

Contextualizing Gender
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Lecture - 53

"Women or Womankind? Signatures, Suspension and Bare Life in Feminism and Science Fiction" by Emily Cox- Palmer White II


Welcome dear participants. In the previous module we had looked at the work of Emily Cox Palmer White. White has analyzed the structure of gender as a biopolitical phenomenon while appropriating Agamben's paradigmatic system as framework. While contextualizing her reworking of gender as a paradigm, she elaborates on several biopolitical fictions.

In this module we shall look at the 2017 TV adaptation of Atwood's, 'The Handmaid's Tale' as a biopolitical dystopia. With reference to Palmer Whites analysis, we will read biopolitics, body politics and patriarchal neoliberalism as blurring the lines of fiction and reality. The cinematic dystopian representation of Handmaid's Tale explicates the biopolitical binaries.

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"Woman or Womankind? Signatures, Suspension and Bare Life in Feminism and Science Fiction"

- While contextualizing gender binaries, Palmer- White, outlines the essentialist conceptualizations of women, feminist politics, "mind cuffs of phallogocentrism"(4); and also the intersections between science fiction writing, gender theory, and biopolitics.
- As we recognize the role of "paradigms" as a tool to deconstruct gender binaries, Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*, adapted as TV series in 2017, explores the nature of gendered body in a biopolitical dystopic universe.



Source: amazon.com
Daniel Wilson Productions



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While contextualizing gender binaries Palmer-White outlines the essentialist conceptualization of women, feminist politics, which he terms as "mind cuffs of


phallogocentrism” and also the intersections which exist between and amongst science fiction, writing, gender theory and biopolitics.

As we recognize the role of “paradigms” as a tool to deconstruct gender binaries, Margaret Atwood’s ‘The Handmaids Tale’, adapted as a TV series in 2017, explores the nature of gendered body in a biopolitical dystopic universe. Let us explore the upcoming genre of biopolitical dystopic fiction and try to define it by decoding the operations of biopower over gendered categories.


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What is Biopolitical Fiction?

- Biopolitics refers to the intersection and mutual incorporation of biology and political control over the body.
- When this intersection is employed in different ways across academic disciplines, critical theory and fiction, the term “biopolitics” tends to take on two meanings.
- Firstly, biopower is both individualized and collectivized through disciplinary technologies in order to control and manage individual bodies, especially female bodies.
- Secondly, biopower intervenes at the social, biological, political and cultural hierarchies.



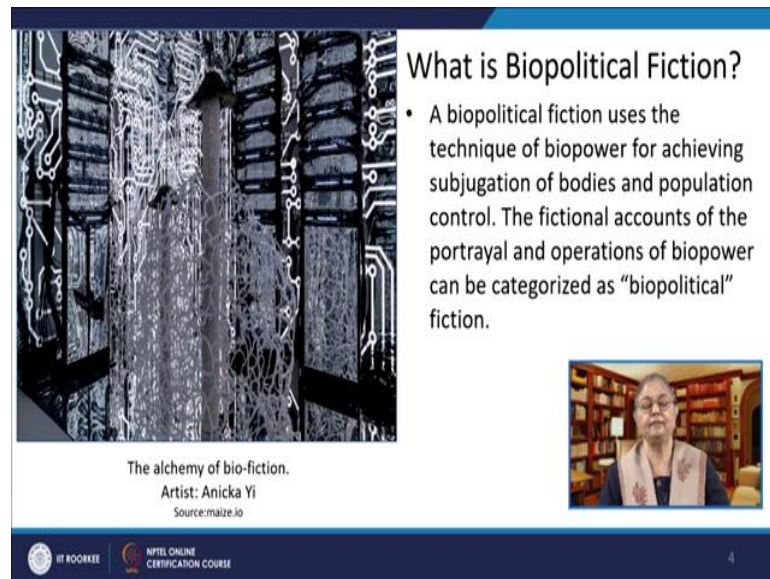
Source: medium.com



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Biopolitics refers to the intersection and mutual incorporation of biology and political control over the body. When this intersection is employed in different ways across academic disciplines, critical theory and fiction, the term “biopolitics” tends to take on two meanings. Firstly, biopower is both individualized and collectivized through disciplinary technologies in order to control and manage individual bodies, especially the female bodies. Secondly, biopower intervenes at the social, biological, political and cultural hierarchies.

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What is Biopolitical Fiction?

- A biopolitical fiction uses the technique of biopower for achieving subjugation of bodies and population control. The fictional accounts of the portrayal and operations of biopower can be categorized as “biopolitical” fiction.

