The Order of Dystopias and the Chaos of Crossings: A Cross-Cultural of Novels from Canada, South Africa, and Egypt

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Abstract

This study ventures into the realm of dystopian literature, examining the nuanced roles that borders—both physical and structural—play in shaping the societies within. It delves into the fabric of dystopian worlds as depicted in Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985) from Canada, Ahmed Khaled Towfik's *Utopia* (2008) from Egypt, and J.M. Coetzee's *Waiting for the Barbarians* (1980) from South Africa. This study adopts a cross-cultural approach to the genre's thematic consistencies, highlighting dystopian literature's capacity to transcend geography and culture and addressing universal human methods of survival and resistance. Through exploring how these borders dictate the flow of knowledge, power, and movement, thus enforcing conformity within dystopian worlds, the study illuminates the interactive relationship between the corporeal of the dystopian citizens and the physical and structural borders they navigate. Secondly, as a transgression to such borders is inevitable, it reveals how transgressions (either minor or major) in dystopian settings catalyze shifts in power dynamics and individual identity. Scrutinizing the minor and major crossings, the study extends the concept of the contact zone to dystopian encounters, showcasing how these narrative spaces become sites of transformative interaction and resistance and, most importantly, reflecting and shaping our understanding of complex society systems under dictatorships, colonization, and social segregation. Through a cross-cultural lens, the research examines the portrayal of bodies in contact with borders, investigating the transformative potential of these crossings. The tension between maintaining order and the chaos that arises from crossing these borders echoes the principles

of chaos theory, which asserts both the inherent unpredictability and interconnectedness within these complex systems.

The study asserts that dystopian narratives, akin to chaotic systems, defy reduction to simple terms and maintain an inherently unpredictable nature, deeply influenced by the nuances of seemingly minor acts of defiance and transgression as much as major ones. Moreover, it cautions against a narrow interpretation of border crossings as merely positive acts framed within a simplistic binary of defeat versus revolution or despair versus hope. Instead, the study advocates for a broader spectrum of interpretations, recognizing the multifaceted complexity of dystopian societies and the varied significance of crossing borders. Rethinking the unpredictability of complex systems forces us to rethink the hastily deterministic interpretation of the outcome of revolutions and resistance movements. In other words, to view such major events not as rupture events but as events in progress. In doing so, it offers a fresh perspective on the chaotic underpinnings of dystopian worlds and their reflection on our societal structures. This approach underscores the enduring power of literature to dialogically reflect on societies' challenges and hardships, revealing the collective human experiences that unite us across cultural and geographical divides.

Zusammenfassung

Diese Studie führt in den Themenbereich der dystopischen Literatur ein und untersucht die unterschiedlichen Rollen, die Grenzen - sowohl räumliche als auch strukturelle - bei der Gestaltung der Gesellschaften spielen. Sie befasst sich mit der Konstruktion dystopischer Welten, wie sie in Margaret Atwoods *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985) aus Kanada, Ahmed Khaled Towfiks *Utopia* (2008) aus Ägypten und J.M. Coetzees *Waiting for the Barbarians* (1980) aus Südafrika dargestellt werden. Diese Studie wählt einen interkulturellen Ansatz für die thematische Kohärenz des Genres, unterstreicht die Kapazität dystopischer Literatur, Geografie und Kultur zu überschreiten, und widmet sich den universellen menschlichen Methoden des Überlebens und des Widerstands. Die Studie beleuchtet, wie Grenzen den Fluss von Wissen, Macht und Bewegung bestimmen und Konformität in dystopischen Welten erzwingen, indem sie die interaktive Beziehung zwischen dem körperlichen Dasein der dystopischen Bürger und den physischen sowie strukturellen Grenzen, die sie überwinden müssen, untersucht. Weiterhin, da die Überschreitung solcher Grenzen unausweichlich erscheint, zeigt sie auf, wie selbst kleinste Übertretungen in dystopischen Kontexten zu Verschiebungen in der Machtdynamik und der individuellen Identität führen können. Die Untersuchung erforscht sowohl kleine als auch große Grenzüberschreitungen und weitet das Konzept der Kontaktzone auf dystopische Kontakte aus. Sie verdeutlicht, wie diese narrativen Räume zu Schauplätzen transformativer Interaktion und Widerstandes werden und, was besonders bedeutend ist, unser Verständnis von komplexen Gesellschaftssystemen unter Diktaturen und Kolonialisierung sowie soziale Segregation widerspiegeln und formen. Mit einem interkulturellen Blickwinkel

analysiert die Studie, wie Körper im Kontakt mit Grenzen dargestellt werden, und beleuchtet das transformative Potenzial dieser Grenzübertritte. Aus interkultureller Sicht erforscht die Studie, wie Körper in Berührung mit Grenzen dargestellt werden und erforscht das transformative Potenzial solcher Grenzüberschreitungen. Die Spannung zwischen der Aufrechterhaltung von Ordnung und dem durch Grenzübertritte entstehenden Chaos reflektiert die Grundsätze der Chaostheorie, die sowohl die inhärente Unvorhersehbarkeit als auch die Vernetzung in diesen komplexen Systemen hervorhebt.

Die Untersuchung erkennt, dass dystopische Erzählungen, ähnlich chaotischen Systemen, sich einer Reduktion auf einfache Begriffe widersetzen und einen wesentlich unvorhersehbaren Charakter besitzen. Dieser Charakter wird sowohl von den Feinheiten scheinbar kleiner Akte des Widerstands und der Überschreitung als auch von größeren Ereignissen beeinflusst. Zudem warnt die Studie vor einer zu engen Interpretation von Grenzüberschreitungen als ausschließlich positive Handlungen, die in einer vereinfachenden binären Darstellung von Niederlage versus Revolution oder Verzweiflung versus Hoffnung verankert sind. Die Studie setzt sich für ein umfassenderes Spektrum an Interpretationen ein und erkennt die vielschichtige Komplexität dystopischer Gesellschaften sowie die unterschiedlichen Bedeutungen von Grenzüberschreitungen an. Eine Neubewertung der Unvorhersehbarkeit komplexer Systeme fordert uns heraus, deterministische Interpretationen der Ergebnisse von Revolutionen und Widerstandsbewegungen zu hinterfragen. Das bedeutet, solche bedeutenden Ereignisse nicht als punktuelle Brüche, sondern als fortlaufende Prozesse zu begreifen. Auf diese Weise eröffnet die Studie eine neue Sichtweise auf die chaotischen Grundlagen dystopischer Welten und deren

Spiegelung in unseren gesellschaftlichen Strukturen. Dieser Ansatz betont die anhaltende Bedeutung der Literatur, die Herausforderungen und Sorgen von Gesellschaften dialogisch zu reflektieren und die gemeinsamen menschlichen Erfahrungen aufzuzeigen, die uns über kulturelle und geografische Grenzen hinweg verbinden.

ملخص البحث

تغوص هذه الدراسة في أعماق الأدب الديستوبي، مستكشفة الدور الدقيق للحدود/ الفواصل - سواء كانت مادية أو هيكلية - في تشكيل المجتمعات الديستوبية. تتعمق الدراسة في تفاصيل العوالم الديستوبية كما تجسدها أعمال "حكاية الخادمة" لمارغريت أتوود (1985) من كندا، و"يوتوبيا" لأحمد خالد توفيق (2008) من مصر، و "في انتظار البرابرة" لجي إم كوتزي (1980) من جنوب أفريقيا. تتبنى الدراسة منهجاً عابر للثقافات للتوافق الموضوعي لهذا النوع الأدبي، مسلطة الضوء على قدرة الأدب الديستوبي على تجاوز الحدود الجغرافية والثقافية وبحث أساليب البقاء والمقاومة من منظور إنساني عالمي. تبحث الدراسة كيف تحد هذه الحدود تدفق المعرفة والسلطة والحركة عبرها، وكيف تفرض التماثل داخل العوالم الديستوبية، ملقية الضوء على العلاقة التفاعلية بين الوجود الجسدي لسكان هذه العوالم والحدود المادية والبنيوية التي يجتازونها. ونظرًا لأن اجتياز هذه الحدود أمر حتمي، تكشف الدراسة كيف أن التجاوزات والتعديات لتلك الحدود الصغيرة أو الكبيرة داخل المجتمعات الديستوبية تسهم في تغيير ديناميكيات السلطة والهوية الفردية. بالتعمق في تحليل عبور الحدود سواء كان ثانوية أو رئيسية، توسع الدراسة مفهوم منطقة الاتصال لتشمل اللقاءات الديستوبية، وتبين كيف تتحول هذه المساحات السردية إلى مواقع للتفاعل التحويلي والمقاومة. والأهم من ذلك، تعمل على تعكس وتشكيل فهمنا للأنظمة الاجتماعية المعقدة في ظل الديكتاتوريات والاستعمار، وكذلك الفصل العنصري. من خلال منظور عابر للثقافات، تناقش الدراسة تمثيل الأجساد التي تتفاعل مع الحدود، وتستقصي الإمكانات التحويلية لهذا العبور. يبرز التوتر بين الحفاظ على النظام والفوضى الناتجة عن عبور هذه الحدود، مما يعكس مبادئ نظرية الفوضى (بمفهومها الرياضي) التي تشدد على عدم القابلية للتنبؤ والتشابك الكامن في هذه الأنظمة المعقدة.

تبرز الدراسة كيف أن الروايات الديستوبية، المماثلة للأنظمة الفوضوية، تقاوم تبسيطها إلى مفاهيم أولية وتحتفظ بطابعها غير المتوقع، متأثرة بشكل عميق بتفاصيل أفعال التمرد والتعدي سواء كانت جسيمة أو طفيفة. كما تحذر الدراسة من تفسير ضيق لمفهوم عبور الحدود كأفعال إيجابية فقط، ضمن تقابل تبسيطي بين الهزيمة والثورة أو اليأس والأمل. بدلاً من ذلك، تقترح الدراسة مجموعة أوسع من التفسيرات، مع التأكيد على التعقيد المتعدد الأوجه للمجتمعات الديستوبية والأهمية المتنوعة لمفهوم عبور الحدود. إعادة تقييم الطبيعة غير المتوقعة للأنظمة المعقدة تدفعنا إلى التفكير مجدداً في التفسيرات الحتمية المتسرعة لنتائج الثورات وحركات المقاومة، معتبرين هذه الأحداث لا كلحظات انقطاع، بل كعمليات مستمرة. من خلال هذا، تقدم الدراسة رؤية جديدة للأسس الفوضوية التي تقوم عليها العوالم الديستوبية في دعوة للتفكير في الهياكل المجتمعية الحالية. وتؤكد هذه النظرة على القدرة المستمرة

للأدب في عكس التحديات والمعضلات التي تواجه المجتمعات من خلال إيجاد مساحة تفاعلية، وكشف التجارب الإنسانية المشتركة التي تربطنا عبر الفوارق والحدود الثقافية والجغرافية.

Table of Contents

Chapter 1: Dystopias, Borders, Bodies: Intersections and Crossings 14

1.1 Introduction: Towards a Cross-Cultural Approach 14

1.2 Dystopias: Origins, Concepts, and Borders 20

1.2.1 Utopia and Dystopia as Modes of Thinking 20

1.2.2 In the Beginning Was Utopia, then Dystopia Was Created: A Western Historical-Cultural Context 22

1.2.3 Utopia and Dystopia: Blurring Borders between Literary Genres 25

1.2.4 Dystopias in South African Literature 34

1.2.5 Utopias and Dystopias in Egyptian Literature 36

1.3 Main Concepts of Borders as a Multifaceted Phenomenon 41

1.4 Imposing Borders, Crossing Borders: Life in Dystopian Realties 46

1.5 The Dystopian Body: Within the Border and Contact Zones 50

1.5.1 Navigating Dystopian Territories: Unveiling Power Dynamics and Body Disciplines 51

1.5.2 The Dynamics of Domination and Docility: Foucault's Insights into Disciplinary Power Structures 53

1.5.3 From Discipline Zones into Contact Zones 57

1.6 Crossing Borders: Understanding Chaos between Mythology and 59

Complex Systems 59

1.6.1 Approaching the Intersection between Science and Humanities 60

1.6.2 Chaos and Complexity: Unraveling the Interconnectedness and Unpredictability within the Dystopian Worlds 63

1.7 Aims of the Study 68

Chapter 2: Crossing Borders, Revealing Hidden Scripts of the Household: The Dynamics of Contact Zones in Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985) 72

2.1 Introduction 72

2.1.1 The Dystopian United States of America from a Canadian Perspective 74

2.1.2 The Historical and Political Contexts of the Pre-Gilead Era 77

2.1.3 The Construction of Gilead: A Recipe for a Dystopia 79
2.2 B/ordering Society in Gilead 80
2.2.1 Re-structuring Society 81
2.2.2 Re-producing the Gileadean Female Body: Rachel and Leah Center 86
2.2.3 Ritualizing the Gileadean Body through the Events of Life and Death 93
2.3 Offred's Daily Minor Crossings and Uncovering the Hidden Scripts of the Subordinates 102
2.3.1 Surviving through the Workings of Memory 103
2.3.2 Revealing the Hidden Scripts of the Subordinates 108
2.4 Major Crossings, New Contact Zones, and Revelation of the Hidden Scripts of the Elite: Introduction 113
2.4.1 "Taboo Dissolved": Crossing into the Commander's Study Room as the First Contact Zone 115
2.4.2 Jezebel as a Second Contact Zone: The Hidden Scripts of the Commanders 119
2.4.2.1 The Exposure of the Elite Men 120
2.4.2.1.1 Inside the Hotel Room 124
2.4.2.2 The Underground Networks: 126
2.4.3 Nick's Room as a Third Contact Zone: Wives' Hidden Scripts Revealed 128
2.4.3.1 Under the Gaze of Shame 129
2.5 Conclusion: Under the Gaze of Narration 134
2.5.1 Limits of Storytelling and Storytelling as a Border Crossing 138
Chapter 3: The Dystopian City Chronicles of Ahmad Khaled Towfik's *Utopia* (2008): Challenging Gates and Forming Contact Zones 141
3.1 Introduction: Reflection on the Tyrant City 141
3.1.1 Utopia through the Lens of Urban Studies 144
3.1.2 Present Cairo between Gated Communities and Slums: The Binary of Urbanity 145
3.1.2.1 On '*Ashwa'iyat* 147
3.1.2.2 The Phenomenon of Cairo's Gated Communities 149

3.1.2.3 Shubra: A Short Overview 150
3.2 Future Cairo as a Dystopia: Urbanity between Segregation and Chaos 153
3.2.1 Symbiotic Relation between Slums and Gated Communities 157
3.2.2 Life of the Affluent: The Predator 160
3.2.3 Life of the Abject: The Prey 164
3.3 One Gate, Two Dystopias: Boredom(s) and Death 169
3.3.1 Boredom in Daily Life 170
3.3.2 Narrating Boredoms of Two Dystopias through Enumerations 172
3.3.3 Slum Hunting: Narratives of Death 179
3.3.4 Slum Tourism to Slum Hunting 180
3.4 Out of the Gates: Experiencing Shubra 184
3.4.1 First Contact Zone: The Truck 185
3.4.2 Dystopian Shubra 188
3.4.3 Second Contact Zone: Gaber's Shack 190
3.4.3.1 The Acts of Rape: Contestation of Masculinities 191
3.4.4 The Third Contact Zone: The Tunnels 194
3.4.5 Infiltrating Utopia: The People Demand the Overthrow of Utopia ... 197
3.5 Conclusion 199
3.5.1 The Predator and the Prey: Dual Facets of Class Segregation 201
3.5.2 Death and Revolution 204
Chapter 4: Exploring the Anatomy of the Empire's Labyrinth of Order: Center, Margins and Beyond in J.M. Coetzee's *Waiting for the Barbarians* (1980) 209
4.1 Introduction: An Apocalypse of An Empire 209
4.1.1 Present Tense and Its Allegory 216
4.2 One Empire, Multiple Manifestations: The Center Versus the Margins .. 219
4.2.1 The Burden of The Empire: Lining the Borders and Defining Barbarianism 226
4.2.2 Torture: The Empire's Narrative of the Border 232
4.3 The Magistrate's Willful Blindness: The Hut as First Contact Zone 236

4.4 Pursuit Of Reconciliation with The Tortured Body: The Apartment as Second Contact Zone 241

4.4.1 Filling in The Blankness: The Other's Trauma and Narration 246

4.5 Crossing the Empire's Borders: The Desert as a Third Contact Zone ... 252

4.6 Becoming the Tortured Body: The Prison as a Fourth Contact Zone 257

4.6.1 The Empire with Thousands of Faces of Torture 259

4.6.2 Imposing Loneliness: The Silent Face of Torture 261

4.6.2.1 Blossoms of the Prison: Empathy and Restoring the Voice 263

4.6.3 Public Torture and Humiliation: Sharing the Responsibility and Exposing the Soul 268

4.6.4 The Investigation: Re-Writing the Enemy and Speaking Madness at the Empire 272

4.7 Conclusion: Unwriting the Self 275

Chapter 5: Navigating through Chaos and Crossings without Conclusions 280

5.1 Introduction 280

5.2 Navigating the Dystopian Labyrinth: Deciphering the System's Building Blocks 280

5.3 The Body Between Entrapment in the Dystopian Maze and Resistance in the Contact Zones 285

5.4 Open-Ending Narratives: Breaking the Order and Instigating Chaos 290

Works Cited 294

Chapter 1:

Dystopias, Borders, Bodies: Intersections and Crossings

1.1 Introduction: Towards a Cross-Cultural Approach

Literature maintains a dynamic and dialogical relationship with society, engaging with and commenting on critical historical moments. The novel, as highlighted by Tarek El-Ariss, serves "as edifice and main framework for interpretation shaping the microcosmos of the public sphere and generating political consciousness […]" (5). Dystopian fiction reflects contextualized historical periods marked by shattered hope and escalating fears as a critique of the present and past while warning about the future. The genre has witnessed a significant global production surge among adult and young adult readers, prompting numerous books and research studies to scrutinize its themes and characteristics. However, the definitions and boundaries of dystopian literature remain subjects of ongoing revision and exploration in literary studies worldwide.

