progress and where they are excluded from the political debate concerning their own bodies. Although many will consider it an implausible prospect, she warns against this potential future and suggests that, instead, rebuilding our society based on the model of Mattapoisett could help us to eradicate all social injustices existing in the 1970s. Perhaps the most controversial ideals presented in *Woman on the Edge of Time* are the externalization of the reproductive process and the creation of an agricultural, androgynous society, as they stand in direct opposition to the values of many contemporary feminists. Similarly to Firestone, Piercy does not necessarily associate the sacrifice of women's exclusive reproductive ability with the agenda of masculine science in contrast to many feminists at the time. On top of this, she challenges critics of the concept of androgyny by getting rid of social binaries and depicting a harmonious society in which this phenomenon has liberated all human beings.

3 The Exploitation of the Female Body in Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*

Feminists' anxieties about the growing authority of science over women's reproductive organs and the rise of political and religious conservatism in Britain and the United States heightened over the course of the 1980s (Ritch 52; Di Minico 3). One of the most acclaimed dystopian novels of the period, *The Handmaid's Tale,* written by the Canadian feminist writer Margaret Atwood, was published in 1985. It is particularly concerned with the United States' embrace of (religious) conservativism (Pahl 83; Beauchamp 12, 15) and the implications of commercial surrogacy for women's bodies (Levaque 527). The narrative is set in the dystopian Republic of Gilead, a new state established after the American government has been overtaken by a group of fundamentalist Christians called the Sons of Jacob. In this fictional society, "woman's body becomes the territory to master; female sexuality is harnessed for the "higher good" of the body politic, and viable ovaries become a "national resource"" (Kauffman 226). In other words, women's bodies are employed based on their usefulness to men (Bouson 137). Through the female protagonist Offred – her name already indicates that she is someone else's possession – we learn that non-fictional social phenomena in the 1980s such as the authorities' crusade against abortion, and the questionable procedures of the surrogacy industry (discussed in Chapter 2) also affect women in the fictional future society of Gilead and have grown increasingly problematic.

This chapter will argue that *The Handmaid's Tale* reflects contemporary feminists' concerns about the restrictions imposed on women's sexual and reproductive rights by the Republican Party and the New Christian Right in the United States of the 1980s. Moreover, the novel attacks the patriarchal separate spheres ideology which the (religious) conservatives used to justify the enslavement of women's bodies. On top of this, it criticizes the (inter)national commercial surrogacy industry for commodifying women's wombs.

Gilead is plagued by mass infertility, a phenomenon which, as professor Pieixoto of the University of Cambridge explains at the end of the novel in the "Historical Notes," has presumably been caused by a complex interplay of factors. The most predominant cause was some sort of nuclear catastrophe (Atwood 316), after which Gilead became surrounded by toxic wastelands which would isolate them from the rest of the world. This future scenario terrified real-life Americans – and the rest of the world – in the 1980s, a decade in which "a nuclear scare coursed through American society" due to "increasing tensions between the two superpowers," the United States and the Soviet Union (Santese 496; Fischer 483). Other factors were "the widespread availability of birth control of various kinds" (Atwood 316), and the emergence and spread of a number of sexually transmitted diseases such as aids and syphilis, as they caused a dramatic decline in birth rate. Although this information is based upon speculation, it is important to be aware of it in order to form a better understanding of why the Sons of Jacob have taken ownership of women's reproductive organs the way they have. Also, as most female citizens have become incapable of fulfilling woman's predestined duty, childbearing, it becomes clear why it is the fertile Handmaids who serve as the pivot to the continuation of the human race and become the ultimate victims of bodily exploitation.

To begin with, the Sons of Jacob' propagation of a separate spheres ideology and their idealization of the traditional nuclear family evidently mirrors that of the Republican Party and the New Christian Right of the 1980s (Miceli 100; Pankhurst & Houseknecht 5). For all three parties, the belief in the patriarchal separate spheres ideology becomes the guiding principle which justifies women's confinement to their domestic tasks (Teodorescu 77-78; Miceli 99-100). In Gilead, so-called "Commanders of the Faithful" are the authoritative leaders of the public and the private spheres. They are responsible for making sure each household functions according to the law, and, as opposed to women, they are highly involved in both civic and public life. The activities of the Wives, Marthas (the servants), and the Handmaids (the breeders

of the Commanders' children) – take place indoors, and revolve mainly around accommodating these men. This role division between men and women is a projection of the ideal situation as advocated by the Republican Party and the New Christian Right, who deemed women's bodies predestined for motherhood and maintaining the housekeeping (Klatch 676-677). Rebecca Klatch explains that, from their perspective, because these roles have been "divinely ordained," they should not be blurred (677). Like the Sons of Jacob, they are convinced that "family values would be safeguarded only when men are once again fully in power in both the public and domestic spheres" and women are assigned their traditional role within the household (Oliver xv). Clearly, the Sons of Jacob have "successfully" implemented the reforms which the Christian fundamentalists advocated in this period.

According to Aisha Matthews, Atwood suggests that through imposing upon women motherhood and the role of housekeeper, the religious authorities are able to realize the oppression of the female body (650). Evidently, Handmaids, who are forced to perform the task of motherhood, become the ultimate victims of bodily exploitation at the hands of the regime. I will provide an elaborate analysis of the deprivation of Handmaids' bodily autonomy later on in this chapter. For now, I will analyze the position of Wives and Marthas within the Gileadean nuclear family. The former are "the social objects of each Commander's home" (652). Due to the fact that the majority of Wives are incapable of producing offspring, their bodies are relatively unsusceptible to exploitation. However, as Danita Dodson explains, because they are trapped inside a female body, they are not allowed to actively engage in masculine public life and their bodies remain confined to the private sphere (79). This also applies to Marthas, who are forced to take on women's traditional role within the household, that of the housekeeper. What can be concluded at this point, is that by dividing woman's traditional role within the nuclear family unit into three separate branches: maintaining and elevating the family's social status, housekeeping and childbearing, The Sons of Jacob have realized that which the

Republican Party and the New Christian Right in the 1980s aspired to accomplish: "restoring the value base of America" (Pankhurst & Houseknecht 13) and re-establishing the traditional role division. Atwood's narrative experiments with the idea that, as many feminists argued in the 1980s, this could potentially result in the domestic imprisonment of women's bodies.