The alchemy of bio-fiction.
Artist: Anicka Yi
Source:maize.io

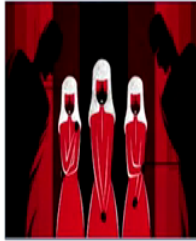
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So, what exactly is biopolitical fiction? A biopolitical fiction uses the technique of biopower for achieving subjugation of bodies and population control. The fictional accounts of the portrayal and operations of biopower can be categorized as “biopolitical” fiction.


On the left-hand side, we have a painting by an artist Anicka Yi, with the title of The alchemy of bio-fiction. Biopolitical fiction is an emerging genre which is now captivating the attention of artists as well as literary writers. The idea of control and discipline in such narratives can be achieved through violence, repression, surveillance or ideology as social conditioning. These narrative tropes are best represented in dystopias apocalyptic fictional spaces and documentary models of storytelling.

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- Biopower produces and exposes the literary production and re-production of gendered norms through regulatory practices, surveillance, violence, and repression in a dystopic setting.
- The dystopic literary spaces elaborate on the biopolitical calculus, bio-sovereign power and control over individuals and bodies; while appropriating sex as a tool for social production and reproduction.
- However we always encounter several questions while exploring such literary spaces.



Source: pinterest.com



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Biopower produces and exposes the literary production and re-production of gendered norms through regulatory practices, surveillance, violence and repression in a dystopic setting. The dystopic literary spaces elaborate on the biopolitical calculus, bio-sovereign power and control over individuals and bodies; while appropriating sex as a tool for social production and reproduction; however, we always encounter several questions while exploring such literary spaces.


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Questions we encounter

- What is the status of a citizen? What is the state of women as citizens?
- Can we be more than genders, sex and organs in the workings of a biopolitical paradigm?
- Can the literary space of speculative fiction elucidate the operations of biopolitics in a postmodern, globalized, posthuman world?
 - These questions will be contextualized within the virtual cinematic representation of Atwood's *Handmaid's Tale* -- a successful Hulu TV series; now streaming on Amazon Prime.



Source: pinterest.com



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The questions we encounter can be listed as first: what is the status of a citizen? And particularly what is the state of women as citizens? Secondly, can we be more than genders, sex and organs in the workings of a biopolitical paradigm? And thirdly can the literary space of speculative fiction elucidate the operations of biopolitics in a postmodern, globalized, posthuman world? These questions will be contextualized within the virtual cinematic representation of Margaret Atwood's 'Handmaid's Tale', a successful Hulu TV series; now streaming on Amazon Prime.

To illustrate further, let us begin with the first question and that is: what is a citizen? The citizens in a dystopic setting are subjects in the making as some are included, some may be excluded and rendered as waste by the statutes of the state. The subjectivized biopower contributes largely to biopolitical indeterminacy as well as unrest.

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- What is the status of the 'citizen'?
- According to Agamben, "....the biopolitical relationship between state and citizen depends on the fact that the subject may become suspended by the law in a state of emergency...."
- "The citizen's position is tenuous, as he or she can, when necessary, enter a zone of indistinction where they are both prosecuted by the full force of the law (included), while no longer retaining the legal rights of a citizen (excluded)." (28)

Modern totalitarianism can be defined as the establishment, by means of the state of exception, of a legal order that allows for the physical domination not only of political adversaries but of entire categories of citizens who for some reason cannot be incorporated into the political system.

— Giorgio Agamben —

Source: az. quotes

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It would be pertinent to refer to Agamben in this context and he says, I quote the biopolitical relationship between state and citizen depends on the fact that the subject may become suspended by the law in a state of emergency. "The citizen's position is tenuous, as he or she can, when necessary, enter a zone of indistinction where they are both prosecuted by the full force of the law which is including, a citizen within its fold, while no longer retaining the legal rights of a citizen.

That is the situation when a person can be excluded from the rights of being a citizen.

Belongingness and citizenship are essential components of an individual's identity, but the exclusion of a given citizen or a group from the law may be sanctioned, it is this biopolitical indeterminacy that appears as an ambiguous and uncertain zone. Agamben sees it as a threshold, where fact and law seem to be undecidable. Sometimes an individual might suffer for being a man or being a woman or a trans person or for homosexuality.

Women find themselves in a marginalized state as a result of their politically defined status as women. Let us now look at the second question, can we be more than our genders?

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More than Genders!

- The categories -- biological sex (which is a public construct) and gender (which is a personal choice) -- determine the nature of an individual's political identity.
- However, the political identity attempts to hegemonize "all women" – whether trans or cis, fertile or infertile, intersex, etc.; as "subjects" to the same laws regarding the regulation of female bodies – even though the biology of various female subjects may, in actuality, differ". (29)
- The political system normally identifies women only through biological sex.