That said, dystopian narratives are perceived in this study as an elaborate metaphor of society's order in crisis standing at the threshold of chaos. Regardless of their cultural origins, dystopian narratives can serve as a laboratory for exploring the interplay between the thematic concept of borders and the pervasive influence of fear on the dystopian body. These narratives do not merely depict fantastical realms divorced from any connection to real-life experiences across diverse historical and geographical contexts. Instead, they engage in fictionalizing historical occurrences that have already unfolded. This narrativization points out the recognition of the commonality of the human experience, irrespective of linguistic and cultural contexts, and motivates this study to analyze narratives from culturally distinct national literatures, namely,

Canada, Egypt, and South Africa. At the core of this recognition is another acknowledgment of the primary affective emotion—fear. Fear, as a potent and pervasive emotion, profoundly shapes human experiences not only in a destructive way but in various constructive ways. Dystopian narratives, in a sense, can be viewed as narrativized embodiments of these fears, as authors employ the affective framework of fear to spotlight societal dysfunctions and how individuals under extraordinary circumstances decide to cross the unexpected hinterlands of the borders of fear. Furthermore, a cross-cultural study of the dystopian genre is itself an expedition across seemingly geographical and cultural boundaries on one level and across areas of academic studies on another. Correspondingly, this study's focal point involves a critical juxtaposition of three narratives set in bleak dystopian worlds: *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985) by Margaret Atwood, *Utopia* (2008) by Ahmad Khaled Towfik (Aḥmad Khālid Tawfīq's *Yūtūbiyā*), and *Waiting for the Barbarians* (1980) by John Maxwell Coetzee from Canada, Egypt, and South Africa, respectively. As a first step, this unusual exploration allows the placement of these texts within their unique historical and social contexts but also goes beyond the confinement of their respective contexts to highlight the underlying universal thread across the selected texts, paving the way for a portrayal of societies across times of order and chaos.

Exploring the dystopian genre cross-culturally enriches the understanding of its themes and challenges the demarcations between dystopia and other literary genres. It fosters a universalization of the themes discussed while complicating and broadening their scope. Tackling different cultural perspectives helps unveil the underlying universality of human fears and anxieties, transcending borders

and fostering a comprehensive examination of the human condition in real or fictional dystopian settings. Ralph Pordzik points out in *The Quest for Postcolonial Utopia: A Comparative Introduction to the Utopian Novel in the New English Literatures* (2001) that this approach

> can legitimately claim to have uncovered links between cultural ensembles where formerly there appeared to have been separate traditions and to draw instructive parallels between literary systems where before it was taken for granted they did not exist. (1)

Pordzik's book offers a broad survey of postcolonial literatures written in English, focusing on texts from Australia, New Zealand, Canada, South Africa, and India. In contrast, this study seeks to draw connections between the shared experiences of settler colonies such as South Africa and Canada, and Egypt as a non-settler colony. While the literature of Canada and South Africa falls under the category of New English literatures, the Egyptian text is situated within Arabic literature, thereby placing two linguistic realms into conversation. At the same time, reading texts from Egypt and South Africa—two countries on the same continent but marked by different languages, cultural traditions, and colonial legacies—strengthens the idea of a South-South discourse. In a broader sense, bringing together literary narratives from Canada, Egypt, and South Africa within a single critical framework becomes a way of imagining a triangular dialogue between North and South, positioned within a transcolonial perspective.

At the heart of this study lies a strong belief in the value of a humanist, cross-cultural approach to literature—one that can open up broader, more inclusive international perspectives. This approach sheds light on how imagined dystopian

worlds intersect with lived realities, offering deeper insight into the complexities of our interconnected and constantly shifting world. Building on this foundation, the study turns to three narratives through the lens of humanism, drawing inspiration from Edward Said. Said defines humanism as a practice grounded in "the agency of human individuality and subjective intuition, rather than on received ideas and approved authority" (xxii). For Said, humanism represents "the only, and […] the final, resistance we have against the inhuman practices and injustices that disfigure human history" (xxii). His vision of humanism is not abstract or isolated, but rooted in a sense of solidarity—a shared space of reflection and interpretation across cultures that aims for "reflective understanding and genuine disclosure" (xvii).

Bringing together dystopian narratives from distinct cultural and historical contexts into a shared analytical space is a challenging task. This study acknowledges the genre's reputation for being largely Eurocentric. While Western dystopian literature has been widely recognized and canonized, the aim here is to broaden the theoretical scope of the genre by placing different literary traditions alongside one another. The selected texts each hold canonical status within their own national contexts. The intention is not to reject existing canons, but to extend the ways in which dystopian literature is approached by fostering a conversation between literatures that emerge from fundamentally different histories and languages, in line with what Pordzik has previously suggested.

Amidst the portrayals of fears and multilayered oppressions within these narratives, a challenge arises from the distinct historical moments that shaped these fears. The depicted oppressions often extrapolate experiences from

colonial histories that the respective countries endured, as well as from the post-independent era. While these texts offer glimpses into their societies, they also reflect how the dystopian genre mirrors diverse patterns of oppression and submission, as well as the various ways to defy and resist such injustices. Drawing from the unique backgrounds of these texts, a brief examination of their historical contexts underscores the urgency for reflection within dystopian writing. This study acknowledges these historical contexts without delving deeply into them, relying on the assumption that the spotlight is on the portrayed human in the narrative, universalizing their oppression and the ways they defy oppressive systems without prejudging their resistance.

Through this cross-cultural analysis, I trace the authors' engagement with intersectional universal questions, fears, and concerns that resonate across global societies. Themes such as sexism, classism, and the persistent remnants of traditional colonialism or ongoing features of neoliberal capitalism remain relevant worldwide. While *The Handmaid's Tale* and *Waiting for the Barbarians were* published in the 1970s and 1980s, rendering them classics, *Utopia* was later published in 2008; the three texts and their storylines and questions they pose remain contemporary and intersectional regarding themes. Not only do they remain contemporary to our world, but situating them in one critical space can bring more to the forefront than each text standing alone, bordered by its respective culture. Through an exploration of dystopian narratives from diverse corners of the world, a deeper understanding of our complex global landscape is sought, along with a recognition of the enduring relevance of these narratives in shaping conversations around prevalent societal challenges.

On another note, the cross-cultural approach brings into focus the shared power of literature to defamiliarize the familiar across different cultural contexts. The concept of defamiliarization, introduced by Viktor Shklovsky, is central to understanding this effect. He argues that art exists to renew our perception of life—to make us feel things again by presenting the ordinary in unfamiliar ways. For Shklovsky, the purpose of art is not to reflect reality as we habitually see it, but to disrupt that habit and extend the act of perception. As he puts it, "[t]he technique of art is to make objects unfamiliar, to make forms difficult, to increase the difficulty and length of perception" (18). In this sense, defamiliarization becomes a powerful artistic tool, especially in dystopian fiction, where it forces us to confront the often invisible or normalized forms of injustice that shape everyday life.

Furthermore, the exposure to the defamiliarization of literature cross-culturally implies that through exposure to various perceptions of cultural expressions, the process of defamiliarization is, in a sense, redeemed. The commonality of defamiliarization across various national literatures is critical in transcending preconceptions and stereotypes that often hinder a genuine understanding of cultures and inadvertently assign them hierarchical positions. The familiar thread of defamiliarization runs through cultures, bridging diverse perspectives and promoting a more authentic and open exploration of cultural expressions. Enabling a departure from conventional thinking, cross-cultural defamiliarization of literature facilitates a deeper engagement with the intricacies of cultural nuances, ultimately fostering a more inclusive understanding of the human experience across the boundaries of culture and context. Accordingly, the cross-

cultural approach offers a means to adopt a fresh outlook on the human condition that goes beyond the constraints of specific contexts.

1.2 Dystopias: Origins, Concepts, and Borders

This section is devoted to exposing my conceptualization concerning the interrelationship between utopia and dystopia as distinctive modes of thought and fictional genres. This exploration involves a comprehensive examination of the linguistic roots of both terms, charting their evolutionary trajectories as they metamorphose into distinct literary genres while concurrently entwined with the historical milieus that have influenced their conceptual and literary evolution. Given that the genesis of these terms occurred within the confines of the Anglophone sphere, it becomes imperative to delineate the trajectory through which this cognitive mode and literary form traversed geographical boundaries, ultimately disseminating from the Anglophone context to the Arab world, with a particular focus on the realm of Egyptian literature.

1.2.1 Utopia and Dystopia as Modes of Thinking

Pre-dating the formal coinage of these terms in English, ancient scriptures, superstitions, mythologies, and archaic prophecies from old civilizations often promised an idyllic utopia. It menacingly warned against an apocalyptic end and a dystopian afterlife as rewards for virtuous or malevolent deeds. As part of the collective unconscious of humanity, the narrative of Adam and Eve, as an example in its various renditions, embodies a complex interplay of yearning for an unprecedented utopian advancement for humanity and the dread of catastrophic ruin. The iconic biblical portrayal of the coiled serpent hissing in the Garden of Eden, interrupting the idyllic existence of Adam and Eve, presents a pivotal moment that can be interpreted as the genesis of a metaphorical

apocalypse, resonating with the modern concept of post-apocalyptic scenarios. This brief juncture evokes a nostalgic longing for a lost paradise. This image encapsulates humanity's perpetual struggle between hope and despair, heaven and hell, reflecting the duality of aspiration for utopian progress and the fear of apocalyptic devastation. This singular tale serves as a condensed representation of 'dystopia' and 'utopia,' not as mere linguistic terms but as foundational modes of thought and survival. These dual modes have permeated the collective human psyche through the potent force of imagination, ingraining themselves as archetypes.

Against this backdrop, I aim to delineate the historical contexts from which these terms originated and how the energies of these contexts have subsequently permeated the literary genres of utopia and dystopia as we recognize them today. In this exploration, the age-old argument on determining the 'original' versus the 'copy' within the utopian/dystopian realm, as Krishan Kumar strives to distinguish, is overcome (100). Raffaella Baccolini aptly points out that this question becomes obsolete, "the wrong question" (14). The endeavor shifts focus, as Baccolini confirms, from a mere binary of contradiction or hierarchical distinction between utopia and dystopia, often associated with high literature versus popular literature (14). Instead, the intention is to delve into the nuanced nature of the interrelationship between these concepts, their porous boundaries, and the evolving meanings they have assumed against the backdrop of rapidly changing societies they are trying to narrativize. This analysis seeks to uncover the intricate threads that connect the historical origins of these terms with their contemporary manifestations in literature, transcending the limitations of a simplistic binary framework.

1.2.2 In the Beginning Was Utopia, then Dystopia Was Created: A Western Historical-Cultural Context

The roots of the utopian concept can be traced back to the term coined by Thomas More in 1516. Derived from the Greek words "ou," meaning 'not,' and "topos," meaning 'place,' or when the Greek prefix "eu," meaning 'good,' is used, it refers to the 'good place.' Essentially, utopia signifies 'no place.' However, preceding the emergence of Western Renaissance utopia, thinkers of antiquity conceptualized "eutopia," envisioning societies where human suffering was minimized and happiness maximized, either through historical realities or imaginative constructs.

Ancient texts carry echoes of this utopian yearning. Hesiod's *Works and Days* (700 B.C.), penned in the seventh century BC, wistfully recalls the lost 'Golden Age' of King Kronos. In this era, humans led lives akin to gods, untouched by sorrow or hardship, and reaped bountiful harvests without sweat (Kumar 3). This lamentation endured through works like Virgil's *Eclogues* (37 B.C.) and Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (8 C.E.), both mourning the bygone Golden Age of Saturn while introducing the pastoral serenity of the classic Arcadia, a realm symbolizing peace, abundance, and prosperity (Kumar 3). In this lexicon of an ideal existence, terms like 'Cokaygne,' 'Arcadia,' or 'Golden Age' take on varying shades of meaning, often serving as synonyms for 'utopia.' Yet, these ancient myths predominantly look backward, embodying a 'retro-topia,' such myths all share more or less

> simplicity, unity, security, immortality or easy death, unity with God or the gods, abundance without labor, and no enmity between homo sapiens and

> the other animals. If women are included (which they usually are not) and get pregnant, they give birth without pain. (Sargent 10)

Lyman Tower Sargent names this form of utopia found in the myth of the Greeks and the Romans as the “utopias of sensual gratification or body utopias” where dreams and abundance are manifested with ease (10).

Plato was pivotal in steering utopian thought toward the future for societal reformation. His magnum opus, *Republic* (375 B.C.), presented a society governed by reason and philosopher-kings, advocating for communal property and the collective betterment of society (Kumar 2). The imagined 'republic' claimed the possibility of a future paradise on earth, affected deeply by the ongoing social and political changes of his era. While Plato's *Republic* envisaged a future earthly utopia, Christianity's emphasis on an afterlife relegated life on Earth to “a period of necessary suffering and purgation before [humans are] redeemed through divine agency" (Kumar 11). The ascendancy of Christianity during Europe's Middle Ages led to a recalibration of utopian aspirations. Instead of earthly paradises, the focus shifted towards heavenly salvation. St. Augustine's *The City of God*, written in the fifth century, declared the ultimate triumph of God's city over that of Man, reinforcing the notion of an afterlife as the locus of the true utopia. Yet, the Christian Middle Ages saw a dampening of utopian thought due to the perceived contradictions between utopian ideals and Christian doctrines, resulting in “creating not a utopia but an *alotopia*” (Vieira 6).

Nevertheless, the pursuit of alternative societal models persisted throughout history. Thomas More's seminal work, *Utopia* (1516), marked a watershed moment in utopian thinking. Emerging during a time of profound upheavals and

discoveries in the sixteenth century, More's work reflected the spirit of the age. It was an era characterized by geographical exploration, colonization, religious reformations, and political changes. Christopher Columbus' historic voyages between 1492 and 1503 heralded the commencement of European expansion, igniting a chain of events that saw the continent's exploitation of the Americas and Africa. This era of geographical expansion, often viewed as a geographic utopia (a real one on earth) in the imagination of the emerging colonizing countries, gave birth to the age of colonization and introduced the concept of the Other and the Exotic. Simultaneously, Martin Luther's Reformation, epitomized by his posting of the ninety-five Theses on the door of All Saints' Church in Wittenberg in 1517, ushered in a period of religious transformation. In 1513, Niccolo Machiavelli penned his influential political treatise, *The Prince,* a manual about how to seize power and excuse the use of violence—a utopia of power and domintaion. Then, in 1516, Thomas More introduced *Utopia,* the title of his fictional work that envisioned an ideal society, indirectly criticizing English society. *Utopia* established foundational elements for the genre, fundamentally criticizing one’s own society by creating a new, different one.

The evolution of the utopian concept is deeply entwined with historical contexts, ranging from ancient myths to philosophical treatises, and ultimately found expression in literary works like Thomas More's. These diverse manifestations of utopian thought have been shaped by their respective eras' prevailing circumstances, aspirations, and anxieties. From mythical musings of abundance to philosophical dreams of reformation, and from the Golden Age to the modern world, the concept of utopia has endured, a testament to humanity's unyielding quest for an ideal existence.

The conventional view positions 'dystopia' as a direct antithesis of 'utopia.' However, the term 'dystopia' emerged much later, coined by John Stuart Mill in a parliamentary speech in 1868. 'Dystopia' emerged as a political term within a charged context:

> It is, perhaps, too complimentary to call them Utopians, they ought rather to be called dys-topians, or cacotopians. What is commonly called Utopian is something too good to be practicable; but what they appear to favour is too bad to be practicable. (Mill)

It combines the prefix 'dys,' meaning bad, impaired, or abnormal, with 'topos.' John Stuart Mill's creation and initial use of 'dystopia' carry significant weight, foreshadowing the genre's direct engagement with politics. Primarily, 'dystopia' was coined as an antonym to 'utopia' in a nonfictional context, reflecting and acknowledging the impracticality inherent in utopian ideals. The context of its inception also references the centrality of politics within the discourse of dystopia. Unlike utopia, created as a fictional veil for concealed criticism, dystopia emerged as a term openly intertwined with political themes.