The remainder of the female population: Aunts (instructors of the Handmaids), Unwomen (female dissidents), and Jezebels (prostitutes) – all function outside of the traditional family unit. And yet, their bodies, similarly to the Wives, Marthas and Handmaids, are confined to the private sphere and become political pawns in the agenda of the Sons of Jacob (Johnson 70; Nongjai 189; Gotlib 327). The first category, the Aunts, run the Rachel and Lea Center, a place where Handmaids are sent to be indoctrinated and prepared for their stay at the Commanders' households. Ironically, whereas Aunts are excused from having any bodily responsibilities, they have been employed by the system to regulate the exploitation of Handmaids' bodies. Their position within society is undoubtedly the most controversial, for they have been granted a certain degree of freedom and authority that the remainder of the female population will never be able to obtain, but they get to enjoy this "luxurious position" at the expense of other women. Barbara Hill Rigney argues that "the control agency in this novel is, not the commanders, but the "Aunts", who "run their re-education centres with cattle prods, torture techniques, and brain washing slogans" (118). Their aim to establish "a spirit of camaraderie among women" (287) is therefore contradictory in J. Brooks Bouson's eyes, "because the aunts uphold the male supremist power structure […] and they play an active role in the state's sexual enslavement of the Handmaids" (141). I endorse their view that the Aunts' involvement in the systematic oppression and torture of women is condemnable, however, as Atwood herself explains in the "Historical Notes," human beings, including the Aunts in this society, will go to great lengths to obtain as little as a fraction of the power available in order to secure their own position. Based on my analysis of Atwood's depiction of the Aunts, I would

argue that Atwood suggests female solidarity is an ideal objective, but seems well-nigh impossible to implement.

The position of Aunts arguably reflects that of real-life contemporary Christian women's activist groups such as Concerned Women for America, who actively defended the conservative agenda and accused contemporary feminists of, amongst others, "destroying the role of women as housemakers" (Diamond 128). Shirley Neuman draws our attention to the similarity between the organization's CEO and president Phyllis Schlafly and the fictional character Aunt Lydia, one of Offred's instructors, as both individuals advocate women's return to their traditional role (860-861). There were other public conservative female figures in this period such as Nancy Reagan and Beverly Lahaye, and, as was discussed in Chapter 2, across the Atlantic, Margaret Thatcher (see Kent 215), that called for a return to traditional morality and idealized women's "pre-destined" tasks as mother and housekeeper (Moen 349; Marshall 56-57). These right-wing wives and female politicians enjoyed privileged positions in comparison to the average female citizen, but, from a feminist perspective, contributed to the exploitation of women's bodies in a similar fashion as the Aunts do in Atwood's narrative, by regulating and facilitating their subordination.

The second category, the Unwomen, are the ultimate antagonists in the eyes of the religious authorities, as they have either rebelled against their political doctrine or because they physically fail to serve any useful purpose to society. Significantly, women who fit this category in the United States of the 1980s were either demonized by the Republican Party and the New Christian Right or received a lack of support from the (religious) authorities (Lienesch 59; Fetner xxi; Jeffries 206). "Unwoman" is an umbrella term that is used to refer to female dissidents such as feminists, women who have aborted their child(ren), "gender traitors" such as lesbians, and Handmaids who fail to conceive children. In the eyes of the Sons of Jacob, these women and their bodies are not employable within traditional family life and are therefore

valueless to society. Consequently, they are sent away to the Colonies, exile camps where they are forced to participate in physically exhausting – and oftentimes perilous – labor until their bodies shut down. Clearly, the regime would prefer to discard these women as soon as possible, if not yesterday, but they choose to extend their punishment as a political warning to other female citizens (Gotlib 327). The non-fictional (religious) authorities in the United States of the 1980s had comparable views of these women, as they campaigned against homosexuality and feminism, and openly villainized abortion clinics and women who have committed aborticide (Dowland 607). Clearly, the situation of the Unwoman in Atwood's narrative is a projection of that of the "female dissidents" in non-fictional American society in the 1980s.

The final category, the Jezebels, are the sex workers at Gilead's brothel for the elite. Through them, Atwood criticizes the Sons of Jacob's "use of the Bible to persecute women and exploit them [specifically their bodies]" (Gardiner 30), while simultaneously excusing their own sins and blaming their promiscuous behaviors on their "masculine needs." The name "Jezebel" alludes to the eponymous biblical figure; a ruthless temptress who asserts her power through the sexual manipulation of men and who tempts people to stray from the "path of righteousness" (Streete 157). Ironically, in Atwood's story, the masculine authorities are actually the ones responsible for the creation of "Jezebel" women and their rendezvous point Jezebels. As will be explained below, Atwood argues that *they* are responsible for the corruption of women's sexuality and their bodies, and do not refrain themselves from enjoying the immoral pleasures of the flesh as long as it is done out of public view.

Jezebels' bodies initially appear liberated, as these women are not expected to act in accordance to traditional gender roles, are allowed to engage in extramarital sexual acts and are even permitted to engage in homosexual activities, which the regime considers some of the cardinal sins. However, after the Handmaids, Jezebels are arguably the most subjected to bodily exploitation as they are forced to perform and take part in sexual activities against their will and

are permanently exposed to the objectifying male gaze. Offred's illegal visit to Jezebels, which she is able to undertake with the Commander's assistance, reveals that although these women have been relieved of their domestic duties and can wear whatever they please, which indicates a certain degree of bodily autonomy, their supposed liberation is only a façade. The more Offred observes them, the sooner the decadent, revealing outfits worn by the Jezebels "turn into a monotony of cheap male fantasies" (Atwood 248). David Coad explains that the sense of empowerment Offred had initially felt as a result of being excused from wearing her traditional wardrobe, which includes the all-concealing veil, has proven to be temporary, and instead of feeling liberated, she ends up feeling repulsed by the men's intruding stares and taken advantage of by the Commander (61). She realizes that by breaking the rules, the powerful male visitors, including her Commander, do not wish to uncage the female body, on the contrary, they wish to demonstrate "their mastery over the world" (Atwood 248), including them, to each other and to the women present. Arguably, Atwood's allusion to the Biblical figure of Jezebel conceals her criticism of non-fictional Christian fundamentalists, including the New Christian Right of the 1980s, as she believes their attitude towards (female) sexuality and the female body to be hypocritical.

As I previously indicated, it is the Handmaids who are the primary targets of bodily exploitation as they are "explicitly politicized as the function, focus, and means of indoctrination" (Cooper 94). Due to the fact that they are the only fertile women left in Gilead, the Sons of Jacob have determined their uteruses state property. In order to secure their domination of the female womb, the religious conservatives have confined Handmaids to the private sphere and have deprived them of their reproductive and sexual autonomy. This includes the right to decide when they get pregnant and by whom, the right to use contraception, the right to enjoy sexual intercourse for non-reproductive purposes, and the right to have an abortion.