Source: panopticon.com


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The biopolitical paradigm not only has the potential to fracture the body of an individual, but it can also generate normative oppression violence and repression.

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- Palmer-White observes that an exemplary link between Agamben's work and feminist theory is present in his most famous and controversial statement where he stated that "today it is not the city but rather the camp that is the fundamental biopolitical paradigm of the West" (Agamben, *Sacer* 181).
- His words resonate with those of Betty Friedan's when she stated that "the state of a housewife is similar to a concentration camp victim". (29)
- Similarly, the devolution of an identity of an individual especially women to a well functioning set of reproductive organ can make them prisoners of their own bodies.



Source: feminist.com



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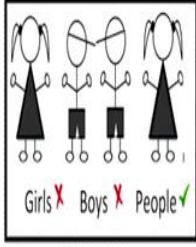
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Palmer-White observes that an exemplary link between Agamben's work and feminist theory is present in his most famous and also perhaps the most controversial statement, where he states that "today it is not the city, but rather the camp that is the fundamental biopolitical paradigm of the West".

His words resonate with those of Betty Friedan's when she stated that "the state of a housewife is similar to a concentration camp victim". Similarly, the devolution of an identity of an individual especially women to a well functioning set of reproductive organ can make them prisoners of their own bodies. In the dystopic space biopolitics is generally ritualized through language and underpinnings of sexual and reproductive labor.

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- This depiction of visual violence is found in Sf literature, especially dystopias.
 - For example: *Handmaid's Tale* by Atwood, *Herland* by Charlotte Perkins Gilman, *Red Clocks* by Leni Zumas, or web series streaming on Netflix like *Black Mirror* or *Westworld* etc.
- On the other hand, in the discursive space of Sf, gender identity outside of prescribed norms is made possible or *livable*.
- The themes of performance and biopolitical subjectivity highlight the ways in which *gender* influences our lives as political subjects.
- Thus dystopia constitutes a critique of existing social and political conditions contextualizing *gendering*.



Source: toisz.com

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The depiction of visual violence is found in science fiction literature, especially the dystopias. We can take the example of ‘Handmaids Tale’ by Atwood, or ‘Herland’ by Charlotte Perkins Gilman, ‘Red Clocks’ by Leni Zumas, or web series streaming on Netflix like ‘Black Mirror’ or ‘Westworld’ etcetera.


On the other hand, in the discursive space of science fiction, gender identity outside of prescribed norms is also made possible or livable. The themes of performance and biopolitical subjectivity highlight the ways in which gender influences our lives as political subjects. Thus, dystopia constitutes a critique of existing social and political conditions contextualizing gendering.

Sometimes the fictional, science fiction universe is more livable for the subject because they can always fight against a system which may not be perhaps the case in their real life. Therefore, that dystopic spaces is structurally provide struggle as well as rebellion. This aspect can also be seen in video games which will be taken up in the 5th module of 11th week; wherein we will explore the workings of biopower in simulated video games.

Hence a study of the dystopic space allows us to be more than our genders, by highlighting the problems faced by gendering. It allows us to be a receptacle of change through a cautionary tale. By combining the biopolitical paradigm and the feminist theory Palmer-White suggests that the dystopic discourse is best suited to deconstruct the discursive gendered subjects and respectively biopolitical subjectivities.

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- For Butler, as for Agamben, the private sphere of the self-- for example, one's sexual desires -- is intertwined with one's social, cultural, political self which makes 'gender'- a complex socio- political apparatus.
 - Palmer-White finds Butler's work decidedly compatible with Agamben's understanding of the conception of life as both 'a personal entity and a public one forever intertwined with the lives and experiences of others' (21).
- The feminist Sf deconstructs paradigms of gender and sexuality. Butler poses the question: "If I am a certain gender, will I be regarded as part of the human? Will the human expand to include me in its reach? ...Will there be a place for my life and will it be recognisable to the others upon which I depend for social existence?" (Butler, *Undoing Gender* 2–3).



Source: npr.org

Source: routledge.com



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For Judith Butler, as for Agamben, the private sphere of the self for example, one's sexual desires is intertwined with one's social, cultural, political self which makes 'gender' a complex social and political apparatus. Palmer-White finds Butler's work decidedly compatible with Agamben's understanding of the conception of life as both a personal entity and a public one forever intertwined with the lives and experiences of others.

The feminist science fiction deconstructs paradigms of gender and sexuality. Butler poses a very interesting question and I quote if I am a certain gender, will I be regarded as part of the human? Will the human expand to include me in this reach? Will there be a place for my life and will it be recognizable to the others upon which I depend for social existence? Unquote.