1.2.3 Utopia and Dystopia: Blurring Borders between Literary Genres

The intricacies between these two terms, utopia and dystopia, are further amplified when they represent two seemingly contrasting literary genres. The genre of utopia, which More's work *Utopia* helped establish, deepens these connections. Utopian literature often features a common element: the protagonist embarks on a journey from their familiar society to an ostensibly utopian one. This journey offers both the protagonist and the reader an opportunity to juxtapose their familiar surroundings outside the text, and the utopian setting the text

envisions. In this narrated journey, the protagonist assumes the roles of mediator and native informant, bridging the gap between their home society and the readers. This technique of meta-textual contrast serves as a vehicle through which utopian literature achieves its critical and didactic objectives.

Unlike traditional utopian fiction, dystopian narrative unfurls within the disconcerting milieu of the dystopian society, characterized by a deliberate plunge into the midst of ongoing events instead of a gradual narrative buildup. This commences "in media res" as a calculated strategy to defer cognitive estrangement initially (Baccolini and Moylan 5). Baccolini and Moylan illustrate that the immediacy and unremarkable familiarity of the setting effectively precludes any mental detachment, thereby inducing a semblance of normalcy (5). A departure from convention becomes evident without a dream sequence or a transformative journey undertaken to traverse from an ordinary world to this dystopian reality. Baccolini and Moylan point out that this narrative modality resonates with a prevalent characteristic of science fiction, wherein the protagonist and the reader are invariably placed within the confines of the world under scrutiny, seemingly immersed in its constructs without overt introspection (5). This way of thoughtless engagement wraps the main character in the fabric of society, making it hard to see things critically and allowing them to blend into the cultural surroundings easily. Baccolini and Moylan refer to the protagonist of the dystopian narrative as the ‘dystopian citizen’ who undergoes a journey that “moves from apparent contentment into an experience of alienation and resistance” (5). Through this journey, the dystopian citizen unfurls a counter-narrative that harnesses language as a mode of engagement with society and a

vehicle for dissent and emerges as the pivotal medium through which this dynamic unfolds (Baccolini and Moylan 5).

The contrasting narrative techniques employed in utopian and dystopian fictions contribute to their perception as diametrically opposed genres. Critics such as Ericka Hoagland and Reema Sarwal have highlighted the ongoing "definition war" that tends to overshadow the science fiction genre, which also extends to dystopian fiction. On one side, there is an inclination to expand the genre's boundaries through what could be termed "definitional onslaughts." At the same time, there is a tendency to restrict and solidify its definition (Hoagland and Sarwal 5). These opposing approaches manifest as a tension between maintaining the genre's perceived purity and advocating for its inclusivity. Paul Kincaid's perspective aligns with the former approach. In his essay "On the Origins of Genre," Kincaid rejects rigidly defined borders for the genre, acknowledging the challenge of pinpointing an exact starting point for science fiction (and, by extension, dystopia). He emphasizes that “as long as writers are writing different books, they will be constantly taking different things from and adding different things to the pattern. The pattern, the genre, is hence in a state of constant flux” (414). In other words, the genre's pattern is continuously shaped by writers who draw from various sources and introduce novel elements, leading to an ever-fluctuating nature of the genre. In the same direction, in his essay “On Defining SF, or Not,” John Rieder views genres as tools employed by communities of practice and offers a valuable perspective. While definitions are necessary, making them the focal point of the history of SF might be more of a detour that obstructs a more profound understanding (Rieder 206). Instead, Rieder suggests that “the project of comprehending what sf has meant and currently means is one

to be accomplished through historical and comparative narrative rather than formal description" (206). This approach underscores the complex and expansive nature of the evolution of science fiction—and, by extension, dystopian fiction—and emphasizes the significance of its exploration.

The science fiction genre frequently finds itself intertwined with that of dystopian fiction. This interrelation is notably expounded upon by M. Keith Booker, who asserts that "considerable overlap exists between dystopian fiction and science fiction, with numerous works straddling both domains" (19). Booker extends this viewpoint, contending that "at its core, dystopian fiction distinguishes itself from science fiction by its distinctive focus on intricate social and political critique" (19). While the attribution of Mary Shelley's Frankenstein from 1818 as the inaugural dystopian work remains debated, it harbors science fiction elements. The notion of dystopia gained traction in the late 1800s and early 1900s, evident in Samuel Butler's *Erewhon* (1878), H.G. Wells' *The Time Machine* (1895), and Jack London's *The Iron Heel* (1908), and surged further in the first half of the 20th century with seminal works like Yevgeny Zamyatin's *We* (1921), George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1948), and Ray Bradbury's *Fahrenheit 451* (1953), as noted by Baccolini and Moylan (1). In a more widespread fashion, literary works that shared the cultural atmosphere of the dystopian imagination emerged on the fringes of mainstream literature, often with a touch of ambiguity or irony (Baccolini and Moylan 1). These encompass a range of titles that may appear divergent and contradictory, such as Franz Kafka's *The Metamorphosis* (1915), Ayn Rand's *Anthem* (1938), C. S. Lewis's *That Hideous Strength* (1945), Vladimir Nabokov's *Bend Sinister* (1947), Evelyn Waugh's *Love among the Ruins* (1953), and Don De Lillo's *Underworld* (1997). Unlike utopian narratives, which frequently entail

transitions between worlds, dystopian stories immediately immerse readers within wholly unfamiliar dysfunctional realms, deliberately reshaping their consciousness. These narratives concurrently construct a subjective critique of the depicted society through the trials and introspection of dystopian characters, exploring the evolving comprehension of their surroundings. This interplay of estrangement and unity between the reader and the dystopian protagonist/ citizen fosters a reciprocal process of consciousness deconstruction and reconstruction, both within and beyond the text.

Traditional dystopias, characterized by “a bleak, depressing genre with little space for hope within the story, dystopias maintain utopian hope outside their pages, if at all; for it is only if we consider dystopia as a warning that we as readers can escape its pessimistic future” (Moylan and Baccolini 7). However, a trace of utopian aspiration often lingers beyond the narrative confines, underscoring readers' need to perceive dystopia as an admonition rather than an inescapable future. Early dystopias inherently mirror the underlying political currents, whether at the start of the twentieth century or within its midpoint. Emanating amid uncertainties, alarms, and anxieties stemming from the surging forces of modernity, dystopia surfaces as a retort to the escalating impact of historical upheavals such as two World Wars, the advent of the atomic bomb, genocidal atrocities, and the ascendancy of fascist regimes. This resonates with the foreword written for *Science Fiction, Imperialism, and the Third World;* Andy Sawyer highlights the universal potency of the science fiction narrative as a creative avenue, facilitating the amplification of diverse voices and enabling a more unreserved and critical exploration of complex themes like "change," "difference," and "otherness" (1).

This turbulent backdrop that accompanied and fueled the rise of dystopian fiction in the first half of the twentieth century shapes its sharp bleakness, making it easily an antithesis to utopian literary fiction. This position suggests a rigid border between those two genres—borders of good dreams versus nightmares and hopes versus despair. In principle, these borders add ambiguity to the implications of the two states. On the other hand, the significant events in the first half of the twentieth century that took over the whole globe confused the fixated visions of utopia. By practice, the long-propagated-for utopias, like social states, proved to be a literal plan for hell. Not only did borders shift, but the essence of utopia and dystopia were blurred; utopia became doubtful, and dystopia became closer to reality. Accordingly, starting from the second half of the twentieth century, when the center oscillated, it was inevitable to have a blend of two states concurring a prevailing atmosphere of doubt and caution.

In the 1960s and 1970s, the discourse of utopia evolved into 'critical utopia'. Broadly, the feminist, ecological, and New Left writers of this period led the wave of critical utopia; they wrote to criticize the danger of an inherent solid ideology in utopian writing (Baccolini and Moylan 2). They could differentiate between utopia as a 'blueprint' and utopia as a 'dream' (Moylan). Critical utopias 'resist narrative closure (perfection)' (Mohr 9), in which the 1970s feminists deny any monolithic definitive nature of utopia. On the contrary, they showed the possibility of paths toward a better society. Their liberal manipulation of the genre was a kind of attempt to revive utopian writing after it ceased at the end of World War II. Baccolini and Moylan define 'critical,' quoting Moylan's own words in *Demand the Impossible*, as an integration of "an Enlightenment sense of critique, a postmodern attitude of self-reflexivity, and the political implication of a 'critical

mass required to make the necessary explosive reaction'" (Moylan qtd. in Baccolini and Moylan 2). To such a degree, this wave was a kind of revision and scrutinizing of a long utopian tradition. Unfortunately, this wave was short-fused and was replaced by the 1980s' second wave of dystopia due to the rise of fundamentalism and commodification; this wave came along with the new 'cyberpunk' dystopias with a nihilistic inclination (Baccolini and Moylan 2).

The 'resisting closure [and] the ambiguous, open endings' of the 1980s dystopian novels, produced by Pat Cadigan, Kim Stanley Robinson, Octavia E. Butler, and Ursula Le Guin, developed the genre into a 'critical dystopia'; "moving beyond nihilistic anxiety into a new oppositional consciousness—opened the door to a dystopian narrative that was, like its eutopian predecessors, critical in its poetic and political substance" (Baccolini and Moylan 3). These works, as Baccolini and Moylan describe them, "carry out an intertextual intervention that negates the 1980s negation of the critical utopian moment and thus makes room for a new expression of the utopian imagination" (Moylan and Baccolini 7). The second wave further evolves the dystopian tradition into 'critical dystopia.' Those writers who originally wrote utopias were aware of the dystopian genre's flexibility and the historical moment's cruciality. Sargent defines critical dystopia as

> a non-existent society described in considerable detail and normally located in time and space that the author intended a contemporaneous reader to view as worse than contemporary society but normally includes at least one eutopian enclaves or holds out hope that the dystopia can be overcome and replaced with a eutopia. ("US Eutopias" 222)

As for Baccolini and Moylan, they define 'critical dystopia' in *Dark Horizons* as “texts that maintain a utopian impulse” (7).

The evolution of dystopian discourse by the outset of the 1980s manifests a nuanced interplay that involves the assimilation of hopeful inclinations, thereby cultivating a hybridized narrative within the confines of dystopia. Unlike anti-utopian paradigms that traditionally appeared diametrically opposed to utopia, this convergence of optimistic elements and dystopian themes yields a more complex landscape, where dystopia, in a certain sense, assimilates utopian elements and enters into a mutually enriching dialogue with them. This intricate interaction complicates the distinction between utopia and dystopia. Also, it inaugurates a negotiation process wherein the definitions of what is deemed utopian or dystopian become subject to continuous negotiation. In this context, Jane Donawerth encapsulates this convergence, asserting that “it is precisely the use, re-vision, and appropriation of the generic fiction that constitute an oppositional writing practice and an opening for utopian elements in dystopian fiction” (30). This dynamic imparts resilience to the oppositional stance inherent in dystopian narratives. Beyond its apparent bleakness, the hallmark of critical dystopia resides in its deliberate avoidance of closure. Through this strategic refusal, the interplay of power dynamics comes to the fore, constituting a pivotal thematic terrain. The symbiotic interaction between authoritative structures, hegemonic influences, subaltern resistance, agency, and power flux is intrinsic to critical dystopia, notably, despite the overt pessimism that often pervades these narratives, an underlying implication of optimism persists, albeit latent and implicit.

On the terrain of genre taxonomy, the classification of dystopia manifests an inherent 'impurity' that distinguishes it. This phenomenon of hybridity, characterizing dystopian narratives, has persisted since the inception of Mary Shelley's seminal work *Frankenstein*. In this pioneering text, the realms of science fiction and dystopia interweaved, setting a precedent for the hybrid nature of the genre. This impurity, far from diluting its essence, rejuvenates dystopian science fiction by infusing it with a vitality derived from its capacity for formal and political resistance (Baccolini and Moylan 7). Yet, beyond rejuvenation, this hybridity affords the dystopian genre a unique versatility and potentiality. The likes of Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* and Octavia Butler's *Kindred* epitomize this hybridity by blending a somber portrayal of societal challenges with elements of biography and science fiction, respectively, thereby attesting to the genre's capacity for multi-dimensional expression and thematic engagement (Baccolini and Moylan 7-8).

Contrary to what we might assume about utopias, Ruth Levitas, in her exchange with Lucy Sargisson, describes their role not just as aspirational but also as deeply personal and emotional. She sees them as “compensation (or retreat or escapism) and critique,” adding that “in the face of a hostile world, retreat, escape, or simply a compensatory fantasy to cheer yourself up may be reasonable and humanly valuable responses” (Levitas and Sargisson 14). Dystopias, on the other hand, tend to focus on what is broken in society. They take existing problems and stretch them forward, imagining what might happen if those issues spiral out of control. This way of projecting the present into the future often makes dystopian stories feel eerily relevant, which is part of what gives the genre its reputation for foresight. Pardoxically, even though utopias aim for

something better, their idealism often feels implausible. Dystopias, however, with their roots in real-world struggles, can seem unsettlingly possible. As Laurence Davis puts it, “dystopia serves not to highlight the futility and folly of all utopian aspirations, but to remind us of its historically and biographically rooted origins and limits” (26).

1.2.4 Dystopias in South African Literature

Anglo–South African literature is often situated within the broader category of “New English Literatures,” a term referring to literary works written in English outside the traditional centers of Britain and the United States. These literatures typically emerge from colonial and postcolonial contexts, reflecting complex histories of empire, resistance, and identity. In the case of South Africa, the nation’s unique trajectory—particularly the institutionalized racism of apartheid (1948–1994)—has shaped a distinct literary engagement with dystopian fiction. The legacy of apartheid has rendered speculative scenarios a potent medium through which writers critique the coercive mechanisms of the social order and envision its potential collapse. These narratives often expose the entrenched roots of racism, oppression, and systemic violence. However, the South African dystopian production is quite rich, as it is keeping pace with the social changes. According to this section, I would like to categorize South African dystopias into two main phases: the late apartheid era (1980-2000), and the transitional post-apartheid era (2001-2011), along with the contemporary dystopias (2012-present).

In the late apartheid era, several writers turned to the dystopian form. J.M. Coetzee wrote *Waiting for the Barbarians* in 1980, and Nadine Gordimer followed

with *July's People* in 1981. Both went on to receive the Nobel Prize in Literature—Coetzee in 2003 and Gordimer in 1991. While Coetzee critiques the logic and mindset of apartheid through an allegorical setting that never directly names South Africa, Gordimer imagines a future where apartheid collapses in a violent revolution. Alongside these better-known works, there are also lesser-known dystopian novels from that time, like Michael Cope's *Spiral of Fire* (1987) and Mike Nicol's *The Day and Age* (1992). What these texts share—beyond imagining the end of apartheid—is a sense that the deep injustices created and sustained by the system do not simply vanish. Instead, they leave behind tensions and wounds that can erupt into new forms of violence, shaking the wider society. Emily Davis comments on apartheid writing in general, not just dystopia, as " South African writers of this era produced their work within the historical and political constraints of their time and tended to write in response to the overwhelming oppression of the apartheid context. Their formal and topical choices, shaped by their political commitments and their everyday experiences under the apartheid regime, bear the indelible stamp of their time." (798) Such a remark reflects the politicized tone of these novels and likely explains the choice of dystopia as a form of veiled criticism against apartheid.

A decade after the collapse of apartheid (late 1990s into 2000s), South Africa, the Rainbow Nation as it used to be called, navigated freedom and its discontent. One remarkable procedure not only in South Africa but to the world is the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) led by Archbishop Desmond Tutu. The TRC focused on individual stories and personal forgiveness, which problematically shifted the attention away from the broader rooted systemic violence of apartheid, As Attwell and Harlow note, "By emphasizing individual

acts of abuse, [the TRC] has tended to obscure the systematically abusive social engineering that was apartheid" (2). The deep-seated problems that the apartheid cultivated made their way boldly to the surface. This period witnessed a new crisis: the devastation of the epidemic spread of HIV/AIDS due to the government's denial, the rise of violent crime, and the widening economic inequality.

Accordingly, a new wave of South African speculative writers emerged in the 2000s, producing works that critique contemporary society through the lens of futurism. One prominent writer is Lauren Beukes, whose debut novel *Moxyland* (2008) has been described as "an allegory for a corporate apartheid state" (Hoad 297). Her second novel, *Zoo City* (2010), leans more toward urban fantasy, portraying an underclass of animalized outcasts and blending magical realism with a dystopian tone to comment on crime, xenophobia, Afrophobia, and the AIDS crisis (see Hoad).

1.2.5 Utopias and Dystopias in Egyptian Literature

Within the Arabic literary landscape, 'dystopia' is both a new term and a new literary genre. This is demonstrated through the instability of how the term 'dystopia' is translated into Arabic. Among these designations is *adab al-madīna al-fāsida*—translated as "literature of the corrupted city"—which serves as a counterpoint to *adab al-madīna al-fāḍila*, signifying 'literature of the virtuous city.' This terminology is employed within philosophical discourse and connects the present with the rich Arabic tradition of the Middle Ages. This translation aims to introduce the Arab reader to dystopian fiction, thereby mitigating feelings of estrangement associated with perceiving dystopian fiction as purely Western, at

least in terms of genre categorization. Originally, *adab al-madīna al-fāḍila* or Virtuous City[1] is written by Abū Nasr Muhammad al-Fārābī (874-950), known as the father of Neo-platonism (Netton). Much akin to Plato, al-Farabi shared the perspective that the ultimate objective of an ideal political community is to realize the inherent human yearning for happiness. This happiness, according to al-Farabi, entails attaining the highest good and personal excellence by the members of society. Drawing inspiration from a political approach reminiscent of ancient traditions, al-Farabi expounded upon his conceptualization of happiness within the framework of ethical considerations (Suleimenov et al. 477). Additional Arabic terms encompass *naqīḍ al-yūtūbīā*, which directly translates to 'the antithesis of utopia,' and *ʿālam al-wāqiʿ al-marīr*, carrying the connotation of 'the world of the bitter reality' (Barbaro 26-27). Moreover, the lexicon includes *al-yūtūbīā al-ḍidd*—the opposite of utopia—as well as *al-mudun al-taḥdhīriyya*, signifying 'the cities of warning' (al-Shārūnī 189). Furthermore, there has been a growing incorporation of the English term "dystopia," transliterated as "*dīstūbīā*," in certain Arabic articles (Bakker 82).