According to Anne Barbeau Gardiner, the regime's preoccupation with women's reproductive ability is a clear "example of projection [in The Handmaid's Tale]," as the Reaganites and the members of the New Christian Right in the 1980s were accused by many feminists of valuing women solely for their fertility (108). Some of the key figures of the Christian Right such as the televangelists and activists Jerry Falwell[6] and Pat Robertson, came to embody the movement's core values (Lienesch 419), and their conservative views, amongst others on men and women's roles in reproduction, mirror that of the Sons of Jacob and the Commanders in Atwood's story. They considered sexual intercourse purely for the purpose of pleasure ungodly, and advocated that the act is only intended for procreation (Harding 198; Manning 58), a view which Atwood, as a feminist writer, castigates (Armbruster 148). On top of this, they believed that the act should be instigated by the husband, and woman's task is to accept his invitation at all times as she is his subordinate other (Harding 177; Dexter & Lagrander 102). In Atwood's story, the Handmaids are similarly obligated to be "constantly available walking vaginas at man's [the Commander's] disposal" (Coad 56). They are reminded of their bodily purpose by the bright red color of their garments. Simultaneously, however, they are expected to hide behind their veils, to present themselves as virginal and to never instigate physical contact (Cooper 110). In short, the sexual restrictions imposed on Handmaids by the regime of Gilead resemble the sexual restrictions imposed on women by the Christian Right in the 1980s.

Because the Christian fundamentalists consider every newborn one of God's children, they perceive the idea of allowing women to deprive an unborn child of life as outrageous and inadmissible (Gotlib 335; Busby & Vun 15). Key figures of the Republicans' most influential

[6] Jerry Falwell founded the Moral Majority in 1979. The Moral Majority was a "conservative political action organization" which "wanted to strengthen the Judeo-Christian foundations of the political system" (Snowball 2). The organization was anti-abortion, and wished to "reinstate school prayer, re-establish traditional gender roles for men and women, defeat the Equal Rights Amendment, quash special rights for gays, and help the country get back to its roots" (Banwart 135).

ally, the (New) Christian Right had continuously expressed a strong desire to criminalize aborticide over the decades. Their view disturbed most feminists under Reagan's administrations as they were terrified of "losing legal abortion" (McKeegan 130). Atwood's narrative presents a future in which she acknowledges feminists' concerns and experiments with the idea of realizing their fears. In *The Handmaid's Tale,* Atwood describes how fictional bombings led by the religious conservatives have destroyed "lots of abortion clinics and porn shops before the revolution" (92). Furthermore, she has transformed the Wall of Harvard yard into a place where the corpses of both abortionists and other men who the Sons of Jacob deemed a threat to society are displayed after they have been brutally murdered:

> Each has a placard hung around his neck to show why he has been executed: a drawing of a human foetus. They were doctors, then, in the time before, when such things were legal […] these men, we are told, are like war criminals. It's no excuse that what they did was legal at the time: their crimes are retroactive […] No woman in her right mind, these days, would seek to prevent a birth, should she be so lucky as to conceive. (42-43)

Through Offred, she explains that generally, the authorities execute these men privately, but on rare occasions, the Handmaids themselves are obligated to participate in "Particicutions," public executions where they must use their bare hands to kill those who are condemned of crimes by the state, including abortionists (Cooper 95). This is significant, as it reveals how the Sons of Jacob redirect Handmaids' anger towards the authorities about their bodily mistreatment and force them to take it out on the "real enemy." Based on the above, it becomes evident that Atwood warns against the New Christian Right and their conservative stance on abortion in this narrative (Gardiner 94). She indirectly accuses the religious movement of hypocrisy, by questioning why it is that their anti-abortion stance seems to reveal their dedication to protect the lives of newborns, but simultaneously they are less concerned with the

physical condition of infants that suffer from birth defects (Hofman 231), referred to as "Unbabies" in the narrative, as well as that of their mothers.

In Gileadean society, it is only when Handmaids succeed in producing healthy offspring that their bodies, and that of their babies, Keepers, continue to be protected by the state. In case they fail to do so, they are sent away to the Colonies, where they are subjected to more physical exploitation, and are instantly separated from their Unbaby, who, as Offred implies, will be secretly killed by the regime. Evidently, Atwood expresses her concerns about the possibility of a future in which the New Christian Right succeeds in permanently stripping women of their exclusive bodily rights and in which the (religious) authorities become in control of the mother-child relationship.

As the previous paragraph explained, abortion is strictly prohibited in Gilead. This is also the case for artificial reproduction. Notably, however, not for assisted reproduction. Arguably one of the most daunting aspects of the Handmaids' existence is the fact that they are forced to participate in a process that "we would name today as […] surrogacy" (Levaque 526; Matthews 652; Miceli 101; Di Minico 4). A process which, according to many American feminists in the 1980s, increases the risk of women's bodies becoming subjected to scientific and economic exploitation (see Mies & Shiva 186-187 Corradi 260; Richards et al 37; Jacobus et al 6.35; Rosen & Twamley 159; Corradi 263). Atwood's depiction of surrogate motherhood is dehumanizing at the very least, as the following scene, which takes place directly after one of the Handmaids, Janine, has given birth, illustrates:

> "It's the Wives who do the naming, around here. […] she's [Janine] still having the pains, for the afterbirth, she's crying helplessly, burnt-out miserable tears […] she'll be allowed to nurse the baby, for a few months […] After that she'll be transferred, to see if she can do it again." (126)

Matthews argues that "the best aspects of motherhood are denied to the Handmaids" (652). Similarly to surrogate mothers in real life, the Handmaids are expected to carry a child, deliver it and then pass the baby onto another woman. Significantly, Karen Busby and Delaney Vun, and Di Minico explain that the practice of surrogacy by the Gileadean regime is based on the biblical passage in which Rachel, who has continuously failed to provide her husband with children, asks him to "impregnate her servant Bilhah, who proceeds to give birth on her behalf (Di Minico 4; Busby & Vun 15). It becomes especially evident that the inspiration behind the Handmaids' surrogate function comes from this Biblical passage, when one analyzes the procedure of the Ceremony. This is the official, highly-ritualized sexual act that forces a Handmaid to take place between the legs of the Wife, who is fully clothed, and allow the Commander to have intercourse with "them." In this performance, there are three participants, and only one of the two women present is actually physically involved in the act. As this scenario illustrates, the Handmaid's body becomes extremely susceptible to economic exploitation as she is objectified, enslaved by the regime, and forced to become a participant in the procedure. Her vulnerable position evidently mirrors that of non-fictional surrogate mothers of lower-class backgrounds (see Richards 44), who are more often than not forced by their male relatives to sign up their bodies for these procedures in order for these men to make economic profit.