Science fiction allows the individual to take any gender and in the post human narrative one can find association with animals, extraterrestrials, monsters allowing an expansion of the body in a literary sense.

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- Therefore, Sf literature is a place of pure potentiality.
- It offers not only fantasy but, as a virtual world of fiction, the capacity for legitimacy – the chance to make unliveable life possible, if only in an imagined landscape:
- “... the thought of a possible life is only an indulgence for those who already know themselves to be possible. For those who are still looking to become possible, possibility is a necessity” (*Undoing Gender* 31).



Source: npr.org



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Therefore, science fiction literature is a place of pure potentiality. It offers not only fantasy but, as a virtual world of fiction, it also provides the capacity for legitimacy the chance to make unlivable life possible, if only in an imagined landscape. We can again refer to Butler’s work in ‘Undoing Gender’ where she says, “the thought of a possible life is only an indulgence, for those who already know themselves to be possible. For those who are still looking to become possible, possibility is a necessity”.


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Altering Paradigms

- Since the paradigms of gender and sex have changed significantly, “the assumed female duty to reproduce, to attend to the physical and emotional well-being of others and at the same time to place her own needs below those of others is based on the fiction that women’s bodies, instincts, skills and emotions are all designed to prepare them for these capacities” needs changing as well. (34)
- This is one of the founding principle of biopower which accounts political control over people – women – that produce and maintain those lives.
- Control, surveillance and gendering find intersections in modern day living.



Source: artling.com



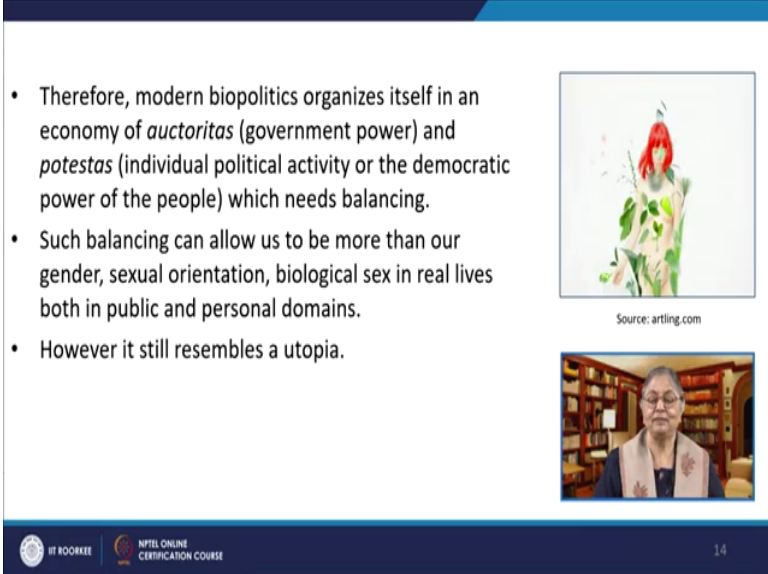
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Since the paradigms of gender and sex have significantly changed, certain other assumptions also require some fundamental changes. For example, “the assumed female duty to reproduce, to attend to the physical and emotional well-being of others and at the same time to place her own needs below those of others is based on the fiction that women’s bodies, their instincts, skills and emotions are all designed to prepare them for these capacities.” So, this perception should also change.

This is one of the founding principles of biopower, which accounts political control over women that produce and also maintain those lives. Controlled surveillance and gendering find intersections in modern day living too.

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- Therefore, modern biopolitics organizes itself in an economy of *auctoritas* (government power) and *potestas* (individual political activity or the democratic power of the people) which needs balancing.
- Such balancing can allow us to be more than our gender, sexual orientation, biological sex in real lives both in public and personal domains.
- However it still resembles a utopia.

Therefore, modern biopolitics organizes itself in an economy of ‘auctoritas’ and ‘potestas’, that is government power and individual political activity or the democratic people of the people, which needs balancing. Such balancing can allow us to be more than our gender, sexual orientation, biological sex in real lives both in public as well as personal domains. However, it still resembles a utopia.

Having established the entanglement of gender, sex and biopolitics, let us move to our third and final question and that is, how does discursive spaces of science fiction decode the operations of biopower? In order to address this question, let us take the example of the 2017 TV adaptation of Atwood’s novel ‘The Handmaid’s Tale’.

It has also been discussed by White in her essay as one of her examples to elucidate on the aforementioned; however, we will move beyond White's theorizations. The novel which was first published in 1985, has always interested people and it also has immense staging power. The TV adaptation is a Hulu original which was released in 2017. The serialized version of 'The Handmaid's Tale' reiterates the complex relation between biopolitics, women's bodies and gender especially in the 21st century.