Drawing on Arabic Folklore literature and science fiction, "*One Thousand and One Nights"* emerges as a timeless testament to human curiosity and creativity, where speculative elements intertwine with cultural narratives. Additionally, *One Thousand and One Nights* is a repository of Arabic Folklore literature, interwoven with elements of science fiction. Yūsuf al-Shārūnī lists three distinct phenomena that arise within its narratives, each embodying the fusion of speculative and

[1] Alternative titles of the book: various renditions, including *Opinions of The Citizens of The Virtuous City* (Ārā' ahl al-madīna al-fāḍila), and *Principles of the Opinions of the Citizens of the Virtuous City* (Mabādi' ārā' ahl al-madīna al-fāḍila).

cultural dimensions (13). Firstly, the presence of the paranormal, embodied by jinn and magic, infuses the stories with an enigmatic allure, blurring the boundaries between reality and the unknown (al-Shārūnī 13). Secondly, the figure of Sinbad embarks on perpetual sea voyages, bridging myth and exploration, and echoing the yearning for discovery that pervades science fiction narratives. Lastly, the motif of the flying carpet, reminiscent of modern airplanes, showcases technological marvels and ignites the imagination with possibilities beyond the ordinary (al-Shārūnī 13). In modern Egyptian literature, Salama Musa pioneered the emergence of Egyptian utopian fiction with his 1926 work, *Khaimi*. This significant literary milestone not only stands as a testament to Musa's contribution but also serves as a poignant reflection of Egypt's cultural and societal landscape at the time (al-Shārūnī 35). Subsequently, Tawfiq al-Hakim emerged as a prominent figure interested in Egyptian science fiction literature. This interest is evident in his creations, including two short stories titled “In the Year of a Million” and “The Wonderful Inventi,” both featured in his compilation of short stories *God Showed Me* (1953). Al-Hakim's exploration of the genre extends further with two plays: *Lunar Report* (1972) and *A Poet on the Moon* 1972, showcasing his engagement with the realm of science fiction. Tawfiq al-Hakim's concentration on science fiction literature was closely aligned with humanity's entry into the space age, marked notably by pivotal events such as the inaugural space missile launch in 1961 and the historic landing of the first human on the moon in 1969 (al-Shārūnī 120).

As for the emergence of the dystopian literary wave in Egypt, it has its roots preceding the year 2011, resonating with the prevailing disintegration within Egypt's social and political landscape during the decline of Ḥusnī Mubārak's

regime. However, the monumental event of January 25, 2011, and its subsequent aftermath serve as a rupture event, demarcating this dystopian surge into distinct pre- and post-2011 periods. Notable differentiating aspects encompass shifts in mood, oscillations between hope and despondency, variations in levels of aggression and violence, as well as alterations in the centrality, significance, and implications of mortality – all distinguishing features that distinguish the two trends within the realm of dystopia.

At its core, a key commonality among the pre-2011 dystopias is their inherently oppositional political stance. These works engage with the socio-political failures of Mubārak's regime, offering a subtle yet powerful form of critique. These texts collectively champion a vision that the resolution to their nation's woes hinges either on a forceful mass uprising or a peaceful elevation of political consciousness within the masses. Noteworthy examples of such early works include Maḥmūd ʿUthmān's "*Thawrat 2053: Al-Bidāyah*" (2053's Revolution: The Beginning – 2007) and *Thawrat 2053: Al-Bidāyah... Marrah Ukhrà* (2053's Revolution: The Beginning… Once Again – 2009), along with Aḥmad Khālid Tawfīq's *Yūtūbiyā* (*Utopia* – 2008). Generally, the protagonists in these narratives experience estrangement within their societies while maintaining a sense of individuality that separates them from their societies, thereby empowering them to resist the prevailing injustices. Consequently, these narratives are characterized as critical dystopias with open-ended conclusions, injecting possible optimistic impulses into their otherwise bleak narratives. As articulated by Raffaella Baccolini and Tom Moylan, such works exemplify "texts that maintain a utopian impulse [which] allow both readers and protagonists to hope by

resisting closure: the ambiguous, open endings of these novels maintain the utopian impulse within the work" (Baccolini and Moylan 7).

The seismic events of 2011 ultimately shattered the earlier optimism that collective resistance could bring about radical political change. At the same time, there was a noticeable rise in dystopian novels, many of which grappled with the aftermath and unresolved tensions of the January 25th uprising. Evidently, this wave reflects an adapted adoption of Orwellian dystopian themes (Said 197), where the protagonists grapple with the relentless resistance against oppression in their worlds, only to succumb to the overwhelming might of authoritarian society – a theme aptly summarized by Baccolini and Moylan, stating that in these narratives, protagonists "are all crushed by the authoritarian society; there is no learning, no escape for them" (7). Consequently, the central protagonists in these novels struggle to make sense of their dystopian realities. As the futility of resisting a corrupt regime—or the possibility of meaningful societal change—becomes increasingly apparent, some characters engage in small, symbolic acts of resistance as a means of survival. In contrast, others withdraw entirely, refusing to participate in any form of dissent. These narratives weave together themes of defeat, trauma, indifference, despair, biting cynicism, nihilism, and unflinching retrospection. Unlike their pre-2011 counterparts, post-2011 dystopian narratives[2] often abandon traditional story arcs; their structures are fragmented, lacking the familiar rhythm of rising action, climax, and resolution. In some cases, the plot takes on a circular form, where turning points do not resolve

[2] Examples of such narratives include *Nisāʾ al-Karantīnā* (*Women of Karantina*) by Nāʾil alṬūkhī (2013), *al-Ṭābūr* (*The Queue*) by Basma ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz (2013), ʿ*Uṭārid* (*Otared*) by Muḥammad Rabīʿ (2014), 2063 by Muʿtazz Ḥasānīn (2016).

tension but instead deepen the sense of crisis. This structural and thematic shift marks a clear break from earlier dystopian trends. It highlights the profound impact of the 2011 events on narrative imagination, particularly evident in the divergent tones of their conclusions, with the latter narratives often concluding with bleak banality.

1.3 Main Concepts of Borders as a Multifaceted Phenomenon

In the preceding sections, I have displayed the concept of borders between utopia and dystopia as distinctive literary genres, their dissolution, and the subsequent traveling of these genres across geographical and temporal borders. In this section, I intend to examine and reflect further on the nature and phenomenon of borders through a multidisciplinary approach. This serves as an introductory exploration, laying the foundation for using borders as thematic criteria or yardsticks. By employing the theme of borders as a lens, I aspire to construct a framework to discern the complex systemic power dynamics, the consequential power transformation, and the dystopian corporal metamorphosis unfolding within dystopia's worlds and systems through highlighting the function of the diverse borders.

In today's global political context, border-crossers who flee war zones and endure extreme socio-economic hardships in their homelands face daunting challenges. On the one hand, they are stigmatized as "illegal aliens." On the other hand, their mere bodily presence, or its potential inside or adjacent to the border, propels changes and challenges to laws and discourses inside borders. Moreover, these bodies in motion challenge and reshape societal norms and legal frameworks merely through their presence within or in proximity to borders. Even upon successfully crossing the political borders of host countries, these individuals are

confronted with new societal challenges. In each encounter, they navigate invisible borders defined by distinct rules, traditions, and (sub)cultures. This section aims to frame the concept of borders in contemporary socio-politics, elucidating their representations and the profound impact they have on the lives of those directly or indirectly interacting with them.

The term "border" carries multifaceted connotations, encompassing notions of an endpoint, separation, and framing within a space. Walls and gates serve as tangible manifestations of borders, establishing boundaries and demarcating territories. In humankind's history, the development of settled agriculture marked a pivotal shift, anchoring communities to specific plots of land and developing a sense of meaning attached to them. As civilizations and empires emerged, they expanded by pushing their borders outward and subjugating neighboring communities living beyond these borders. Ancient border walls such as the Roman Limes from the second century, the Great Wall of China, the Silesian Walls, and the Japanese Genkō Bōrui are enduring symbols of fortified boundaries throughout history. The construction of walls emerged as an age-old practice, driven by the need to contain fear and preempt potential threats. In modern times, the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, which served as a potent symbol of the bipolar world for decades after the Second World War, signified victory, a shifting international order, opening the gateway to liberal freedoms and interdependence among nations and witnessing a momentous event that transformed global politics and precipitated a new era of globalization.

In the contemporary era, scholarly inquiries into border practices and border theories are rapidly shedding light on borders as domains of instability, wherein complex ethical, political, cultural, and national issues undergo intricate

negotiations (Schimanski and Wolfe “Entry Points: An Introduction” 9). Despite the common perception of borders as rigid and impermeable, the historical evidence demonstrates that borders have exhibited flexibility and facilitated transboundary interactions throughout time. Paradoxically, borders simultaneously define and restrict lands while offering passages through gates, embodying dual roles as both walls and bridges (17). Borders challenge human existence, and individuals, in turn, challenge the constraints imposed by borders. Borders function as physical barriers and psychological and cultural dividers, separating and protecting “us here” from ‘them there’ (Newman, On Borders, 14). However, borders create spaces; they “produce an inside and an outside, insiders and outsiders, and establish a system to control whose movement is acceptable and whose is not” (King 2). By delineating borders, societies establish a will to safeguard and segregate the protected "inside" from the rejected "outside," resulting in the construction of the "other" as a source of fear. In this context, the processes of bordering and othering intertwine and mutually reinforce the identities of those within and outside the defined boundaries.

Schimanski and Wolfe introduce the concept of "border poetics" in *Border Poetics Delimited* (2007), which comprises a comprehensive set of methodologies aimed at dissecting the outcomes of successful or failed crossings across diverse categories of borders, encompassing institutional, national, or generic boundaries. In their extensive investigation, Schimanski and Wolfe present a profound understanding of the function of borders, proposing that borders establish a unique relation, “in both spatial and temporal terms, between a limit/ horizon and a connection” (Schimanski and Wolfe “Entry Points: An Introduction” 11-12). Furthermore, they elucidate the performative dimension of borders,

demonstrating how these boundaries are active agents, engaged in the ongoing creation and maintenance of border delineations through either practical deeds or aesthetic expressions, which often yield unpredictable or even enigmatic effects. In this regard, borders consistently emerge as “always presented, marked, represented and mediatized” (12). Therefore, borders are continuously dynamic, subject to ever-evolving “processes of both fixing and blurring” (13). Schimanski and Wolfe emphasize the fluidity inherent in borders as they perpetually undergo transformations and adaptations, entailing elaborate movements between fixity and flexibility. The adopted perspective perceives borders not as stagnant or static entities but as permeable and dynamic. As asserted by Newman, “the bordering process […] per se, which affects our lives on a daily basis, from the global to the national and, most significantly, at the local and micro scales of socio-spatial activity” (Newman, "The Lines that Continue to Separate Us" 27).

Borders can be understood as narratives and rhetorical tools employed by various forms of elites to regulate and discipline (Schimanski and Wolfe “Entry Points: An Introduction” 13). Bordering is intrinsically linked to the power elite's efforts to isolate themselves from the lower echelons of the power hierarchy. However, it is noteworthy that marginalized or excluded groups can also use borders to enclose or exclude, seeking protection for themselves or their cultural identity. Countries are increasingly becoming preoccupied with their borders in the contemporary global context. Schimanski and Wolfe present a border-centric definition of imperialism, characterizing it as a form of community that historically generates numerous in-between border zones, such as colonies, and instigates massive migration movements across global frontiers (Schimanski and Wolfe, "A

Conclusion in the Form of a Glossary" 161). This preoccupation extends beyond the mere protection of political borders; it encompasses the reshaping and re-creation of national identities, often resulting in the construction of a new "Other." The spaces of transition that emerge at borders may lead to hybridity and mixing, but they can also intensify notions of difference and animosity when encountering the "other." As the lines of separation become more fluid and flexible, the challenge of comprehending and navigating them becomes increasingly intricate yet equally captivating and thought-provoking (Newman, "The Lines that Continue to Separate Us" 48).

Interestingly, the border between self and other can manifest in-between spaces where the monstrous and the uncanny find expression (Schimanski and Wolfe, "A conclusion in the form of a Glossary," 154). They “perpetuat[e] and re-perpetuat[e] notions of difference and othering” (Newman “The Lines that Continue to Separate Us” 27). Borders can be regarded as temporal and spatial waiting acts, leading to standstills and differences in time and space (Houtum and Wolfe 129). Additionally, borders must be recognized as strategic efforts to establish fixation and control aimed at achieving ease and security (132). The concept of borders as an "imagined-and-lived reality" further emphasizes their influential role (132).

Schimanski and Wolfe pinpoint the relationship between bodies and borders, as bodies also function as “border sites,” demarcating the distinction between the internal and external, self and other (“Entry” 21). As flesh and blood entities, bodies become platforms upon which the social order imprints “its hierarchies based on the boundaried systems of gender, race, class, religion, sexuality, ethnicity, and so forth” (21). Bordering is a dynamic and transitional activity that

involves processes of debordering and rebordering. This dynamic nature introduces an indeterminacy that paradoxically subverts ordering regimes, diffusing borders across extended borderscapes (Schimanski and Wolfe, "A conclusion" 163). These multifaceted aspects of borders highlight their pivotal role in shaping societies and individuals in negotiating power, identity, and cultural dynamics. Borders become potent agents in regulating and disciplining while also acting as sites of differentiation and connection, a revealing cartography of society's inner intricacies. In other words, we get to know a society through uncovering its inner borders.

1.4 Imposing Borders, Crossing Borders: Life in Dystopian Realties

> A border is a question.
> (Marcus Sedgwick)

> The earth is not easy to carve up. […] The earth sealed its clumsy new boundaries in blood as town by town, farm by farm, the border was defined. (Bapsi Sidhwa, *The Bride* (1983), 14-15)

Borders play a central role in dystopian worlds, acting as structural forces that deeply shape the lives of those within them. In many dystopian narratives, suffering and injustice are not random but are reinforced—and often made possible—by the presence of borders, boundaries, and walls. These divisions not only regulate movement and access but also sustain systems of exclusion, control, and inequality. Disregarding the importance of borders in such a context would amount to underestimating the immense and oppressive sovereignty exercised over its citizens by the dystopian state. Furthermore, the dystopian citizenry itself is forged and molded in response to the borders imposed by these

dystopias. While existing research has examined the dystopian body from a range of perspectives, the direct relationship between the body and borders—a crucial dynamic in many dystopian settings—remains underexplored. As a first step toward filling this gap, this study investigates how physical, structural, and metaphorical borders shape the experience of embodiment in dystopian worlds. Beyond analyzing how bodies are regulated by borders, the study also considers what drives individuals to cross them. In dystopian narratives, border crossings are often perilous acts, driven by desperation, the pursuit of survival, or the quest for freedom. Exploring the motivations behind these crossings—and their physical and psychological consequences—is essential to understanding the toll such systems of control exact on the body. To approach this question, the research takes a cross-cultural perspective, drawing on dystopian narratives from three different national contexts. Bringing together these distinct texts is itself an act of crossing borders—moving beyond political, linguistic, and geographical boundaries. In doing so, the study underscores the importance of rethinking how borders function, not only in literature but in the socio-political realities they reflect and critique to comprehend the implications and effects on individuals who navigate these complex boundaries in dystopian societies. It provides a lens through which to discern shared human struggles, aspirations, and resilience, which persist regardless of the political and physical boundaries that may separate societies.

In dystopian settings, borders include not only physical markers such as imperial boundaries, settlement gates, and room thresholds, but also intangible structural divisions that shape the controlled realities of these worlds. These physical borders impose strict limitations on movement in both directions, creating

temporal and spatial separations between those inside and those outside, while also controlling the circulation of knowledge between the two spheres. As a result, mythologies often arise on both sides of the divide, reinforcing the binary between self and other. Once a border is crossed, however, a contact zone emerges—an in-between space where individuals from various positions within the social hierarchy come into contact. Before such crossings occur, both those within the borders and those in the hinterlands are typically feared and imagined through myth. But with the act of crossing, familiarity begins to shift from what lies inside the walls to what lies beyond them, prompting an exploration of the once-mythologized outside world. Within these contact zones, negotiations over power and authority take shape, revealing the ways in which individuals can influence and reshape the societies they inhabit.