Before I share my conclusions with regard to this chapter, it is important to address the recent developments within American society, as Atwood's novel paints a truthful picture of our present-day reality. According to Philip Gorski, Bradley Jones and Jocelyn Kiley, and Ruth Braunstein, one of the factors which enabled Donald Trump's unexpected victory over Democratic nominee Hillary Clinton during the presidential elections of 2016, was the support from traditionalists and nationalists who felt the need to "defend America's supposed Christian heritage" (Whitehead et al 148). Stephen Mansfield endorses this view and adds that Trump

managed to garner support from the Christian Right, who "realized in amazement that Donald Trump – of all people – had made himself a champion of their cause" (12). The increasing authority of the religious conservatives is certainly noticeable, as recently, the state of Alabama passed a bill banning abortions with very limited exceptions. Doctors who still perform abortions on women whose health is not seriously threatened by their pregnancy will risk facing prison sentence up to 99 years. Moreover, multiple other states have passed or attempted to pass a so-called "heartbeat bill," which "bans abortion after a fetal heartbeat can be detected" (Levenson). As is the case in Atwood's novel after the Sons of Jacob have seized power, American women are losing the exclusive autonomy over their bodies to conservative authorities. In 2018, large groups of female protestors gathered in several countries, including the United States, to protest about "various issues having to do with the requisitioning of women's bodies by the state" (Beaumont & Holpuch). They all wore the red Handmaid's costume, revealing that the garment has become a symbol of protest against women's bodily oppression. In the meantime, (high-profile) women have initiated the #MeToo campaign and the Time's Up movement, which encouraged female Americans to become vocal about the sexual intimidation they experience both inside and outside of the workplace. Clearly, these women are increasingly feeling the need to protect themselves against the conservative authorities and men who feel entitled to women's bodies, and who form a threat to their bodily freedom.[7]

Based on the textual analysis presented in this chapter, it can be concluded that Atwood's narrative acknowledges contemporary feminists' concerns about the misogynistic ideology subscribed to by many members of the Republican Party and the Christian New Right

[7] More evidence for the novel's topicality is the success of the 2017 television adaptation of *The Handmaid's Tale* (Gibson 37). The show explicitly addresses the systematic oppression of the female body, but also highlights the mistreatment and demonization of minorities including the LGBT community, immigrants and refugees (38).

when it comes to the purpose of the female body and women's place within society. Atwood condemns the authorities' idealization of women's domestic imprisonment and attacks the separate spheres ideology which functions as the foundation for this belief. Although it is fundamentalist Christian men who impose this ideology upon women in order to secure their own dominant social position, Atwood emphasizes the role of conservative religious women and women's movements in helping to maintain the subordination of the female body by advocating women's traditional role within the nuclear family unit. Moreover, as a profoundly dystopian text and overtly punitive satire, her narrative functions as a warning to conservative pro-life supporters, as she illustrates that the female population could potentially become increasingly subjected to bodily exploitation once they are no longer granted the authority over their own bodies. Significantly, she accuses the Christian fundamentalist leaders of hypocrisy when it comes to their body politics. Firstly, by being extremely lenient towards higher-ranked men who they know disobey the systems' body politics. Secondly, by depriving women of their abortion right, but not necessarily concerning themselves with the fate of defective babies. On top of this, through her depiction of the bodily duties of Handmaids, she criticizes the humiliating treatment which non-fictional surrogate mothers can experience, specifically those who are forced to enter the (inter)national surrogacy market involuntarily. Lastly, she condemns the profit-oriented nature of the market by illustrating how it encourages the commercialization of the female womb.

4 The Exploitation of the Female Body in James' *The Children of Men*

The Children of Men (1992), written by the British crime writer P.D

. James, belongs to a body of dystopian works that explores the consequences of the rapid rise of reproductive and medical technology (Darcy 89). The narrative is set in the dystopian England of 2021, a dictatorship governed by Xan Lyppiat and his sycophantic Council. In this fictional society, humankind is on the verge of extinction, as the earth has been struck by mass infertility and not a single newborn has been produced since the year 1995, generally referred to as the year Omega. Through Xan's cousin, an Oxford historian named Theodore "Theo" Faron, and Julian, a female dissident who has miraculously become pregnant, the reader learns that a number of social phenomena which had worried feminists for a few decades by now, such as the increasing authority of masculine science over women's reproductive organs and the medicalization of childbirth continued to form a substantial threat to women's bodily autonomy.

In terms of its setting and themes, James' novel resembles that of Atwood, which was published seven years earlier. Both authors depict a dystopian future in which a totalitarian government has demanded ownership over women's wombs after the state has been struck by an infertility epidemic. There are significant differences and similarities between the narrators' perspectives on the impact of science and religion on women's bodily authority. Whereas Atwood's story exposes the hypocrisy at the center of the American (New) Christian Right's ideology, and warns against religious fundamentalists' attempts to strip women of their exclusive bodily rights, James' tale clearly reflects her Anglican beliefs and warns British society about the destructive consequences of scientists' attempts to dominate the natural world as designed by the Creator. In her dystopia "childlessness becomes a metaphor of godlessness" (Wood 585). Atwood's narrative expresses a strong feminist message. James's story, in

contrast, is written from a traditionalist perspective. Yet unintentionally, her criticism of androcentrism mirrors that of feminists such as Atwood.

In contrast to Atwood's novel, James's has received little scholarly attention. Of the few scholars who have critically examined *The Children of Men* (Wood; De Marques; Bacci; Darcy), only Soo Darcy has provided an extensive analysis of arguably its most prominent theme: the power struggle between the pregnant female body and science. She finds that the novel "engages with [feminists'] contemporary concerns about reproduction" and "with [the] shifting cultural attitudes towards the emerging reproductive technologies and modes of control and surveillance of the pregnant body" (92). Amongst others, she explores to what extent the narrative engages with the non-fictional natural versus medical birth debate. In her opinion, Julian's resistance to interference from the pro-medical birth government, and her alliance with a pro-natural birth midwife, reveal James' position within this debate. Darcy's reading suggests that James is critical of "the power hierarchies inherent in the relationship" between the physician and the patient, that are absent in that of the midwife and the patient, which is built on cooperation rather than masculine domination over the female body (Darcy 95-97). Additionally, she claims that James is alarmed by the rise of infertility amongst British citizens (98-99, 102) and that her novel envisions how this could potentially lead to a perilous increase in government regulation of (pregnant) women's reproductive system.