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- The TV series *The Handmaid's Tale* (2017), is created by Bruce Miller. It is an adaptation of Atwood's graphic novel *The Handmaid's Tale* by Margaret Atwood.
- It is currently streaming on Amazon Prime Video and is a HULU original.
- The series has won *Primetime Emmy Award for Outstanding Drama Series*.
- As one of the most famous feminist dystopian depiction of women being bio-politically subjugated to outline the entangled nature of biopolitics and gender, the text functions as a mirror to the present.



Source: guzmostory.com



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This TV series is created by Bruce Miller, it has won Primetime Emmy Award for Outstanding Drama Series. As one of the most famous feminist dystopian depiction of women being bio-politically subjugated to outline the entangled nature of biopolitics and gender, the text functions as a mirror to the present. It depicts the life of a young woman Offred, the part of Offred has been played by Elizabeth moss in the serialized narrative.

She is living under a totalitarian theocracy that had overthrown the US government to form an oppressive Republic of Gilead. It treats women as property of the state and is faced with environmental disasters and also a plummeting birth rate. In a desperate attempt to repopulate a devastated world the few remaining fertile women are forced into sexual servitude, Offred is one of the few remaining fertile women.


She is also forced into reproductive slavery; however, she is determined to survive the terrifying world she lives in and find the daughter that was taken away from her.

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- It depicts the life of a young woman, Offred played by Elisabeth Moss in the serialized narrative, who is one of the few remaining fertile women in America, forced into reproductive slavery under a totalitarian theocracy that overthrows the US government to form the oppressive Republic of Gilead.
- These women, called handmaids, are assigned to the homes of the ruling elite, and must submit to a ritualized *ceremony* by their male masters (Commanders) in the presence of their wives, to be impregnated and bear children for them.
- The Commanders are the power centers dictating this practice.



Source: gettyimages.com




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‘Handmaid’ is a tag by which such fertile women are known, they are assigned to the homes of the ruling elite, and they must submit to a ritualized ceremony by their male masters who are known as ‘commanders’ in the presence of their wives, so that they can be impregnated and bear children for them. The commanders are the power centers dictating this practice. Let us watch a scene from the series as a testament to the forced ritualized ceremony depicted in the narrative both in the story and the series.

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THE HANDMAID'S TALE hulu

- In this scene, we see that June Osborne/ Offred (played by Elisabeth Moss) is forced into sexual servitude.
- Her expression depicts pain and suffering; a sense of stern rebellion is brewing insider her.
- This is called a “ceremony” in the series depicting the foundations of Gilead.



Source: <https://youtu.be/EhwZTSPGagI>

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‘In this scene, we see that Offred or June Osborne played by Elisabeth Moss is forced into sexual servitude. Her expression depicts pain and suffering; a sense of stern rebellion is also brewing inside her. This is called the “ceremony” in the series depicting the foundations of Gilead.

Those eggs you got today were nice and fresh, I wish they would hurry up some of us got things to do you know.

Hurry up and wait.

Late again as usual, what if it is about men?

The knock is prescribed because tonight this room is her domain.


Come in.

This whole thing, but in this house little things mean everything.

Good evening. Dear, now let us get started. Excuse me, and when Rachel saw the Geebeare Jacob Lew children Rachel envied her sister and said unto Jacob give me children or else I die’.

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- The series showcases the collapse of a world order due to decline in fertility rates.
- The depiction of the modern anxieties about political and social problems related to gender from the biopolitical paradigm, the sinister spectre of gender and patriarchal oppression, haunt the totalitarian government of Gilead.
- In Season one of *The Handmaid's Tale* TV series, Offred poignantly portrays the connection between women pre- and post-Gilead: “[t]here was a way we looked at each other at the Red Centre ... before ... you didn’t ever see it. Not more than a glimpse ... That look was terror. Utter and unutterable” (“*Night*” 00:02:00-00:05:17).