The dialogical relationship between borders and resistance extends beyond a singular interaction to encompass a complex network of power relations. When scrutinizing the terms "border" and "resistance," the very essence of this relationship and the resulting network becomes evident, with individuals assuming agency, subjectivity, and/or compliance. The movements of these individuals, particularly the dystopian citizens in the context of this study, within borders or across them, lead to a redefinition of their sense of self and identity. Every transgression or rule-breaking in the dystopian world embodies an act of resistance. However, such movements across borders and boundaries also involve exposing or concealing vulnerabilities. In the process of border crossing, vulnerability becomes a subject of negotiation. When a dystopian citizen consciously decides to cross borders or break the rules, this act implies a

willingness to take risks and expose themselves to potential loss, injury, torture, or death.

Nevertheless, the conscious act of exposing vulnerability is met with rigid measures from the other side as they seek to conceal their own vulnerabilities. It is essential to recognize that vulnerability is not exclusive to subalterns or the dominated; instead, all dystopian citizens are vulnerable, making the overall contestation a complex matrix. John C. Welchman, in his article "Response to the Philosophical Brothel," adeptly describes the ambivalent nature of borders as they mark the farthest reaches of national power regimes and act as places where power is both most visible and elusive. The border is a locus where power manifests in its crudest, most absolute form, only to be subsequently abandoned. It represents a moment of initiation into the ritual of nationality, a necessary rite of passage (Welchman 189).

Indeed, the lines of separation give rise to differences and divisions, which are not merely superficial markers but instead reflect a lengthy political history characterized by tensions, animosities, and the perpetuation of othering. These differences are part of an ongoing, dynamic process that offers substantial insights into society's spatial and social ordering. This perspective posits that the significance of borders extends beyond their physical existence, whether visible or invisible to the human eye (Newman, "The Lines that Continue to Separate Us," 48). In this manner, the study adopts a holistic approach to explore the complex dynamics of borders, emphasizing their transformative and relational aspects. Recognizing borders as fluid and influential entities helps illuminate their complex role in shaping societies and interactions among individuals and groups. By examining the processes and impacts of bordering, this study aims to

contribute to a deeper understanding of how borders permeate and shape various aspects of our lived experiences.

1.5 The Dystopian Body: Within the Border and Contact Zones

> O my body, makes of me always a man who questions!
> Frantz Fanon *Black Skin, White Masks*

Examining the narrative perspective employed in these texts is essential in delving into the portrayal of the dystopian body within the selected dystopian worlds. The chosen novels, namely *The Handmaid's Tale*, *Utopia*, and *Waiting for the Barbarians*, all share a distinctive feature—their narratives are conveyed through a first-person viewpoint. This narrative approach places the dystopian body at the forefront, shaped by the imposed borders and created through language. In these narratives, the protagonists themselves assume the role of narrators, providing readers with a direct window into their inner thoughts, experiences, and emotions. Offred in *The Handmaid's Tale*, Gaber and Alaa in *Utopia*, and the Magistrate in *Waiting for the Barbarians* guide us through their respective journeys within the confines and mazes of their dystopian societies. Through their accounts, where borders hold a central position in shaping lives, we gain insight into the lived realities within these dystopian realms.

The notion of physical and metaphorical borders plays a pivotal role in these narratives. It is through the lens of these borders that the dystopian body is perceived and understood. Each protagonist grapples with the weight of these borders, which constrict and define their existence. As the subsequent chapters will explore in depth, the protagonists embody the physical and psychological influence of these borders on their bodies. There are moments when they are taken aback by the visceral reactions of their own bodies—a realization that their

bodies have internalized their dystopian realities and respond as a distinct entity, a dystopian body molded by the harsh confines of their environment. The deliberate choice of texts narrated from a first-person standpoint transcends the boundaries of specific cultural and historical contexts. This cross-cultural approach shifts the focus from external factors to the intimate and personal aspects of the human experience. By foregrounding personal accounts, these narratives allow for a universal exploration of the interplay and contestation between individual agency and the constraining influences of the dystopian world. This analytical approach seeks to unravel the elaborate ways in which the dystopian body navigates and negotiates the complex relationship between the self and society, ultimately shedding light on the nuanced and intricate tapestry of human experience within oppressive contexts.

1.5.1 Navigating Dystopian Territories: Unveiling Power Dynamics and Body Disciplines

Exploring the complexity of dystopian worlds reveals a tangible interplay between systems of discipline and control on one side, and the body on the other—an interaction that gives shape to the concept of the dystopian body. These bodies are formed within environments marked by constant tension, where spontaneity is suppressed, and every gesture is subject to regulation. The dystopian bodies become subjects of complex signification, appropriated and re-appropriated within an intricate web of discipline and power discourses. The narratives under scrutiny vividly illustrate the personal/inner journeys of subaltern dystopian individuals who navigate these systems in a way to construct their own awareness independent of the dystopian oppression. Their struggles center on sustaining this awareness or finding ways to escape its weight. These efforts—

whether directed toward deeper consciousness or moments of avoidance—reflect a complex relationship with dominant narratives, even as they sometimes end up reinforcing them.

This section aims to conceptualize the dystopian body through Michel Foucault's framework of disciplinary power. Central to this inquiry is an examination of the rules and systems that bind these bodies and establish hierarchical relations of control. Particular attention is given to the ways in which dystopian bodies are rendered docile and regulated, and how the architecture of control informs their consciousness and self-perception. The analysis of disciplinary mechanisms considers not only those positioned at the top of the hierarchy but also those situated at its base, tracing how power operates across the entire dystopian spectrum.

In his introduction to *Dystopian Horizons*, Tom Moylan's reference to the dystopian protagonist as a "dystopian citizen" underscores the intricacy of the citizenship construct within these narratives (5). Moylan's usage leaves room for ambiguity regarding who precisely is encompassed by the term "citizen." This section aims to clarify the concept of dystopian citizenship, emphasizing its inclusive nature that encompasses all participants within the dystopian world or system. This inquiry centers on understanding what it means to be a "good" or "obedient" dystopian citizen, and what is at stake when one crosses into the space of the "bad" or "rebellious" citizen—regardless of where one stands within the power hierarchy. The term "dystopian citizen" is used here as a broad conceptual category that encompasses all individuals within the hierarchical structure, from the elites to those at the margins. This framework allows for a

nuanced exploration of the complex interplay between power, resistance, and identity in the dystopian world. Through the lens of Foucauldian analysis and a nuanced examination of dystopian citizenship, this section aims to unravel the complex relationship between the dystopian body and the systems of control that shape it.

1.5.2 The Dynamics of Domination and Docility: Foucault's Insights into Disciplinary Power Structures

In *Punish and Discipline*, Foucault embarks on a meticulous exploration of the metamorphosis of punishment methodologies across Europe during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. This trajectory of evolution, as he uncovers, unfolds from the spectacle of public corporal punishment to the invisible intricacies of a more "humane" and less corporeal system nested within the confines of prison walls. Amid this historical investigation, Foucault pinpoints the complicity between political investments in the body and the concurrent alterations shaping judicial punishment. He develops the argument that the transformation of the justice system stems from the intricate interplay between the body and power, whereby the economy of power molds the justice system, leading to the shift from severe corporeal punishment that used to target the body and inflict pain on it to the realm of punishments that target the soul. This evolution, he asserts, finds its roots in the interplay between power and knowledge.

Foucault draws on the work of Rusche and Kirchheimer to emphasize how the dominant economic system shapes the forms and functions of bodily punishment. For instance, during feudal economies, where the body was synonymous with

"property," increased corporeal punishment emerged as a means to enhance bodily productivity (Foucault, *Discipline* 24). The body's continuous involvement in labor situates it firmly within the political sphere, where it becomes a site upon which power is inscribed—power that "invest[s] [the body], mark[s] it, train[s] it, torture[s] it, force[s] it to carry out tasks, to perform ceremonies, to emit signs" (25). With economic shifts, Foucault notes, subjugating the body does not necessarily require violence; instead, it could be accomplished by incorporating the body into a meticulously calculated and organized structure (26). This points to a different dimension of bodily knowledge—one that moves beyond physiological interpretation and enters the realm of what Foucault terms the "political technology of the body" (26). This political technology of the body operates within a network of intricate interactions, exerting power over functions, mastery, and even resistance, thus earning the label of "micro-physics of power" (26).

In this realm of micro-physics, the body becomes a strategic terrain molded by maneuvers, tactics, and techniques that oscillate between domination and resistance (26). It is an arena marked by tension, not privilege, and manifests as an ongoing exchange between those atop the power hierarchy and those ensnared by it. This dynamism, however, is anything but 'localized' or 'univocal'; instead, it infiltrates various layers of society, delineating points of confrontation, instability, and temporary inversion of relations (27). Thus, dominated bodies, having learned to navigate the fine-grained operations of power, show resistance in two ways: one emerges through a struggle for self-understanding under power's weight, and the other through moments that interrupt or unsettle its order.

Foucault's framework dismisses the notion of a radical overthrow of the micro-physics of power as a definitive solution, suggesting that an escape from this matrix is not a straightforward target. Instead, Foucault introduces the concept of discipline and its role in shaping the behavior of bodies under power's influence. He posits that the classical age viewed the body as both an object and a target of power (136). In Foucault's analysis, discipline works by shaping a relationship that strengthens obedience through utility. It amplifies the body's capacities in terms of economic productivity while at the same time reducing its potential for political resistance (138).

Within this mechanics of power, the body becomes a malleable entity that operates precisely with predefined techniques, speed, and efficiency—a phenomenon Foucault describes as "discipline," political anatomy of detail (138-139). Discipline renders the body powerless by subjugating it to a structured system that shapes it into an obedient and efficient entity (138). This form of subjugation highlights a central paradox: the more capable the body becomes, the more tightly it is controlled (138). Foucault links this tendency toward meticulous regulation to Christian theology, where every action unfolds under the watchful eye of God, making even the smallest detail carry weight and meaning (140).

Discipline relies on specific techniques to assert its power and make it visible. One key technique involves the creation of enclosed, bordered spaces where activities are carefully organized and shielded from outside influence. Foucault refers to this as the "protected place of disciplinary monotony" (141).Secondly, the principle of "partitioning" mandates that each individual is assigned a specific

task within a confined space, thereby fragmenting collective dispositions and preventing individuals from gathering in large groups (143). This technique ensures that individuals remain isolated and independent, thereby reinforcing the notion of individuality. A feature hinders the possibility of individuals massing and cooperating against the entire discipline/system. In other words, the technique of partitioning makes sure that the individual remains an individual and does not associate with collective peers, as “[i]ts aim was to establish presences and absences, to know where and how to locate individuals, to set up useful communications, to interrupt others, to be able at each moment to supervise the conduct of each individual, to assess it, to judge it, to calculate its qualities or merits” (143). The disciplined individual manifests utmost efficiency and power but remains powerless due to being dominated and disconnected. Such an individual is a sign of docility and disconnectedness. Discipline not only arranges a highly efficient, disciplined individual but also “create[s] complex spaces that are at once architectural, functional and hierarchical” (148). Thirdly, discipline operates by creating "functional sites," enabling free movement while facilitating efficient surveillance in factories or hospitals (143). This architecture of function divides space and labor, resulting in a well-organized grid that eliminates confusion (145). This facilitates ‘serialization’ of the labor process, which, in turn, “form[s] a permanent grid: confusion [is] eliminated” (145). Furthermore, discipline arranges functional individuals in a ranked hierarchy. Foucault describes this disciplinary technique as “an art of rank, a technique for transformation of arrangements. It individualizes bodies by a location that does not give them fixed position but distributes them and circulates them in a network of relation” (146). In other words, discipline introduces a hierarchical order,

effectively defining each individual's place in a network of relations (146). In this way, the individual becomes disconnected and, most importantly, doubts and distrusts the other individual, whether it is the one who holds the same position in the hierarchy or someone in a lower or higher position.

1.5.3 From Discipline Zones into Contact Zones

Foucault's examination of the micro-physics of power and its disciplinary mechanisms opens up a rich terrain for understanding how bordered bodies are molded, controlled, and regulated within a web of power dynamics. Through his meticulous exploration, Foucault dismantles the binaries of domination and resistance, revealing the dance between subjugation and self-awareness within the power matrix. It is imperative to underscore the interconnectedness between the structural bordering system operating within dystopian societies and the inflexible physical borders defining the dystopian space. Both types of borders contribute to the docility of dystopian citizens, engendering a panoptic reality that subjects them to continuous surveillance or the illusion thereof. The panoptic reality produces inflexible bodies that conform to discipline, efficiency, and submission. Borders in dystopian worlds often operate on two levels: the external border marks the limits of physical movement, while the internal border enforces boundaries within the social and structural order. As external borders become more rigid and impenetrable, internal borders increasingly uphold strict hierarchies that regulate status, access, and control. These internal structures reflect the logic of colonial hierarchies, particularly within authoritarian or segregated systems, reinforcing binary oppositions such as colonizer and colonized, hegemon and subaltern, superior and inferior. Both outer and inner

borders exercise control over the movements of dystopian citizens in and out of the dystopian state and within the society itself. This interdependence between the external and internal borders stands as a critical factor that sustains the longevity of the dystopian state.

The concept of the contact zone functions as both a theoretical framework and a narrative device, offering a space through which conflict and its potential resolutions can be imagined and explored. According to the Oxford Dictionary, a contact zone is often characterized as a trading post or a border city where the convergence of people and commodities fosters interaction. This concept was pioneered by Mary Louise Pratt, specifically in her work *Imperial Eyes: Travel and Transculturation*, where she propounded the notion of a contact zone as a social space where divergent cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other. Pratt defines it as “the space of colonial encounters, the space in which peoples geographically and historically separated come into contact with each other and establish ongoing relations, usually involving conditions of coercion, radical inequality, and intractable conflict” (6). Pratt's perspective on the contact zone is characterized by its emphasis on the intricate dynamics of colonial interactions, often overshadowed or silenced by conventional accounts of conquest and dominance. She asserts that the term "contact" underscores the interactive, improvisational aspects of colonial encounters, highlighting the interconnectedness of subjects previously separated by geographical and historical disparities. Pratt's framework portrays how subjects are constructed and shaped through their relationships, challenging notions of separateness and apartheid and instead emphasizing copresence, interaction, shared

understandings, and practices, even within inherently asymmetric power dynamics (7).

While Pratt initially formulated the concept within the context of travel and exploration, this study extends its applicability to a different arena. Here, the contact zone emerges not from voluntary travel but from the crossing of borders by dystopian bodies. In contrast to voluntary travel, this crossing occurs under extreme and compelling circumstances—a transgression that breaches the barrier of fear. In this constructed contact zone, the influence of fear diminishes, creating a space for chaos characterized by interactions that transcend the bounds of trepidation. This conceptualization sheds light on the profound role of the contact zone in shaping the very interactions, dynamics, and transformative processes that perpetuate and redefine the essence of the dystopian bodies within the narratives at hand in an unpredictable fashion. This extrapolation underscores the fundamental premise upon which this thesis is built, establishing a contact zone that envelops the discourse surrounding the three meticulously examined texts.

1.6 Crossing Borders: Understanding Chaos between Mythology and Complex Systems

In this section, I aim to shed light on the final, significant acts of border crossing that contribute to the open-ended quality of the narratives discussed in this study. These ultimate transgressions mark a turning point, signaling the gradual breakdown of the dystopian order. I also seek to explore how this progression edges toward a state of chaos—precisely the kind of disorder that the architects and enforcers of the dystopian system work so hard to prevent, as previously

discussed. To ground the notion of chaos more firmly, I will outline and reflect on its evolving meaning: from its origins as a symbol of a negative, primordial void in mythology to its more neutral framing as unpredictability within scientific discourse.

1.6.1 Approaching the Intersection between Science and Humanities

In his article titled "Science and Literature and Philosophy: The Case of Chaos Theory and Deconstruction," Stephen H. Kellert delves into the varying perspectives regarding the correlation between chaos theory within the realm of science and deconstruction in literature and philosophy. As he elaborates

> Because science is part of this broader cultural context, no one group of people has a preemptive right to decide what chaos theory does or does not mean. The discussions of the relationship between chaos and deconstruction constitute part of the process by which such meanings will be created. In this regard, we should note that much of this meaning-creation takes place outside both the humanities and the natural sciences, in departments of organizational research and corporate training seminars where the hype about chaos theory continues to flourish. (231)

The debate arises from differing views on whether meaningful similarities exist between these domains. Some see clear points of connection, while others firmly argue that no such correspondence exists. At the heart of this discussion is a deeper inquiry into the possible interconnectedness of areas that, on the surface, may seem unrelated—and the role philosophy plays in making sense of these relationships. Kellert notes that philosophers often lack a concrete framework for articulating how different disciplines relate to one another. While philosophy has long played an important role in debates about the nature of science, it does not hold exclusive authority over how concepts like chaos theory should be

interpreted or applied. Instead, philosophers must balance their inclination toward abstract, big-picture thinking with the need to engage with the complexities of lived experience and disciplinary nuance (see Kellert, *In the Wake*). This process often involves speculative attempts to draw connections across fields that may appear to stand apart (215).