For my own analysis of the novel, I will take into consideration Darcy's findings. I will demonstrate that *The Children of Men* takes on a traditionalist Christian standpoint concerning the medicalization of childbirth by suggesting that this phenomenon violates God's natural laws and poses a threat to woman's autonomy over her body. My analysis of James' perspective will show that she critically observes how the newfound hope in science as the salvation of mankind, as opposed to religion, did not bring about a change in the controlling attitude of men towards the natural world and women's bodies. In addition, I will demonstrate how James challenges

the conviction of feminists such as Simone de Beauvoir and Shulamith Firestone that women will experience sexual liberation, and that their bodies will become empowered, once they are no longer biologically enchained to their reproductive function.

In James' dystopian future England, the pregnant female body becomes the primary object of study and manipulation by masculinist scientific institution that seeks to dominate the reproductive process as a result of the infertility epidemic. It is essential to be aware of the fact that the narrative, to a certain extent, is a projection of the real-life situation in Britain in the 1990s. A decline in fertility and a decrease in semen quality were two matters that greatly concerned the British authorities at the time. In fact, the nation had suffered a plummeting birth rate on a number of occasions over the course of the twentieth century (Gauthier 153; Joffe 1961), most notably in the 1930s and 1990s.

Through Theo, the reader learns that the changing demographic situation also occurred in the fictional society of Britain in the 1990s. Social developments such as "more liberal attitudes to birth control and abortion" and "the postponement of pregnancy by professional women pursuing their careers" (James 1.9) presumably catalyzed the drop in birth rate. The fact that, amongst others, these factors are stated to have caused this crisis suggests that the improvement of women's situation and their successful plea for the right to bodily autonomy have come to be viewed as a *faux pas* in hindsight. Both male and female citizens are now forced to subject themselves a certain degree of bodily supervision from the medical authorities: "virile males are subjected to compulsory semen-testing" on a systematic basis (Wood 280) and healthy female citizens who are below the age of forty-five are obligated to undergo "six-monthly, time-consuming, humiliating re-examinations" (James 6.12). At all times, they are expected to allow the medical authorities access to their reproductive organs. This reveals that humans become fragmented, medicalized bodies. In the case of a woman, once the authorities discover she is capable of bringing forth offspring, she will become semi-permanently confined

to the medical realm of the hospital and the obstetrician. This is something I will further elaborate on below. The only woman who the reader learns runs the risk of ending up in this situation is Julian, who ironically enough has been categorized as a defect woman, someone who the authorities deem unsuitable for reproduction. She refuses to inform the government about her discovery as she is convinced that "If I [she] have [has] the baby with the Warden present we [her and the baby] shall both die" (James 21.23). Her situation reveals that once a woman is found pregnant in this dystopian future Britain, she becomes unprotected against the dehumanizing practices of medicalization.

Notably, James approaches the matter of the medicalization of childbirth from a traditionalist rather than from a feminist perspective, but reveals that, like feminists, she is concerned with women's loss of bodily authority. The analysis below will show that she is primarily concerned with the idea that scientific interference in the natural birth process undermines both God's divine design of the womb and facilitates masculine domination over the female body. Chapter 2 explained that by the 1990s, most women's experiences of childbearing in Britain had become medicalized. Significantly, during this period, Christine McCourt explains that "there was a policy impetus to return toward a more woman-centered way of providing care" (186). Non-religious movements such as the Natural Childbirth Trust (NCT), Action for Sick Children, and AIMS, which had been established in the 1960s, expressed their concerns about the rapid rise in hospital births and expressed skepticism about the morality of medical experts' treatment of their female patients (Beech 1). In the eyes of religious traditionalists, obstetrical intervention had always been an unnecessary evil, as everything, including a successful delivery, "could be attained by favouring God's "natural cures"" and by seeking divine guidance (Moscucci 170). According to Ornella Moscucci, religious supporters of natural birth believed "it was the task of science to show the [divine] laws of nature that governed the processes of birth (170). Julia frost et al add that even a

significant number of medical experts revealed feeling disquieted at the frequency of birth interventions in hospital according to a report from the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists (302). In short, it is safe to say that the practice of the medicalization of childbirth was under pressure from both religious traditionalists and women's movements.

James reflects on this social development by exploring the potentially catastrophic consequences of male interference with the process of natural birth. Her descriptions of the scientific policies of the Warden and his medical staff suggest that medicalization is a scheme of masculine science to facilitate the domination of the female body. Just as the scientists criticized by Carolyn Merchant in *The Death of Nature* deemed it their predestined role to force nature to display its properties (see Merchant 148), medical experts in this dystopia have been instructed by the Warden to continuously monitor, and if deemed necessary, to dissect the natural, female body. James exposes the intense longing of men to take on the role of the Creator; to exert control over that which was deemed uncontrollable before: the natural world. This becomes evident based on Theo's confession in the beginning of the novel that Western science had replaced religion, and became "our [their] god" until they were plagued by mass infertility (James 1.5). Most people had distanced themselves from the "evils [that] had been perpetrated [by] […] religions" (12.10), and began to view science as the actual salvation of mankind. Medical experts were therefore reportedly "outraged and demoralized" by the idea that they had not been able to discover the exact cause of the infertility epidemic (1.4). Evidently, this has resulted in a detrimental obsession with controlling the human body. One of the ways in which the Warden aims to achieve this, is to refuse women the permission to have a natural birth, as this would allow them to rely solely on their biologically-determined childbearing abilities, and would threaten the authorities' control over the female body. The analysis above shows that, initially through religious intervention and later through medical and

scientific intervention, men have continuously sought to control the natural world by establishing their monopoly on women's wombs.

Significantly, the figure of the midwife is depicted as the protector of God's natural laws. Her guidance prevents her patient from falling victim to medicalization, and consequently from being deprived of the ownership over her own body. As was explained in Chapter 2, for centuries it had been primarily midwives' responsibility to assist expecting women during their pregnancies. Yet in both Britain and the United States they became marginalized figures as a result of male physicians' interference in childbirth. By introducing new techniques that altered the traditional birth process, they induced midwives' struggle to hold onto their profession (Marland & Rafferty 164). Hilary Marland and Anne Marie Rafferty explain that "the changed cultural attitudes" of the late twentieth century, referring to women's renewed interest in natural birth, "allowed midwives to maintain a foothold in modern medical systems" (163). In the dystopian future, the midwife has been demoted due to the medical intervention of physicians. Her perception that the person assisting a woman throughout her pregnancy and during childbirth should intervene as little as possible is diametrically opposed to the Warden's incitement to medical intervention, and this attitude is initially misunderstood, ridiculed and attacked by the male protagonist:

> "You know she ought to be in the hospital. Or are you thinking of yourself? […] It would be quite a thing, wouldn't it? Midwife to the first of a new race, if that is what this child is destined to be. You don't want to share the glory, you're afraid you might not be allowed even a share." (21.22)

Yet her actions illustrate that she is the only medical expert who understands the true value of the female body, and the only one who wishes to respect the divine laws of nature. As opposed to Xan Lyppiat's scientists and physicians, who wish to seize the child in order to obtain more

power, wealth and status, the midwife's acts are motivated purely by altruism. It is she who urges that the soon-to-be-born child is nobody's possession except its own, and, for the time being, that of his mother (James 21.23). Notably, in the fragment of the novel in which Julian goes into labor, Theo reports witnessing an intense connection between midwife and patient, so profound that it seems as if they become "one woman," and although he too is there to witness the event and to physically support Julian, he is "excluded from the heart of the mystery" (32.8). This fragment depicts the process of natural birth as "primitive" (32.8) and almost as sacred; a secret that is to be kept between the midwife and her patient; an event in which they temporarily become one in spirit. The former assists the latter in completing the biological process her body was designed to perform, rather than forcing her to become a passive recipient of medical intervention.

Consequences Women's Loss of Reproductive Abilities

A number of feminists, most notably Simone de Beauvoir and Shulamith Firestone, have advocated that women must be freed from the burdens of pregnancy and childbirth (Beauvoir 6.20, 27; Firestone 10.18). They argue that these responsibilities have always prevented them from experiencing unconditional bodily freedom, and will continue to do so until sex and gestation are separated. As De Beauvoir argues: ''the conflict between species and individual, which sometimes assumes dramatic force at childbirth, endows the feminine body with a disturbing frailty […] and it is true that they [women] have within them a hostile element—it is the species gnawing at their vitals'' (6.27). Firestone envisions a society in which women are able to enjoy sexual pleasure by simply participating in the process and not having to concern themselves with reproduction (10.17-18). James is skeptical about the alternative reproductive and sexual arrangements which these feminists envisioned. She believes that, rather than liberating the female body, separating sex from gestation will result in one's estrangement from

the body. James' attitude is not necessarily anti-feminist, but reveals that she would consider it a loss to distance ourselves from "the gift of procreation," and thinks women should be able to both enjoy intercourse and produce offspring, in other words, to enjoy the entirety of our bodies, without having to worry about male interference.

The Children of Men becomes a traditionalist thought experiment that seeks to extrapolate on the theories of feminists such as De Beauvoir and Firestone. In this dystopia, people no longer find themselves in the luxurious position of being able to participate in both sexual intercourse for the sake of pleasure and for the sake of reproduction. Consequently, they begin to experience a sense of bodily entrapment. While reminiscing about his estranged spouse Helena, Theo recalls how, as women's sexual autonomy increased throughout the 1980s and the early 1990s, many of them started to distance themselves from men for reasons unexplained (16.4). In the long term, due to the outbreak of mass infertility, they were deprived of the ability to generate a new life. Although "the fear of pregnancy was permanently removed" (16.4), the utopian visions of feminists about women experiencing newfound bodily freedom after being relieved of their biological duties, did not exactly become reality in James's novel. Rather than experiencing this freedom as an opportunity to explore their sexuality, some women became consumed by the desire to procreate, and started to disassociate themselves from their feelings of sexuality. Their physicality became an empty shell that no longer had a purpose, and that reminded them of their impotency.

James raises a significant concern when she questions whether women will actually experience bodily freedom once they are relieved of their reproductive "duties." It is undeniable that one of the few things almost every human being has in common is the innate desire to procreate and that most women have a strong maternal instinct. Therefore, it does not sound so unreasonable that the solution to the demanding bodily responsibilities of women presented by

some feminists could potentially lead women to become alienated from their bodies, rather than liberated.

James continues by demonstrating that women's search for a bodily purpose as a result of losing their reproductive abilities makes them and their bodies increasingly susceptible to exploitation. According to Theo, about a decade earlier, during the period in which their anxieties about this loss intensified and reached unprecedented heights, a powerful class in society, the Omegas,[8] introduced hyper-realistic dolls to the market that are supposedly meant to still women's "frustrated maternal desire" (6.3). This is evidently a projection of the emergence of the multimillion-dollar market for dollmaking in non-fictional Britain in the 1980s and 1990s (Pearse 28; Robertson 17). Those who began to collect the dolls realized that it was a controversial hobby, as adult women surrounding themselves with dolls were generally stigmatized as mentally unstable (Robertson 11-12). This is exactly how doll owners in the dystopian future of Britain are depicted. Theo reveals that at some point, the hype became so outrageous that pseudo-births would take place and actual memorial services were held for dolls who had "passed." One time, while walking his usual route to Magdalen Chapel, Theo encounters a woman walking with a pram. He observes how the "mother" is approached by another woman. The latter initiates conversation and begins to compliment her child, much to the satisfaction of the former. When, out of nowhere, "the woman suddenly seized the doll, tore it from the coverings and, without a word, […] dashed it against the stone wall with tremendous force" (James 6.3), its "mother," first petrified, then outraged, and eventually grief-stricken, is forced to pick up the lifeless pieces of porcelain that she had considered family.

[8] In *The Children of Men,* The Omegas are the last generation born to mankind. I purposely did not analyze their position within society, and the extent to which female Omegas are subject to bodily exploitation for the following reasons: firstly, because remarkably little is known about them, as these individuals form a separate society within the dystopia of England and rarely interact with the remainder of the population. Secondly, because their "body is not only physically but, most importantly, psychologically and socially sterile (Marques 41), it would be impossible to explore to what extent they have been affected by the medicalization of childbirth, the infertility crisis and other issues addressed in this chapter.

Based on this fragment it becomes evident that, in exchange for the prospect of material wealth, the Omegas create products to manipulate women into believing that their situation has not changed; that their bodies are still capable and worthy of achieving motherhood. The reaction of the female culprit shows that, although these dolls have supposedly been introduced for the benefits of women, in reality, to some, it becomes a physical reminder of the collective loss of one of their bodily functions.