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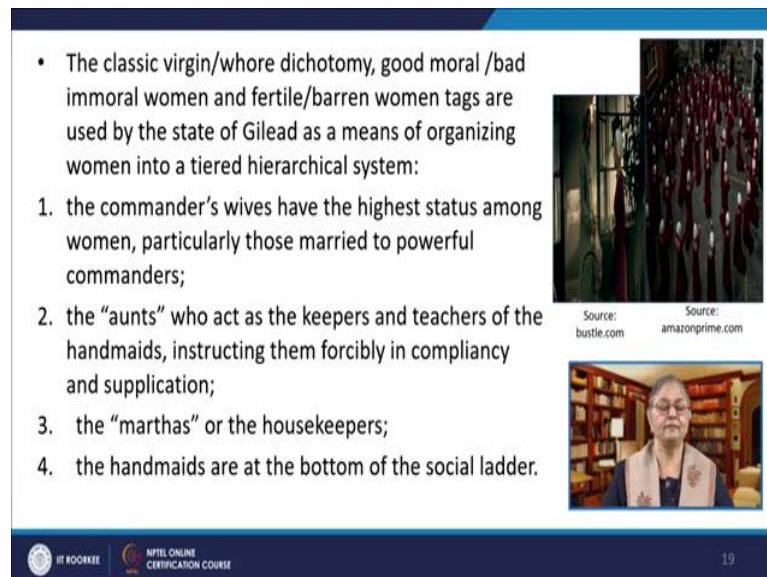
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gender from the biopolitical paradigm, the sinister specter of gender and patriarchal oppression, haunt the totalitarian government of Gilead.

In Season one of ‘The Handmaid’s Tale’ TV series, Offred poignantly portrays the connection between women pre and post Gilead: “there was a way we looked at each other at the Red Centre, before, you did not ever see it. Not more than a glimpse that look was terror. Utter and unutterable.

We witness a haunting depiction of sexual division of labor on the screen and also in this story. The act of organizing women is an act of organizing wombs, sexualization and de-sexualization are integral parts of the Gileadean biopower and it is apparent in the hierarchy which this republic practices.

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- The classic virgin/whore dichotomy, good moral /bad immoral women and fertile/barren women tags are used by the state of Gilead as a means of organizing women into a tiered hierarchical system:

1. the commander’s wives have the highest status among women, particularly those married to powerful commanders;
2. the “aunts” who act as the keepers and teachers of the handmaids, instructing them forcibly in compliancy and supplication;
3. the “marthas” or the housekeepers;
4. the handmaids are at the bottom of the social ladder.

Source: bustle.com Source: amazonprime.com

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The state of Gilead organizes women according to the text, they use the classic virgin or whore dichotomy, good moral bad immoral women and fertile barren women tags as a means of organizing women into a tiered hierarchical system. At the top are the commander’s wives particularly those who are married to powerful ones.

Secondly there are “aunts” who act as the keepers and teachers of the handmaids, instructing them forcibly in compliancy and supplication. In the third place are the “marthas” or the housekeepers and the handmaids are at the bottom of the social ladder.

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- The “aunts” and the “marthas” can be said to form their own distinct categories of women outside the role of wife and the child-bearing handmaids. They are usually older, desexualised and divorced from traditional notions of femininity.
- Therefore the body and female subjectivity with respect to the body is crucial to the roles assigned to each woman in the State.
- Sexual slavery, normalized violence is highlighted by the Aunt’s repetition that “Gilead is within you”. (Atwood, 33)



Handmaid's Tale Class System
Source:
<https://emilyadireng302.wordpress.com/2015/02/24/understanding-a-dystopian-society/>



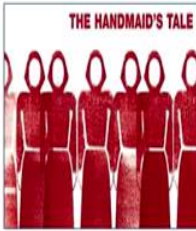
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The “aunts” in the “marthas” can be said to form their own distinct categories of women outside the role of wife and the child bearing handmaids. They are usually older, desexualized and divorced from traditional notions of femininity. Therefore, the body and female subjectivity with respect to the body is crucial to the roles assigned to each woman in this state.


Sexual slavery, normalized violence is highlighted by the Aunt’s repetition that “Gilead is within you” Offred’s body represents the biopolitics of the gendered bodies in a true sense.

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- In the novel Offred states:
“I used to think of my body as an instrument, of pleasure, or a means of transportation, or an implement for the accomplishment of my will.
“I could use it to run, push buttons ... make things happen. There were limits but my body was nevertheless lithe, single, solid, one with me.
“Now the flesh arranges itself differently. I’m a cloud, congealed around a central object, the shape of a pear, which is more real than I am and glows red with its translucent wrappings” (Atwood, 25)



Source: fitcher.com




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In the novel Offred states and it is rather a longer quote. I used to think of my body as an instrument of pleasure or a means of transportation or an implement for the accomplishment of my will. However, after having spent her time in this fictionalized republic of Gilead she says, “now the flesh arranges itself differently. I am a cloud congealed around a central object, the shape of a pear which is more real than I am and glows red with its translucent wrappings”.

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Source: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=81PyH5THNQ&t=8s>

- In the series, Offred states, “I was asleep before. That’s how we let it happen.
- “When they slaughtered Congress, we didn’t wake up. When they blamed terrorists and disrupted the Constitution, we didn’t wake up then either. Now I am awake.”