On another note, Kellert draws a comparison between the ongoing interreferentiality of linguistic meaning and the iterative nature of analyzing chaotic systems. Jacques Derrida's idea of ceaseless referentiality in language points to a never-ending loop of meaning, where each term leads to another without reaching a final point. Similarly, the study of chaotic systems follows its own form of repetition. Larsen-Freeman (1997) echoes this idea when she observes that "every time language is used, it changes" (148). In chaotic systems, a pattern reemerges as the same formula is repeatedly applied to its previous output. This method of iteration enables researchers to trace patterns and behaviors across time, providing insight into systems that appear unpredictable. However, it does not necessarily reveal the chaos itself in a straightforward manner.

Furthermore, Kellert underscores the dissimilarity in the causal origins of the perpetual mechanisms between linguistic meaning and chaotic systems despite their superficial resemblance in continual referencing. He emphasizes that no singular group possesses exclusive rights to dictate the interpretations of chaos theory due to its integration within the broader cultural milieu. Another similarity is manifested as Derrida expounds upon a conceptual framework within writing and reading systems, characterizing their inherent organization around an elusive

blind spot, demonstrating how minute uncertainties can trigger substantial shifts in meaning, as exemplified in his examination of Rousseau's works (164). Meanwhile, chaos theory presents the revelation that systems governed by stringent rules can, nonetheless, manifest unpredictable and complex behaviors. This juxtaposition of random elements within orderly systems, highlighted within chaos theory, is not an entirely novel concept. The ongoing discussions surrounding the correlation between chaos and deconstruction are instrumental in shaping the evolving connotations associated with these concepts. Notably, a significant part of this interpretive process unfolds beyond traditional academic spheres, proliferating in organizational research departments and corporate training seminars where the fascination and utilization of chaos theory persist (Kellert 231).

In conclusion, the application of chaos theory encompasses the use of mathematical principles derived from the study of unpredictable systems in realms extending beyond the confines of scientific inquiry. Although these methods are not directly applicable to the analysis of textual materials, they can be indirectly employed in what is herein termed metaphorical extension. This process involves employing chaos theory as a novel tool across various disciplines. When these methodologies are employed in novel systems, it necessitates reinterpreting these systems through the lens of chaos theory. Rather than delving into the technical intricacies of metaphor usage in scientific contexts, my focus resides in examining the metaphorical application of chaos theory as an interpretative lens for the open-endedness of the three narratives of the dystopian order.

1.6.2 Chaos and Complexity: Unraveling the Interconnectedness and Unpredictability within the Dystopian Worlds

As per the *Encyclopedia Britannica*, chaos was an element in ancient Greek cosmology, representing either the original emptiness of the universe before its formation or the abyss of Tartarus, the underworld. These concepts are found within Hesiod's *Theogony*. Later in cosmological thought, chaos typically referred to the initial state of existence, regardless of the specific interpretation. Its contemporary definition stems from Ovid, who viewed chaos as the original disorganized and shapeless substance. According to Ovid, the creator of the Cosmos fashioned the ordered universe from this chaotic mass (*Britannica*). As for chaos in the bible, Robin Routledge refers to it as the opposite of creation, not nothingness (85). Genesis 1:2 describes the world without God's control, suggesting the frightening possibility of what the world could turn into. This theme is seen throughout Genesis 1–11, particularly in the story of the Flood, where the chaotic waters symbolize an 'uncreation.' It suggests that chaos remains part of God's creation and is controlled by God, who might let it come back due to human wrongdoing (Routledge 85).

In mathematics, the center of chaos theory lies in three main concepts: interconnectedness, sensitivity to initial conditions, and bifurcation, as well as the formation of self-organization and dissipative structures. They echo the tenets of social constructionism, emphasizing the dynamic construction of social worlds, sub-worlds, nuances, and interpretations, as Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann described in *The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge*. Berger and Luckmann “contend that *the sociology of knowledge is concerned with the analysis of the social construction of reality*”

(15). This perspective opens new avenues for understanding human behavior, particularly within ever-evolving and interconnected social contexts. Moreover, this perspective is of special usefulness in approaching dystopian worlds where there is space for experimenting with the unique social contexts of tyranny and injustices.

In the realm of interconnectedness, the theory of chaos, complexity theory, and its various related branches, like uncertainty theory, quantum non-linear dynamical theory, and non-linear dynamical systems theory, have become significant in understanding human behavior. These theories challenge the traditional Cartesian analytical approach of identifying discrete parts within a system and analyzing them to deduce the structure of the whole (Capra 19-20). Instead, Ludwig Von Bertalanffy (1968), in the 1940s and 50s, emphasized that a system encompasses a complex interplay of elements, comprising not only the individual components but also the intricate web of relationships that bind them together. This approach embodies a macro-level understanding, highlighting the importance of comprehending the interconnectedness of individual elements. One foundational idea within chaos theory is that the whole is greater than the sum of its parts. To truly grasp the functioning of a complex system, it is essential to understand how these parts are interconnected, recognizing that even this understanding may prove insufficient to comprehend the system's holistic dynamics. Essentially, the focus is on analyzing the entire system rather than its individual elements separately. This approach involves a broader, more comprehensive examination—a macro perspective. Understanding the interconnectedness of various elements within a system is crucial for comprehending how the system relates to chaos theory. It suggests that

understanding the interactions between these individual elements is vital to grasping the full complexity of the entire system. However, even understanding these connections may not provide a comprehensive understanding of the system's overall functioning (Brennan 5) due to the system's sheer complexity and the difficulty of encompassing all its initial conditions.

The second concept is Edward Lorenz's work on sensitivity to initial conditions, which further illustrates the intricacies of chaos theory. He discovered that even minor alterations in a system's initial conditions can lead to drastically different outcomes. In other words, systems can display unpredictable behavior, which does not imply they are exempt from laws, wherein minor variations in a single variable can significantly impact the system's later history. Lorenz famously coined the "Butterfly Effect," symbolizing how a butterfly's wing flap in one part of the world could potentially trigger a tornado in another distant location (260). This sensitivity to initial conditions challenges the traditional predictability of cause-and-effect relationships within complex systems, rendering precise predictions impossible. Bifurcation, a term resonating with chaos, represents a critical juncture in a system's evolution, akin to a crossroads where new challenges arise, and the system confronts the decision of which path to follow. It symbolizes transformation within the system, involving the addition, subtraction, or mutation of constituent elements, resulting in alterations that ripple through the entire system. Accompanying bifurcation is another concept central to chaos theory: phase transition. Phase transition denotes the precise moment when the system settles on a particular bifurcation or path. Bifurcation can be perceived as the juncture at which a choice must be made, while phase transition represents the ensuing process of transformation resulting from that choice. Importantly, in this

context, the term "choice" does not imply conscious decision-making or autonomy; within complex systems, "choices" occur naturally, and the outcomes of these choices do not necessarily involve cognitive processes.

Another critical aspect of chaos theory involves self-organization and dissipative structures. Complex systems possess the capability to self-organize, allowing them to adapt to external influences and undergo systemic transformations. This adaptation is an energy-driven process, enabling systems to regulate and evolve. Consequently, it is plausible to hypothesize that complex systems never truly stagnate or cease to exist; instead, they continuously recycle and adapt to novel properties while retaining aspects of their previous states. As Eleanor Brennan explains, dissipative structures, illustrated through the example of water changing, demonstrate how complex systems adapt and transform while preserving their core properties under the influence of heat. When external factors like heat are introduced, water adjusts to the heat, alters its structure, transforms into steam, and evaporates. Yet, despite these changes, the water does not disappear; it simply transforms. Given new energies and different influences, it can revert to water or take the form of ice, snow, or fog—all retaining the essential properties of water (Brennan 6).

Dystopian worlds/ systems serve as illustrative examples of complex systems operating significantly distant from equilibrium states. These systems defy conventional, linear cause-and-effect relationships, which is contrary to their intended objectives. As I will explore in the coming chapters, dystopian systems, often prevalent in colonial and dictatorial regimes, tend to oversimplify interactions among their subordinates. This simplification is achieved through the imposition of strict rules and the establishment of unyielding structural and

physical borders. These systems persistently maintain the belief that implementing such measures makes it possible to shift societies from non-linear, intricate dynamics into more straightforward cause-and-effect relationships. This adoption of the assumption suggests that a complex system can be simplified through compartmentalization and stringent regulations, with the aim of exerting control over dystopian bodies and their movements to render them predictable. However, it is crucial to recognize that such control cannot fundamentally counteract the inherent unpredictability within complex societal structures.

Instead, and through the analysis provided in the previous chapters, the dystopian worlds exhibit nonlinear characteristics, where minor causes can result in disproportionately significant impacts or, conversely, have no effect. These systems exhibit an extraordinary sensitivity to their initial conditions, implying that even the most minor inaccuracies in pinpointing these conditions, often an unattainable feat in absolute precision, can result in significantly different outcomes despite having apparently similar starting points, e.g., the repetitive stories of the enslavement of handmaids, killing of *al-Aghyar*, the attack of the Empire of the center on marginal territories. Furthermore, they are characterized by sudden and irregular transitions between various phases. The relevant yardstick of this study is the act of border crossing, whether a minor or major transgression, and the forming of contact zones the witness encounters, the impact of which cannot be perfectly predicted. On another level, every instance of crossing borders, from upper or lower hierarchies, is a "moment[..] of rupture in which pre-existing emotional repertoires of fear, hate, repression, or respect for the political order are destabilized. They can potentiate new ways of being and relating to each other, but can also raise new conflicts and tensions" (Ayata

and Harders 279). The edited volume by Stephanie Wodianka, Christoph Behrens, titled *Chaos in the Contact Zone*, speaks of encounters taking place in the contact zones as

> continually elicit an impulse or represent a laboratory for control, prudence and planning. This concerns, for example, strategies in diplomatic encounters or warfare, medicine and genetics, educational concepts and legislation, travel guides, and oracles. The prescient or retrospective struggle for control can also take on forms that are unpredictable and unexpected and thus cause chaos. Chaos and control are not mutually exclusive in the contact zone; on the contrary, they stand in relation to each other – be it as a phenomenon, a competence or an interpretive scheme. (8)

This interconnective relationship between chaos and control is framed as a phenomenon, a skill, or an interpretive framework, indicating the nuanced and dynamic nature of their interaction in the encounters taking place in the contact zones. As mentioned earlier, this study shares the belief that dystopian fiction can introduce a further laboratory of the interconnectedness between order, rules, borders, and control on one side and crossing, chaos, and unpredictability on the other.

1.7 Aims of the Study

Amidst the surveillance system and the interplay between outer/physical and inner/structural borders aimed at tightly managing the docility of dystopian citizens, individuals from both hegemonic and dominated classes persistently challenge the established rules and transgress the (sub)borders. The selected

novels for this study offer diverse perspectives from various positions in the hierarchy (top/ bottom) and movements (vertical/ horizontal). Through a thorough examination of the voices and rationalizations of dystopian protagonists, this research seeks to achieve four primary objectives: 1. Understand how the presence of borders and the ensuing hierarchical structures shape the psyche and physicality of dystopian citizens; 2. Trace instances when these individuals break the rules, transgress borders, and subsequently transcend and subvert the significance of the borders they encounter; 3. Distinguish between crossings of sub-borders and those of major ones; 4. Examine how such crossings and transgressions affect and unpredictably alter individuals' bodies and actions. This study contends that a reciprocal relationship exists between bodies and borders in complex dystopian settings. As crossings and transgressions proliferate across (sub)borders, new dynamics emerge within the power matrix of the dystopian reality. These dynamics originate in the spaces of contact zones, where new power mutations arise, challenging the established order. As eloquently expressed by Marcus Sedgwick, a border poses a myriad of implied questions, "'Can you cross me?', 'Will you cross me?', 'What am I doing here in the first place?' and maybe most importantly: 'Will you be someone else on the other side?'" (Sedgwick)

To put those concepts into work, the coming three chapters demonstrate an analysis of the three novels, each focusing on one novel. They are organized in a progression from the micro level of border-crossing within households to the meso level of urbanity in a megacity and finally to the macro level of border-crossing within empires. Chapter two delves into Margaret Atwood's dystopian novel *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985) and explores the micro-level of border-

crossing within the complexity of the household. The analysis examines how the novel's narrative exposes hidden scripts and reveals power dynamics through various contact zones. It navigates the constructed dystopian society of Gilead, examining the historical context and the roles of women in a restructured society. Through Offred's experiences, the chapter uncovers both minor and major crossings, revealing the limits of storytelling and the transformative power of narrative in crossing borders. Moving to the meso-level of urbanity, chapter three focuses on the binary urban landscape of the dystopian city depicted in Ahmad Khaled Towfik's novel *Utopia* (2008). It examines the degenerated urbanity of Cairo, situated between gated communities and slums, exploring the binary nature of urban life. The chapter explores into the symbiotic relationship between slums and gated communities, as well as the lives of the affluent "Predators" and the marginalized "Prey." It further analyzes the experiences and narratives of boredom and death within the city, resulting in the practice of slum hunting. The chapter also explores the concept of contact zones and their transformative impact on the characters' self-perceptions and choices. Shifting to the macro-level of empires, chapter four examines J.M. Coetzee's novel *Waiting for the Barbarians* (1980), in which border crossing is within an empire’s power structure. The analysis delves into the manifestations of the empire's power and the constantly shifting concept of the "Other" at its margins. It explores the bordering and definition of barbarianism as well as the narrative of torture employed by the empire. The chapter focuses on contact zones such as the hut, the apartment, the desert, and the prison, uncovering the hidden narratives and voices within them. The analysis concludes by considering the implications of the narrative's unwriting of the self. Finally, the study concludes with Chapter Five, which

provides a conclusive commentary on the endings of the three narratives by reading them through the lens of chaos theory.

Hence, the primary aim of this study is to broaden the definition of borders beyond their physical aspects, such as gates and checkpoints, to extend to mental and hierarchical ones. Subsequently, the investigation looks into the practices of transgressions and movements across these multifaceted shades of borders, providing insight into the motivation, significance, and interpretation of crossing borders and breaking the rules. This study also draws a distinction between resistance to borders, whether explicitly recognized or not, and the association of such resistance with liberation. Notably, within the unique context that dystopias present, resistance and border-crossing may not always be fixed interpretations signifying the freedom for the subordinated and the weak; instead, they may reinforce the rigidity of borders, be it hierarchical or physical.

Chapter 2:

Crossing Borders, Revealing Hidden Scripts of the Household: The Dynamics of Contact Zones in Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985)

2.1 Introduction

Although Margaret Atwood is a Canadian writer who authored *The Handmaid's Tale*, its narrative primarily revolves around the dystopian state of the United States. Within the novel, Canada assumes the role of an envisioned sanctuary, representing safety and survival. Notably, other Canadian authors have also explored dystopian visions of the United States, such as Omar Al Akkad's *American War* (2017) and David Bergen's *Strangers* (2015). In these dystopian works, Canada often occupies a less prominent position within the narrative, functioning as a backdrop against the events unfolding. These literary creations not only idealize Canada to some extent but also serve to imaginatively explore alternative futures for the United States, employing Canada as a symbolic counterpoint.

Margaret Atwood replies ironically on the choice of the United States as the locus of the narration, saying that "[e]veryone watches the States to see what the country is doing and might be doing ten or fifteen years from now" (Ingersoll 223). In her book *Survival,* Atwood argues that at the core of every country or culture, there is "a single unifying and informing symbol at its core" (26). She claims that the symbol for the United States is "The Frontier," in which it

> holds out a hope, never fulfilled but always promised, of Utopia, the perfect human society. Most twentieth-century American literature is about the

> gap between the promise and the actuality, between the imagined ideal Golden West or City Upon a Hill, the model for all the world postulated by the Puritans, and the actual squalid materialism […] (Survival 26).

For Canada, Atwood advocates that 'Survival' is the core symbol for both English- and French-Canadian literature. The symbol of Survival in Canadian literature is "a multifaceted and adaptable idea" (27). She outlines the different dimensions of the survival symbol for Canadian culture as

> [f]or early explorers and settlers, it meant bare survival in the face of "hostile" elements and/ or natives: carving out a place and s way of keeping alive. But the word can also suggest survival of a crisis or disaster, like a hurricane or a wreck, and many Canadian poems have this kind of survival as a theme; what you might call "grim" survival as opposed to "bare" survival. For French Canada, after the English took over it became cultural survival, hanging on as a people, retaining a religion and a language under an alien government. And in English Canada now while the Americans are taking over it is acquiring a similar meaning. There is another use of the word as well: a survival can be a vestige of a vanished order which has managed to persist after its time is past, like a primitive reptile. This version crops up in Canadian thinking too, usually among those who believe that Canada is obsolete. (27)

Atwood pinpoints a preoccupation with the survival mode of the Canadian identity that is quite deep in its collective psyche. The obsession with one's own survival inherently entails an intense focus on the barriers and challenges that impede survival. In earlier literary works, these obstacles predominantly manifest as external factors, such as the harshness of the land or the unforgiving climate. However, as she suggests, these obstacles assume a more elaborate and elusive nature as we delve into more contemporary writings, making them increasingly difficult to discern. They no longer solely threaten physical survival but pose as

impediments to a more profound form of existence that transcends mere biological sustenance and encompasses what we may term spiritual survival (28). She explains this fear, as it is "[s]ometimes fear of these obstacles becomes itself the obstacle, and a character is paralyzed by terror (either of what he thinks is threatening him from the outside, or of elements in his own nature that threaten him from within)" (28). In some instances, the fear may even extend to life itself, where life becomes an imminent danger to one's own survival. This creates a cyclic self-perpetuating anxiety that one must ponder the worthiness of such a compromised existence to pursue survival (28).