Based on the textual analysis presented in this chapter, it becomes clear that James' position within the contemporary natural versus medical birth debate is predicated on the traditionalist view that mankind would be better off refraining from interfering with matters that have been biologically pre-determined. From her perspective, man's desire to dominate the natural world and compete with God could potentially lead to the downfall of mankind. She challenges critics of fundamentalist Christianity by pointing out that scientific intervention has become just another method of control, and that scientific rationalism and religious influence are not necessarily each other's opposites. Significantly, she acknowledges the concerns of feminists such as Carolyn Merchant regarding this matter and confirms that the female body runs a higher risk of becoming subjected to exploitation as a result of man's controlling attitude towards nature and the female body. This reveals that although James does not write from a feminist perspective, her views on androcentrism and masculine science correspond with that of feminists. On top of this, her skepticism of medical intervention throughout women's pregnancies and during their deliveries mirrors the policy impetus that advocated natural birth over medical birth in the 1990s in real-life Britain. As both religious and non-religious groups and movements in the 1990s did, she questions whether the treatment of women in hospitals revolves around securing the wellbeing of the female body.

In addition, it becomes quite apparent that the character of the midwife in included in the narrative as a reminder to society that the authority of the pregnant female body needs to be

safeguarded. The narrative reveals that James believes her intentions are misunderstood, mostly because people are led to believe that medicalized births are more beneficial to women than the other alternative they are offered. The midwife's rebellion against the authorities is perhaps an exaggeration of the real-life situation in the second part of the twentieth century, but James evidently shows that the position of midwives within the medical world is constantly evolving and that they are systematically subject to competition from physicians and the new technological and medical advancements they introduce. I concur Darcy's conclusion that, in this narrative, James criticizes the hierarchical relationship between physician and patient and favors the egalitarian relationship between midwife and patient. On top of this, I will argue that the midwife becomes the guardian of the divine laws of nature. Natural childbirth is depicted as a process in which midwives and patients form an intimate, almost sacred bond that allows them to cooperate in order to safely bring the newborn into the world.

Above all, *The Children of Men* illustrates how the solution to women's bodily oppression by masculine science as suggested by feminists such as De Beauvoir and Firestone, namely for women to be relieved of their reproductive abilities, could potentially alienate women from their own bodies. James explores how the act of intercourse could become less appealing once humans are deprived of the possibility to fulfil their preordained bodily purpose and can no longer satisfy their innermost desires, a view which I endorse. In the dystopian future she envisions, women's bodies can even become more susceptible to exploitation as a result, once the authorities find ways to use women's frustrated maternal desire against them. Her novel suggests that it is only through finding a middle ground between radical feminism and traditionalism that we could potentially discover the solution to this problem.

5 Conclusion

This thesis critically explored the ways in which *Woman on the Edge of Time* (1976) by Marge Piercy, *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985) by Margaret Atwood and *The Children of Men* (1992) by P.D. James, from different perspectives ranging from feminist to Christian traditionalist, castigate the British and American authorities' scientific, political and economic exploitation of the female body in the 1970s, 1980s and early 1990s respectively, and specifically warn against the decreasing autonomy of women in reproduction.

Based on a critical review of feminist scholarship on the late twentieth-century developments in science, politics and economics in Britain and the United States, and close textual analyses of the novels, I can conclude that there is a distinct shift in attitude amongst feminists towards the above mentioned social developments from the 1970s to the early 1990s. The 1970s were a period of change in both the United States and Britain. In the early years of the decade, feminists were relatively optimistic about the realization of a potentially egalitarian future society in which the female body would be equally valued to the male body. The utopias envisioned by radical feminists and women science fiction writers during this decade experimented with the idea of getting rid of gender binaries, the norm of the nuclear family and the traditional process of reproduction.[9] However, as the years passed, many became increasingly pessimistic due to the growing authority of science over women's bodies, the degrading treatment of the female body by those in charge of the capitalist labor market, and the rise of right-wing conservatism in the United States and Britain.

This is certainly noticeable in *Woman on the Edge of Time.* In Piercy's novel, the long-term future has enormous potential for both good and evil: It will potentially come to resemble

[9] See *The Dispossessed* (1974) by Ursula K. Le Guin, *The Female Man* (1975) by Joanna Russ, *Where Late the Sweet Birds Sang* (1976) by Kate Wilhelm, and *Motherlines* (1978) by Suzy McKee Charnas.

the dystopian New York, where woman becomes the ultimate object of scientific, economic, and political exploitation. Piercy argues that in this type of society, women will not be valued for anything other than their reproductive organs or their physical appearance. She depicts the system of patriarchal capitalism as the ultimate evil, as it turns women into products to be selected and purchased. Her narrative suggests that the scientific agenda of America is determined by wealthy conglomerates, and if women do not take action against the policies of those in charge, excessive scientific experimentation on the female body and an increase in violence against women will be inevitable. However, as Piercy suggests, the future can also come to resemble Mattapoisett, a utopian, egalitarian society in which the female body is equally valued to the male body, and woman is not subjected to any form of scientific, political, or economic exploitation. In order to obtain this type of bodily freedom, she argues, women will need to sacrifice their reproductive capacities. In Mattapoisett, this has become possible due to the realization of ectogenesis. By visualizing this invention in her narrative, Piercy evidently challenges the idea of a substantial group of feminists in the 1970s that women's erasure from reproduction will only further increase the authority of masculine science. This solution had previously been advocated by radical feminists De Beauvoir in the 1950s, and Firestone in the 1970s, who deemed separating sex from gestation the only possibility for women to be liberated from their biological enchainment. This thought experiment, together with Piercy's eradication of the nuclear family and fixed gender binaries, as well as the creation of an egalitarian, agricultural society, reveal that she believes only radical measures will lead us to realize a future in which the female body is no longer dominated by patriarchal capitalism and masculine science.

As the 1970s moved towards the 1980s, feminists were faced with many setbacks that dwindled their hopes for the realization of an egalitarian future in which the female body would retrieve its integrity. To them, the most daunting social developments were the conservative

reforms introduced by Reaganism in the United States, supported by the New Christian Right, and Thatcherism in Britain. During Reagan and Thatcher's governing periods, the traditional division of labor and the nuclear family were advocated as the social norm, and abortion became a topic of national importance as tensions increased between pro-life and pro-choice activists. To the dismay of many feminists in the United States, the New Christian Right threatened to deprive women of the option to have an abortion, and the government did little to protect women's reproductive rights. The marketization of artificial reproduction also worried some feminists, not only because of the potential mental and physical effects of the procedures, but especially because it was discovered that a substantial amount of lower-class women and third world women were forced to participate in these procedures by their male relatives in order to gain economic profit.