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In the series Offred states “I was asleep before, that is how we let it happen”. “When they slaughtered congress, we did not wake up, when they blamed terrorists and disrupted the Constitution, we did not wake up then either. Now, I am awake.”

“I was asleep before. That is how we let it happen”. “When they slaughtered congress, we did not wake up, when they blamed terrorists and suspended the constitution, we did not wake up then either. Now, I am awake”.

You girls will serve the leaders and their barren wives, you will bear children for them.

Offred’s words denote under tones of biopower as her body has transgressed the codes of normalcy and her identity is caged in her body, which is controlled by the Republic of Gilead.

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- Both narratives -- the series and the novel-- refer to Offred's becoming one with herself as an act of rebellion. “She is awake” and she is a “cloud”.
- She glows red and for Gilead, red represents fertility and the function of her uterus.
- However for Offred, red is a performance as opposed to codified sexual labour as regimentation of social behaviour.
- Therefore, the figuration of Offred portrays the dehumanization of an individual through biopolitical control in a totalitarian regime.

Source: hulu.com


Both narratives - the series and the novel refer to Offred’s becoming one with herself as an act of rebellion. “She is awake” and she is a “cloud”. She glows red and for Gilead, red represents fertility that is the function of the uterus of a women. However, for Offred red is a performance as opposed to codified sexual labour as regimentation of social behavior. Therefore, the figuration of Offred portrays the dehumanization of an individual through biopolitical control in a totalitarian regime.

In the latest season premiered in April 2021, which is not based on the book, we see Offred or June fight for her freedom against the Republic of Gilead, she fights for autonomy and also for her body.


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The Color and the Body

- The handmaids wear red dresses (Atwood 4), to symbolize fertility and function as sexual objects.
- The wives (of the Commanders) frequently view handmaids as “little whores,” as one wife describes handmaids in *The Handmaid's Tale* TV series (“Birth Day” 00:20:25–28).
- The wives wear blue gowns to denote purity and chastity (Atwood 10) to mark innocence and child care.
- This division of the women into two separate social groups demonstrates the two “biopolitical functions of women” within the Gileadean regime. (35)



Source: hulu.com



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The TV series also represents a color coating of the body. The Handmaids wear red dress to symbolize fertility and to symbolize their function as sexual objects only.

The wives of the commanders frequently view handmaids as “little whores” as one wife describes handmaids in ‘The Handmaids Tale’ TV series. The wives wear blue gowns to denote purity and chastity to mark innocence in childcare.


This division of the women into two separate social groups demonstrates the two biopolitical functions of women within this regime.

The body is color coded and that color is imprinted on the identity of a women, even though she is completely dehumanized. In Gilead the body narrates this story more than the individual. It becomes the receptacle of change as it is disfigured by biopolitical tools of conduct. The postmodern, post humanist speculative discourses operating on the themes of gender and biopower suggest that the incarcerated human body especially the female body is not a problem of the past, but of the present as well.

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It's not a problem of the past.
It's a problem of the present.

- The impossibility of segregating 'sex' and 'power' (as two inter- dependent constructs) forms the biopolitics of our contemporary times.
- The dystopic model of *The Handmaid's Tale* explores the constraints of living in a heteronormative hierarchy.
- However this dystopic model is also very much a part of the reality and not the imaginary.
- To quote Donna Haraway: "the boundary between science fiction and social reality is an optical illusion" (*The Cyborg Manifesto*; 149).




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The impossibility of segregating 'sex' in 'power' as two interdependent constructs forms the biopolitics of our contemporary times. The dystopic model of 'The Handmaid's Tale' explores the constraints of living in a heteronormative hierarchy. However, this dystopic model is also very much a part of the reality and not the imaginary only.


To quote Donna Haraway: "the boundary between science fiction and social reality is an optical illusion".

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- Susan Okin Moller in *Justice, Gender and the Family* (1989) claims that women have been expected to fulfil the roles of Gilead's "handmaids" and wives, while simultaneously carrying out the invisible domestic labor of the 'Marthas'.
- Many women choose to enter the workplace while also maintaining a family, and in such cases it is still women who "will do by far the greatest proportion of unpaid family work, such as child care and housework" (Okin 5).