In Canadian literature, the symbol of survival acknowledges the presence of barriers and obstacles, encouraging the act of transcending these boundaries. In the context of literary works, the act of contemplating also involves a form of imaginative border-crossing. Through the act of crossing borders through imagination, authors are granted the freedom to reflect upon the self (representing the Canadian nation) and its complicated relationship with the 'globally determining neighbour' (Nicholson 33). By harnessing the power of imagination, Canadian authors are able to express their concerns, fears, and aspirations surrounding the United States and its influence on their own national identity. This creative exercise enables them to navigate and examine the complexities of the Canada-US relationship, offering unique perspectives on the interplay between these two nations.

2.1.1 The Dystopian United States of America from a Canadian Perspective

In this chapter, I employ the principal theoretical concepts about borders and bodies discussed in the preceding chapter. This is an initial tool for

comprehensively reading and analyzing Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*. In this literary work, the Canadian author portrays a nightmarish scenario in which the United States has descended into dystopia following its disintegration into a dogmatic military regime known as the Republic of Gilead. This transformation was instigated by an environmental catastrophe and a religiously fueled civil war ravaging the nation.

The center of my argument lies in the assertion that Gilead, as an entity, fabricates two interconnected borders: structural and temporal. Structural borders demarcate the interior of Gilead, characterized by rigid structure and control juxtaposed against the exterior engulfed by the chaotic throes of the civil war. Gilead imposes a temporal border, effectively separating the pre-Gilead era, which corresponds to the United States of the 1970s, from the present-day order implemented by Gilead's governing apparatus. This temporal border necessitates imposing rigid regulations and laws, which facilitate the meticulous reconfiguration of the physical bodies and personal lives of Gilead's first generation—the formerly US citizens. For this, the citizens of Gilead are caught at the intersection of those two borders, structural and temporal. The narrative also alludes to political borders separating the dystopian United States from Canada, which is perceived as a place of hope and refuge. These national borders, however, are effectively sealed off and rigorously guarded by Gilead's intelligence service. To escape the rigidity of Gilead’s reality, they must cross both those borders that shape their dystopian reality as they are intertwined.

However, it is essential to note that the novel primarily depicts the intricacies of individual lives and their internal dynamics. Specifically, it looks into the

household dynamics of Commander Fred, an elite figure within the upper ranks of the Gilead hierarchy, and his wife, Serena Joy. Remarkably, the narrative unfolds from the perspective of an anonymous handmaid, Offred, who resides with them and is identified by the name of her assigned Commander. Thus, crossing borders becomes predominantly evident at the micro level within the household. Despite the seemingly confined scope of the household portrayed in the novel, these border crossings hold considerable significance and wield influence over the established power structure of the Gilead system. By examining Offred's experiences, we discern that her crossings occur on both temporal and spatial planes, culminating in a pivotal crossing of Gilead's political borders.

At the micro level, the notion of borders in this literary work materializes in the form of internal doors within the household, the gates of the residence, and even the deliberate defiance of regulations that govern the household as prescribed by the regime. Moreover, within the confines of the Republic of Gilead, the primary setting of the narrative, borders permeate both public and private spaces. These borders are strictly regulated, mirroring the rules and power hierarchy entrenched within Gilead's governing regime. Consequently, these rules profoundly influence the physical bodies of Gilead's inhabitants and control their movements across and around these borders. Any unauthorized transgression of these borders can have dire consequences, e.g., resulting in loss of life for the narrator and her superiors. Gilead strives to create a clear demarcation from the past by imposing rigid rules, effectively erecting a formidable border that separates the two distinct eras. Within this chapter, I endeavor to scrutinize Offred's subtle and

imperceptible transgressions and explore how the major rule-breakings of her superiors ultimately enable her to undertake significant border crossings.

2.1.2 The Historical and Political Contexts of the Pre-Gilead Era

Margaret Atwood wrote *The Handmaid's Tale* as an extrapolation intricately woven with historical and political events intertwined with the United States of America during the 1980s. The history of the Puritans in the United States heavily influences the novel's backdrop. Notably, the emergence of the "New Christian Right" towards the end of the 1970s played a pivotal role. This emergence was facilitated by the end of the civil rights movement, which brought together fundamentalists and evangelicals, previously divided over racial integration, under a common political coalition (Williams 6). Both parties aligned with Ronald Reagan's call for 'law and order,' further solidifying their association (6).

During this era, public figures like Nixon resonated with evangelicals, emphasizing “that the keys to public morality were personal responsibility and stable families” (Williams 89). Nixon's electoral success was closely linked to his empathizing with conservative social values, advocating for restrictions on pornography, and opposing campus protesters (98). Against these societal changes, Atwood crafts *The Handmaid's Tale* as a dystopian representation of what could transpire if American neo-conservatives or the New Puritans ascend to power.

As for Puritans, they were a reform movement of English Protestants who strived to purify Christianity from the Church of Roman Catholic practices. They escaped England to be colonists in the New World after being exposed to religious

persecution and hostility during the reign of King James I (r. 1603–1625) and King Charles I (r. 1625–1649) (Baracskay). They inhabited majorly what is now Massachusetts and New Hampshire. They established the Massachusetts Bay Company forming the Colony of Massachusetts Bay to flourish economically in the new home (Baracskay). Despite religious persecution in their homeland, they never believed in religious tolerance or freedom; alternatively, they established a theocratic society.

Either back in England or New England, Puritans banned celebrations of Christmas and Easter, suggesting "an increase of emphasis on the spiritual side of the occasion and a minimizing of the joys of the flesh" (Spencer 498-9). However, people continued to sing carols, and the services for Christ's nativity continued covertly (Burton-Hill). The ban lasted in England from 1647 till 1660, while in Boston, it lasted till 1681 (see James Harwood). Besides, they policed social life in

> an attempt to force intellectual and religious homogeneity on the whole community. Banishment, the branding iron, the whipping post, the bilbows, and even the hangman's noose were used as means of enforcing conformity and uniformity in politics and religious faith as well as in suppressing what later ages would accept as clearly defined crimes (Merrill 766)

Sexual relations outside marriage and homosexuality were all banned and publicly punished (Norton 49). In 1634, the colony of Massachusetts prohibited the custom of toasting an alcoholic drink; for instance, "a Puritan lawyer and polemicist William Prynne who, in 1628, wrote an entire book devoted to the subject titled *Health's Sicknesse*" (Rupp).

2.1.3 The Construction of Gilead: A Recipe for a Dystopia

In *The Handmaid's Tale*'s fictional world, the environmental catastrophe is a backdrop for the rise of an authoritarian regime. Accordingly, the founders of Gilead have established their regime by coming into power through a military coup on social and environmental justifications. Before founding the Republic of Gilead, the narrative states that a severe environmental catastrophe has hit the US. One of the nuclear plants leaks or explodes, leading to ruinous pollution of the ecological environment. Consequently, the birth rate plummets below zero, sterility becomes familiar, and, in many cases, stillbirths or appalling newborn deformities. Schools across the nations close down because of the lack of children (123). The idea of the Republic of Gilead, therefore, is constructed to be a solution to these problems: “They made mistakes […]. We don’t intend to repeat them” (123). Gilead’s propaganda introduces itself as a promised utopia for the nightmarish United States of America with a slogan: “Better never means better for everyone […]. It always means worse, for some” (222). To come to power, a chain of political events has taken place that paved the way for the establishment of Gilead. The US president is shot, and the death is later blamed on Islamic fanatics, and an army of fundamentalists declare a state of emergency, comprising Gilead’s paramilitary. The unknown government practices violence by taking extreme measures: the constitution is suspended, post offices and subways are bombed, newspapers are either censored or closed, and people are shot on the limited marches that have taken place on the streets. US citizens are banned from leaving the country for Canada as the borders are closed.

2.2 B/ordering Society in Gilead

The severe decline in the birth rate due to catastrophic nuclear pollution drives Gilead to prioritize female fertility as a means of survival. This prioritization is channeled through the traditional Puritan family structure, which forms the fundamental building block of Gilead's society. Men are considered the heads of households, but women wield real authority and run the households. Despite this gender hierarchy, female fertility ultimately orders Gileadean households and society. Gilead tightly controls female fertility through even stricter interpretations of Puritan ideals than those of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. By regressing three centuries in their approach, Gilead aims to demonstrate the antithesis of the perceived failures of the 1970s, oversimplifying societal problems and disregarding their roots.

Accordingly, this leads to the strict definition of gender and class, creating a highly segregated society where individuals are divided into specific social ranks and confined to designated spaces. The visual representation of this segregation is evident in how people dress and move in public to demonstrate distinctions between social classes. Reinforcing compartmentalization in society, there are no longer public spaces where men and women can freely interact and meet (243). The architects of Gilead believe that by fragmenting society into distinct ranks and confining individuals to specific spaces, they can easily control and manage the population. However, the narrative reveals that despite the strict hierarchies and efforts to compartmentalize society, margins always emerge to evade and challenge this imposed structure. These moments of resistance and

transgression are both inevitable and transient, serving as crucial reminders of the inevitability of resilience and yearning for freedom.

However, this section analyzes how compartmentalization takes place. To create a temporal and structural separation between the US of the 1970s and Gilead, the latter imposes a process of "b/ordering" the entire society. This process unfolds in three interconnected phases, aiming to transform the last generation of US citizens and initiate new generations under the ideology of the Republic of Gilead. This transgenerational transformation involves restructuring society, reproducing the Gileadean body, and ritualizing these changes. Despite Gilead's attempts to establish its utopia through these measures, its approach is fundamentally flawed. The strict control, suppression of individual freedoms, and compartmentalization imposed by Gilead ultimately have led to the emergence of resistance and the fleeting moments of defiance that have challenged the regime's oppressive nature.

2.2.1 Re-structuring Society

As for gender segregation, although men are at the top of the hierarchy, they are arranged based on their rank in Gilead's military and security systems. As the top head of this system is never disclosed in Offred’s narration, the Commanders are considered the highest rank mentioned in the narrative, always seen in black suits. While they enjoy the largest share of freedom in this society, this does not deny their conformity to Gilead’s discipline and laws. In cases of transgression, they are subjected to the maximum punishment, the death penalty. There are other security wings, namely, ‘Eyes,’ which works as the secret police inside the borders of Gilead, and security intelligence for the national borders. ‘Angels’

refers to soldiers fighting on fluctuating political borders. Lastly, at the bottom of the men's hierarchy are 'Guardians' who wear green uniforms. Offred describes them as "[t]hey're like store mannequins almost, with their neat hair and pressed uniforms and plaster-hard young faces" (225). From her description, they are usually young men, trying to do small jobs, e.g., guarding gates or checkpoints or being at the service of commanders in the hope of getting a "promotion to the Angels, and of being allowed possibly to marry, and then, if they are able to gain power and live to be old enough, of being allotted a Handmaid of their own" (32). As the novel's narrator is a woman in a segregated society, there is not much information on how the competition goes among men, allowing one to gain power and find his way up to the top of the hierarchy. The case of the Guardians reflects that not only women, especially in the Handmaids' case, are confined or oppressed, but there are categories of men who suffer under the ideology of Gilead.

Women are also hierarchized into several categories but kept invisible from public spaces and official positions. This hierarchy is seen inside the households of the Commanders. The Commanders' Wives are at the top of the women's societal order, enjoying considerable freedom that is denied to other categories. They are always seen dressed in blue, and their daughters are in white veils. They do not work, staying most of their time in their houses, and are responsible for the households (mainly made of other categories of women), in which the Commanders are not allowed to interfere. Apparently, they are powerful enough to break minor rules, like obtaining cigarettes from the black market (24). Conversely, they seem to suffer long hours of boredom and lack of purpose. As Offred narrates, Serena Joy spends her time gardening and knitting scarves

for the Angels at the frontlines of the battles. Offred observantly doubts the usefulness of these scarves, saying, "[s]ometimes I think these scarves aren't sent to the Angels…Maybe it's just to keep the Wives busy, to give them sense of purpose" (23). Then, the Marthas follow in the row of power inside households with their green dresses; their function is to run the household as servants to the Commanders' houses.

Outside the households are the Aunts in their brown dresses, who work at 'Rachel and Leah Center.' Aunts are described as they put "that frown and keeping [themselves] stiff and pursing [their] lips and through [the guards of the checkpoints], as if they were festering sores" (256-7). They play an essential political role in Gilead's regime, as their task is to educate, or in other words, brainwash, women on the new Gilead's beliefs and to qualify them to be handmaids. Then comes the role of the Handmaids, who are trained in the 'Rachel and Leah Center,' to be surrogate mothers. Usually, they are women considered 'fertile.' Gilead's handmaids are usually dressed in red uniforms called 'habits,' on which Offred aptly observes that "[h]abits are hard to break" (34). "Habits" embody more than just a strict dress code; they also represent the imposition of familiarity that ultimately leads to acceptance. Each of the Handmaids is sent after 'graduation' on a two-year mission to the Commanders' houses to be copulated by them in a monthly ritual called "the Ceremony." The event of the Ceremony is not meant to be for sexual pleasure but more of a witnessed rape scene to impregnate them. If they are successful, they have no right to the born baby and are transferred to another household.

On the side of the social class spectrum are Econowives, who are dressed “in striped dresses, red and blue and green and cheap and skimpy, that mark the women of the poorer men” (34). Exemplifying their lower status in society, “[t]hese women are not divided into functions. They have to do everything” (34). Usually, they do not mingle with elite women and remain on the periphery of the social hierarchy. However, on the fringes of society, we encounter the marginalized and invisible. The ‘Unwomen,’ donned in grey dresses, endure a dire fate, being forcefully sent to the dreaded 'colonies' where they collect and dispose of hazardous nuclear waste, stripped of their identity, and deemed unfit for Gilead's strict societal norms. Another hidden aspect of Gilead's social order involves women working as sex workers in a clandestine establishment, Jezebel's house. This secret entertainment facility caters exclusively to the Commanders' desires and starkly contrasts the puritanical facade propagated by the regime.

Gilead’s philosophy towards women is based on the idea that the natural interaction between men and women cannot be circumvented. Commander Fred elaborates on the premise of this nature that one “can’t cheat *Nature* [of the interaction between men and women]” (my emphasis 249). This *Nature* argues that “[w]omen know that instinctively […] they buy so many different clothes, in the old days[..] [t]o trick men into thinking they were several different women. A new one each day” (249). Instead, “now that [they] don’t have different clothes […] [men] have different women (249). Essentially, Gilead seeks to impose predictability upon the female body, transforming it into a standardized and color-coded function. This approach results in a paradoxical situation where women

become invisible within society, stripped of their individuality, and yet remain visible and replaceable through their uniform habits.

Consequently, women lose their unique identities, reduced to mere vessels defined solely by the functionality of their bodies. By extension, Handmaids are stripped of their names and named after their commanders. The novel's narrator is named Offred, meaning that she is the property of Commander Fred. In one instance, her companion, Ofglen, is suddenly replaced with another one and introduces herself to Offred as: “I am Ofglen” (295). To her surprise, Offred comments, "[…] of course she is, the new one, and Ofglen, wherever she is, is no longer Ofglen. I never did know her real name. That is how you can get lost, in a sea of names. It wouldn’t be easy to find her, now” (295).

Gilead not only positions itself as an ideological counterforce to the previous United States but also manifests this opposition through the manipulation of language. This linguistic approach is evident in using terms like 'Unwoman' and 'Unbabies,' which carry connotations of erasure, negation, and denial. Rather than inventing new words that signify a clear departure from the past, Gilead chooses to recycle existing vocabulary from the very past it seeks to reject, employing the prefix 'un' as a symbol of direct antagonism and a dearth of imagination.

Newborns with deformities in the Gileadean discourse are called ‘Unbabies,’ which are babies “with a pinhead or a snout like a dog’s, or two bodies, or a hole in its heart or no arms, or webbed hands and feet […]” (122), and as soon as they are born, they “[are] put somewhere, quickly, away” (123). Similarly, Gilead uses the term 'Unwomen' to refer to a specific faction of 1980s feminist activists who, despite sharing the regime's pro-life stance, are denied recognition as 'women'

due to their perceived lack of adherence to Gilead's religious beliefs. These 'Unwomen' are considered 'Godless' and deemed unworthy of gender identity merely because they engage in acts of free expression and protest (128-9). To establish the new society, it must undergo a process of restructuring and strict hierarchization while simultaneously employing linguistic manipulation to disentangle itself from the previous United States society and create a sense of distance through language.