The Handmaid's Tale is the most renowned work of feminist dystopian fiction that was published as a response to the social developments of the 1980s.[10] Atwood's story is particularly vocal about the misogynistic body politics of the Republican Party and the New Christian Right. Through her descriptions of the Sons of Jacob' dehumanizing treatments of female citizens, she directly castigates the conservatives' treatment of non-fictional American female citizens and reveals that she strongly condemns their appropriation of the Bible to support their own agenda. The patriarchal separate spheres ideology at the center of the Christian fundamentalists' policies, is, according to Atwood, merely a method to facilitate male domination of women, as is the nuclear family and as is the traditional division of labor. Significantly, the position of scientists and abortionists in Gilead appears to be a dystopic future scenario for real-life scientists and abortionists in the 1980s, who were under constant scrutiny by members of the New Christian Right, as they were perceived by them as cold-blooded murders for their

[10] Other works include *The Gate to Women's Country* (1988) by Sheri S. Tepper and *The Cloning of Joanna May* (1989) by Fay Weldon.

willingness to contribute to infanticide. Atwood suggests that it is not scientists and abortionists women should be wary of, but the Christian fundamentalists governing the country.

In addition, Atwood's depiction of the Sons of Jacob' treatment of the Handmaid in particular, reveals that Atwood is extremely concerned about the dubious treatment of women's bodies by the international surrogacy market. The Handmaids are completely deprived of their bodily autonomy and are systematically raped, not just physically by the man in question, but symbolically by the entire government of Gilead. They are forced to live as the ultimate slaves of the system. Evidently, Atwood's disapproving attitude towards the ways in which the marketization of artificial reproduction is executed mirrors that of many feminists in the 1980s, who consider it a major threat to women's physical and mental health. In short, the society Atwood envisions appears to be the ultimate dystopian vision for the future, but based on my textual analysis and my exploration of secondary literature I can safely conclude that the novel actually describes what was happening in the 1980s and holds up a mirror to contemporary society.

After two tumultuous decades, the 1990s was a period of relative peace and economic prosperity. In the United States, the Democratic Clinton administration lifted several of the restrictive abortion policies that had been implemented by the Reaganites and the Christian Right started to experience repeated setbacks which threatened their authority. Across the Atlantic, Thatcher's government had reached the end of its term, which led to positive developments in women's bodily authority such as more liberal attitudes to birth control and abortion. However, social phenomena such as the increasing authority of masculine science over women's reproductive organs and the medicalization of childbirth continued to form a substantial threat to women's bodily autonomy.

The Children of Men is one of the last novels published in the 1990s that is written in the tradition of (feminist) dystopian fiction of the 1980s. It explores the concerns expressed by feminists about the potentially destructive consequences of scientists' attempts to dominate the natural world and the female body, and the dissension amongst pro-medical and pro-natural birth supporters. My textual analysis of James' narrative has shown that according to her traditionalist Anglican perspective, the medical birth process undermines both God's divine design of the womb and facilitates masculine domination over the female body. Based on her depiction of the egalitarian relationship between the pregnant woman and the midwife and the hierarchical relationship between the scientist/doctor and the pregnant woman, it becomes evident that, in her opinion, the former harmoniously assists women in undergoing the biological processes their bodies were designed to perform, whereas when undergoing the treatment of the latter, they become passive recipients of medical intervention. Although her narrative is written from a traditionalist rather than from a feminist perspective, her aversion to masculine science and her concerns about women's authority over their bodies mirror that of feminists such as Merchant.

Significantly, James' narrative reacts to some of the ideas previously expressed by feminists and female writers in the 1970s and 1980s. Firstly, as opposed to Piercy, Firestone and De Beauvoir, she is critical of the idea that the female body will be liberated once she is relieved of her reproductive responsibility. In her narrative she demonstrates the potential psychological consequences of women being deprived of their ability to reproduce. The women in the dystopian future England become frustrated, empty vessels, in desperate search of a sense of purpose. Her depiction of them reveals that, from James' perspective, being impregnated is one of the biological processes of the female body and without it women will experience a sense of incompleteness. Secondly, she is equally critical of Atwood's theory that religious fundamentalism on its own forms the ultimate threat to women's bodily authority, by

demonstrating that masculine scientific rationalism and fundamentalist religiosity are not necessarily two opposites and that men turning to science rather than religion as the salvation of mankind, can easily abuse their power and attempt to control the human body.

All in all, I can conclude that *Woman on the Edge of Time* is written from a feminist perspective that reflects the concerns of feminists of the 1970s about the authority of masculine science and patriarchal capitalism. It takes a controversial stance on the feminist debate of the 1970s on women's loss of bodily autonomy by advocating the externalization of the reproductive process, getting rid of gender binaries, and expressing the desire to return to an agricultural, self-sustaining society. *The Handmaid's Tale* is written from a feminist perspective that reflects the concerns of feminists of the 1980s about the restrictions imposed on women's sexual and reproductive rights by the Republican Party and the New Christian Right in the United States of the 1980s, attacks the patriarchal separate sphere ideology which the (religious) conservatives used to justify the enslavement of women's bodies, and criticizes the (inter)national commercial surrogacy industry for commodifying women's wombs. *The Children of Men* is written from a Christian traditionalist perspective that criticizes the medicalization of childbirth, and demonstrates that mankind's hope in science as the salvation, as opposed to religion, did not bring about a change in the controlling attitude of men towards the natural world and women's bodies. Lastly, it challenges the conviction of Marge Piercy, Simone de Beauvoir and Shulamith Firestone that women will experience sexual liberation, and that their bodies will become empowered, once they are no longer biologically enchained to their reproductive function.

As I already indicated in my chapter on Atwood's narrative, the struggle of feminists for woman's exclusive bodily autonomy is still ongoing at present. As of recently, there continue to be tensions in the regulation of abortion in Britain (Taylor & Wilson 71), and Trump's sexual and reproductive health policies are starting to form a severe threat to American

women's bodily authority. According to Daniel Grossman, "several policy proposals" have been suggested that "have the potential to limit access to contraception severely" (90) and as Kate Smith's article in *CBS News* suggests, "several American states have enacted or proposed a "trigger law" or a full ban on abortion". Moreover, "scholars in fields such as women's studies, bioethics and law have become increasingly concerned" about the consequences of the international surrogacy market for women's control over their bodies (Bromfield & Rotabi 124). There are of course many more concerning developments, but what I am trying to illustrate is that, especially now, the genre of feminist dystopian fiction is extremely relevant and can help us form a better understanding of the society we live in. As for the future, women worldwide will need to continue to stand up against the violation of their exclusive bodily rights, and this way, hopefully one day all women will achieve the bodily integrity they deserve to have.

For future research, it could perhaps be relevant to compare these works to contemporary works of dystopian fiction to see how the social phenomena that concerned late-twentieth-century feminists have evolved, to explore what new developments have taken place in the meantime, and to analyze how contemporary writers of feminist dystopian fiction respond to these changes as opposed to their predecessors.

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