Source: newsun.org

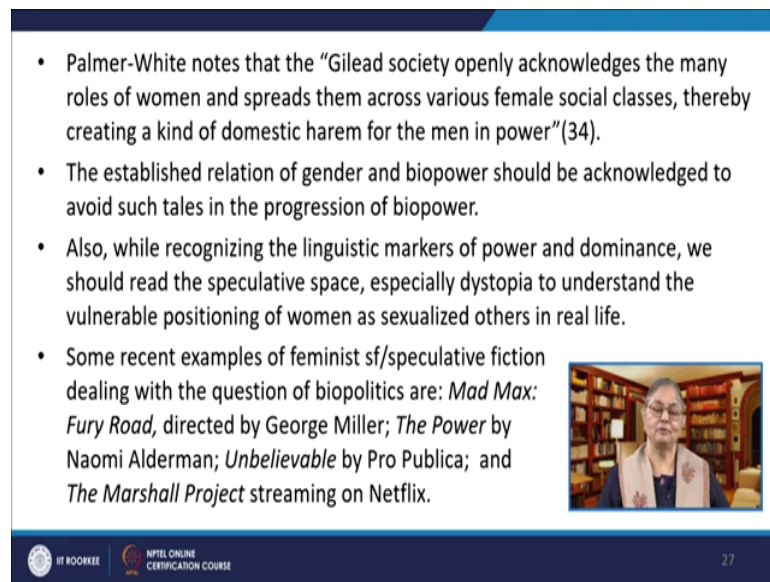


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We can also refer to Susan Okin Moller, in a work ‘Justice, Gender in the Family’. She claims that women have been expected to fulfill the roles of Gilead’s “handmaids” and wives, while simultaneously carrying out the invisible domestic labor of the ‘Marthas’.

Many women choose to enter the workplace while also maintaining a family and in such cases it is still women who “will do by far the greatest proportion of unpaid family work, such as childcare and household chores”.

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- Palmer-White notes that the “Gilead society openly acknowledges the many roles of women and spreads them across various female social classes, thereby creating a kind of domestic harem for the men in power”(34).
- The established relation of gender and biopower should be acknowledged to avoid such tales in the progression of biopower.
- Also, while recognizing the linguistic markers of power and dominance, we should read the speculative space, especially dystopia to understand the vulnerable positioning of women as sexualized others in real life.
- Some recent examples of feminist sf/speculative fiction dealing with the question of biopolitics are: *Mad Max: Fury Road*, directed by George Miller; *The Power* by Naomi Alderman; *Unbelievable* by Pro Publica; and *The Marshall Project* streaming on Netflix.

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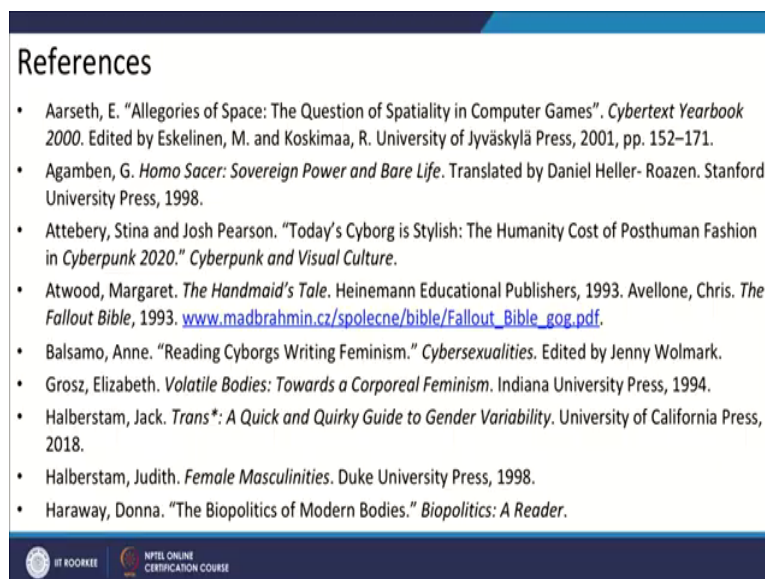
The established relation of gender and biopower should be acknowledged to avoid such tales in the progression of biopower. Also, while recognizing the linguistic markers of power and dominance, we should read the speculative space especially dystopia to understand the vulnerable positioning of women as sexualized others in real life.

Some recent examples of feminist, science fiction or speculative fiction dealing with the question of biopolitics are: ‘Mad Max: Fury Road’, directed by George Miller; ‘The Power’ by Naomi Alderman; ‘Unbelievable’ by Pro Publica and ‘The Marshall Project’ is streaming now on Netflix.

To conclude and continue this discussion further, we can say that in order to achieve gender equality and progress towards gender sustainability we should acknowledge the impact of biopower on gender and on genders. Following this line of inquiry and foregrounding the intersections of gender and biopolitics, the next segment will focus on the sexual politics of the term 'gender' as explained by Donna Haraway. This discussion on the textual, linguistic and sexual politics of the term 'gender' shall provide a holistic understanding of biopower and gender.

Thank you.

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