2.2.2 Re-producing the Gileadean Female Body: Rachel and Leah Center

Fertile young women are the core of the Gileadean society, as they promise the continuity of society after the obscure nuclear leakage catastrophe. Fertile women's bodies also become rare. The plan, therefore, of Gilead's mastermind is to guarantee the maximum productivity of those women to reproduce babies with the utmost submission of these women. Unlike seventeenth-century Puritans, who believed men could be infertile, Gilead views infertility as only associated with women. The belief that linked infertility with impotence and associated them with notions of manhood and a man's ability to lead his household can be traced back to seventeenth-century Puritans. During this historical period in New England, Puritans held a particular discourse on men's sexuality, which Thomas A. Foster explores in his article titled "Deficient Husbands: Manhood, Sexual Incapacity, and Male Marital Sexuality in Seventeenth-Century New England" (1999). In this article, Foster investigates the social and cultural context of seventeenth-century New England and the Puritan community's understanding of male sexuality. The Puritans did not distinguish between infertility (the inability to produce offspring) and impotence (the inability

to engage in sexual intercourse). Instead, they linked these concepts and viewed them as a measure of a man's masculinity and capacity to fulfill his marital duties.

> Seventeenth-century definitions of the word "impotence" highlight the relationship between male sexual dysfunctioning and more general male character flaws. All the various definitions of impotence point to notions of weakness, deficiency, or powerlessness. […] These definitions taken together indicate that impotence meant more than simply sexual incapacity. Manhood incorporated strength, power, mastery, and morality, whereas impotence signified the absence of these qualities and, thereby, the erosion of manliness. (733)

Within the Puritan framework, the patriarchal structure of the household was of utmost importance, with the husband positioned as the head of the family. His ability to procreate and produce heirs was seen as a biological function reflecting his manhood and virility. Failing to fulfill this role could lead to questions about a man's masculinity and ability to perform his duties as a husband and leader of the household. In contrast to Gilead's view, Foster clarifies that

> [a]lthough seventeenth-century New Englanders held strong beliefs about the importance of reproduction, they subscribed to an allied and separable appreciation for sexual relations between husbands and wives. Within this matrix, sexual incapacity was not solely an obstacle to reproduction but to the giving and receiving of 'due benevolence'. (729)

Indeed, in the face of an environmental catastrophe and vehement opposition to the progressive views on feminism that emerged in the 1970s, the Gilead regime recognized that a significant part of their strategy to address the declining birth rates was to separate pleasure from sex and transform sexual intercourse into a mere functional act for procreation. Drawing on biblical narratives, the Gilead regime sought to reproduce the story of Leah and Rachel, who used their

handmaids, Bilhah and Zilpah[3], to bear children on their behalf. In the biblical story, two sisters, Rachel and Leah, vie for the affection of their husband, Jacob. Due to Rachel's infertility, she allows her husband to have sexual relation with her handmaid, Bilhah, to conceive a child. Similarly, Leah, who was fertile, employs her handmaid, Zilpah, for the same purpose. The offspring of these handmaids were considered the wives' children. This biblical narrative serves as a blueprint for their reproductive system in Gilead. The ruling elite of Gilead, particularly the Commanders and their infertile Wives, adopt the practice of using Handmaids as surrogate mothers to bear children for them. These Handmaids are fertile women who were taken from the lower ranks of society and designated to serve this purpose, stripped of their previous identities, and reduced to mere vessels for procreation.

The Rachel and Leah Center is Gilead's institution for producing trained slaves. Initially, fertile women should be captivated as enslaved people for religious purposes. After that, they are referred to as Handmaids upon their graduation. They are forcefully secluded from their families and acquaintances and taken to start a new life. Some of these are women who are also mothers, like Offred, who is separated from her six-year-old daughter and who is put in an orphanage. Those captivated women are omitted from society in the transformation phase to the Republic of Gilead, as if they had never existed. In the strict, violent discipline of Rachel and Leah Center, those women are collected and isolated under the

[3] Bilhah and Zilpah gave birth to four sons—Naphtali, Dan, Asher, and Gad—fathered by Jacob, who became the heads of four of the Twelve Tribes of Israel. Genesis 35:25-26

supervision of middle-aged women named Aunts. The existence of this Center at the start of Gilead is

> hardly common knowledge. It was all secret at the first, behind barbed wire. There might have been objections to what they were doing, even then. So although people had seen the odd Aunt around, they weren't really aware of what they were for. They must have thought they were some kind of army nurse. (257-8)

Women in Gilead are omitted and absent; they are only reproduced as dissected bodies under the panoptic gaze of Gilead. The lived body degenerates into corporeal body parts of fertility — a" womb with two legs."

In his article "The Phenomenology of Shame," Thomas Fuchs, influenced by Merleau-Ponty, differentiates between the lived body and the corporeal body. The lived body is "the subjective space of bodily sensations […]. Hence, lived bodiliness means my relation to the world as mediated and lived by the body, or my embodied being-in-the-world" (Fuchs 224). As for the corporeal body, it "is the anatomical object of physiology and medicine which can be observed, grasped and even manipulated […] the field of expression of a person, enters a complex relation to the subjective "lived-body" (Fuchs 224). Accordingly, Fuchs perceives that "[b]odiliness and corporeality are, therefore, dialectically intertwined" (225). The body acts in such duality when "lived and corporeal body is closely connected with the interpersonal sphere: the body becomes an object in the proper sense only when it is seen by the other" (Fuchs 225). Therefore, the corporealized body experiences the emotion of shame in the presence or under the gaze of the other. Before the influence of the gaze of the other, the lived body (before its transformation into a corporeal one) "is directed towards the outside from a

hidden center. The lived-body has no access to the inner source from which its directions, drives, and intentions spring: it lives itself and by this remains blind to itself" (Fuchs 226). In other words, Fuchs describes this transformation as if the lived-body is "caught in a force field" in which it is "torn out of the centrality of [the] lived-body and become an object inside another world. The other's gaze decentralizes [its] world" (226). The surveillance practices of Gilead transform it into a panoptic gaze under which women "invert[..] the directions of [their] bodiliness turned towards the world and make[..] [them] shrink to the size of [their] corporeal bod[ies] experience of "me-here-now" arises" (Fuchs 226).

The former stadium (a symbol of freedom and corporeal flexibility), now transformed into the Center, serves as a pivotal space where the relationships among the young women and their connections to their past undergo a rupture. Designed specifically for the transitional generation—the witnesses to the collapse of the United States of America and the rise of the Republic of Gilead—the Center aims to indoctrinate and mold these women into their new roles as Handmaids. The day at the Center is meticulously structured, consisting of didactic lectures and video presentations conducted and commented on by the Aunts. As a prominent figure in this indoctrination process, Aunt Lydia plays a crucial role in shaping young women's perceptions and understanding of their circumstances. Part of the daily lectures is displaying documentaries: old violent porn movies from the seventies and women's demonstrations from the same era dubbed as "Unwoman documentary" (128). As for the former films, they keep the soundtracks, as "[t]hey want [the Handmaids] to hear the screams and grunts and shrieks of what is supposed to be either extreme screams or extreme pleasure of both at once, but they don't want us to hear what the Unwomen are saying" (129).

The latter documentaries are always accompanied by the voice of Aunt Lydia "with smug authority in her voice of one who is in a position to judge. We would have to condone some of their ideas […]" (128).

Besides, there are documentary pictures of the Unwomen's lives in the Colonies. Those colonies are places for slave labor; people, especially women, who are disobedient, rebellious, or simply not useful for the structure of Gilead. People in the Colonies clean up dead bodies after ambiguous battles by burning them, fearing plagues. Other Colonies

> are worse, though, the toxic dumps, and the radiation spills. They figure you've got three years maximum, at those, before your nose falls off and your skin pulls away like rubber gloves. They don't bother to feed you much, or give you protective clothing or anything, it's cheaper not to. (260)

Later, Offred is told by her friend Moira that her mother is featured in one of the documentaries on the cleaning colonies where unwanted women are exiled to work and die. Similarly, Offred's mother disappears without her noticing. Offred narrates the incident of her mother's disappearance as "[a] week later, two weeks, three weeks, when things had become suddenly so much worse, I tried to call her. But there was no answer, and no answer when I tried again" (264). Offred manages to get into her apartment, "[t]here was furniture overturned. The mattress was ripped open, bureau drawers upside-down on the floor, their contents strewn and mounded, but my mother wasn't there" (265).

During one of her daily lectures, Aunt Lydia employs the concept of sacrifice to give these women a sense of purpose and meaning amidst their captivity and future work as Handmaids. She explicitly draws a connection between sacrifice

and fulfilling their duties as Handmaids, framing their role as essential for the future of Gilead. In her words, she emphasizes, "[y]ou are a transitional generation […]. It is the hardest for you. It is hard when men revile you. For the ones who come after you, it will be easier. They will accept their duties with willing hearts" (127). Aunt Lydia employs the concept of sacrifice as a means to erase generational memory. By emphasizing the significance of their sacrifices and their role in shaping the future, she attempts to sever the young women's ties to their pre-Gilead past.

In the dystopian society of Gilead, a harrowing ritual called "Testifying" takes place daily, where a woman is coerced into sharing a personal account from her life before the Gilead regime. During this vulnerable moment, the rest of the captive women respond with collective shouts of blame and shame, repeatedly uttering the phrase "Her fault, her fault." The emotionally charged session concludes with the demeaning refrain of "Crybaby, crybaby" (82). In one such Testifying session, Janine, later known as Ofwaren, recounts her deeply traumatic experience of being gang-raped at the age of fourteen and subsequently undergoing an abortion. Despite the immense horror of Janine's trauma, Offred finds herself experiencing conflicting emotions towards her fellow Handmaid. Offred's inner turmoil is revealed as she describes Janine's appearance during this distressing narrative as "disgusting: weak, squirmy, blotchy, pink like a newborn mouse" (82). Despite their knowledge of Janine's unimaginable suffering, they momentarily harbor disdain towards her vulnerability and emotional outpouring: “None of us wanted to look like that, ever. For a moment, even though we knew what was being done to her, we despised her” (82). The Testifying ritual exemplifies the dehumanizing tactics employed by the

regime to keep its subjects submissive and compliant. This scene encapsulates the psychological complexity that Rachel and Leah Center attempt to root in the future Handmaids, where individuality and empathy are systematically deconstructed and disrupted.

2.2.3 Ritualizing the Gileadean Body through the Events of Life and Death

In this section, I examine the third phase of Gilead's process of b/ordering society, which involves the ritualization of the Gileadean body through communal rituals. It is essential to note that the analysis of these ritualized events is examined from the narrator's perspective, which, despite her limited and restricted view, reveals how power is perceived and scrutinized by the silent subordinates. Gilead organizes various community events, such as Prayvaganzas, Birth Days, and Salvagings, where the entire society gathers. Prayvagazas is one of the few events where men and women can celebrate group weddings in the same place. As for the events of Salvagings and Birth Days, they are gender-segregated occasions exclusively for women. These two occasions invest heavily in death and birth as unique events celebrated in a particular way, generating affects and bodily reactions that support the coherence of the rigid façade of the Gileadean regime. The female Gileadean body and affects are ritualized, disciplined, and controlled through those detailed structured communal events.

These events are meticulously planned and tightly controlled, leaving no room for improvisation. These rituals are essential for investing and intensifying collective emotions; they foster a sense of belonging among Gilead citizens and reinforce loyalty to the regime's ideology. At the same time, we follow how those events are received on the silent end of the subordinate and what affects they instigate.

In Offred's narrative, she describes the rituals in the events and the accompanying affects as outlined by the regime for them. In parallel, she takes another affective journey exploring how she feels and what suppressed emotions such gatherings evoke. Through her narrative, she skillfully and playfully crosses the border between the exterior and interior worlds.

In the segregated society of Gilead, where women and men are kept apart and prohibited from interacting in public spaces, arranged marriages are introduced to bridge this societal gap. The wedding ceremonies, known as Prayvaganzas, are "held in the covered courtyard, where there's an oblong space, a skylight" (225). Not only do men and women sit separately during the ceremony, but also citizens are seated according to their social class, underscoring the strict gender and class segregation. As Offred reflects, the purpose of attending the Prayvaganza is "to demonstrate how obedient and pious we are" (224). Prayvaganzas are group weddings in which Angels, the soldiers who have returned from the frontlines, are married to young girls whose mothers give them away. The Prayvaganza ceremonies are initiated by a Commander who delivers a service speech, proclaiming the day as one of "thanksgiving" and "praise" (230). While these events are intended to evoke communal happiness for the young couples, there is a stark contrast between the outward display of celebration and the underlying atmosphere of fear and control.

At the Prayvaganza entrance, checkpoints are surveilled by Guardians armed with "a submachine gun slung ready, for whatever dangerous or subversive acts they think we might commit inside" (225). This display of weapons in public is a performance of public transcript, as termed by James Scott. He explains the use of this performance as

> [i]t is tempting to see displays and rituals of power as something of an inexpensive substitute for the use of coercive force or as an attempt to tap an original source of power or legitimacy that has since been attenuated. Effective display may, by conveying the impression of actual power and the will to use it, economize on the actual use of violence. (48)

Scott continues to elaborate on the effect of displaying violence on the subordinates that, if successful, as in Gilead's case, "it contributes to something like a self-fulfilling prophecy. If subordinates believe their superior to be powerful, the impression will help him impose himself and, in turn, contribute to his actual power" (48-9). The presence of armed security reinforces the tightly regulated and bordered nature of Gilead's society. Even during moments of pretentious celebration, the public space remains steeped in an undercurrent of violence and the fear of potential counter-violence. Fear is the predominant currency of these occasions, not only from the subordinate individuals like the handmaids, who constantly live in a state of fear due to their oppressed status, but also from those in positions of power who exhibit hypervigilance and an overemphasis on security due to un/expected act of resistance. Gilead cultivates an atmosphere of fear and counter-fear, where both the marginalized and the powerful perpetuate a climate of heightened vigilance and control. Despite attempting to create events that promote communal happiness, Gilead's society remains defined by fear, surveillance, and violence, underscoring the regime's constant need for control and preserving its hierarchical structure.

Salvagings serve as inquisitorial courts where public executions are carried out for both men and women. These events occur within a former university campus, now occupied by the Eyes' offices. The tolling of bells throughout the city signals the announcement of Salvagings, prompting women to gather and witness the

live executions. Like the heavily guarded entrance of Prayvaganzas, Salvagings are even more tightly secured. Offred describes the securitization of the campus as “[t]here’s a heavy contingent of guards, special-detail Angels, with riot gear—the helmets with the bulging dark plexiglass visors that make them look like beetles, the long clubs, the gas-canister guns—in a cordon around the outside of the Wall. That’s in case of hysteria. The hooks on the Wall are empty” (Atwood 284). On this occasion, the security measures are at their highest, alluding that such events used to be confronted with collective anger. The interior is also arranged according to the social classes of Gilead, with the Handmaids seated at the center, “where everyone can keep an eye on [them]” (285), thereby intensifying the panoptic surveillance. The Handmaids are the only class permitted to sit on cushions during the entire event, kneeling throughout.

In the narrative procession of the Salvaging Day, Aunt Lydia assumes the role of leading the event and introduces the female Salvagers, consisting of two Handmaids and one Wife, all dressed in black hoods and cloaks. Previously, these events involved dogmatic preachings, with the responsible Aunt narrating in detail the misdeeds of the Salvagers. However, in this particular event, Aunt Lydia announces a change in approach, stating that

> we have found that such a public account, especially when televised, is invariably followed by a rash, if I may call it that, an outbreak I should say, of exactly similar crimes. So we have decided in the best interests of all to discontinue this practice. The Salvagings will proceed without further ado. (287)

Swiftly, Offred decodes the statement that it will intensify fear and hypervigilance among the citizens of Gilead: “Now we are left to our own devices, our own speculations” (287).

The scene on Salvaging Day is grotesque. At its backdrop, Aunt Lydia’s demeanor is dutiful while smiling as if the execution is merely another bureaucratic task that needs to be handled quickly. She opens her speech by saying, “I’m sure we are all aware of the unfortunate circumstances that us all here together on this beautiful morning, when I am certain we would all rather be doing something else […]” (286). The three Salvagers on the stage are seated, waiting for their turn in the death line. Offred deduces from the "groggy off-centre smile” on their faces, one-sided contracted faces, uncoordinated wink, and the clumsy walk that they are drugged. Watching the surreal scene, Offred behaves contained and emotionless as it is prescribed, while on the inside, she begins “to shiver. Hatred fills [her] mouth like spit” (286). Moreover, the ritual dictates that the Handmaids take a central part in the execution. Through a symbolic practice, the Handmaids are compelled to hold the rope that suspends the Salvagers (later corpses). Offred describes the act:

> I’ve leaned forward to touch the rope in front of me, in time with others, both hands on it, the rope hairy, sticky with tar in the hot sun, then placed my hand on my heart to show my unity with Salvagers and my consent, and my complicity in the death of this woman. I have seen the kicking feet and the two in black who now seize hold of them and drag downwards with all their weight. I don’t want to see it any more. I look at the grass instead. I describe the rope. (288)

The entire ritual underscores the disposability of the individual in Gilead; their death is ungrievable yet witnessed. Moreover, they force the subordinates to

share and execute death responsibility equally. Anyone can be murdered, and everyone is a murderer. Caught between the external and internal realms, Offred makes the decision to narrate both spaces, providing a glimpse into the conflicting forces at play. Through her narration, Offred effectively snares the reader's attention and challenges any inclination towards moral superiority that may arise from judging her actions.

In contrast to the negative emotions of hatred and disgust that characterize Salvagings, Birth Days foster a contradictory sense of communal rivalry, achievement, and camaraderie. The timing of Birth days is as random as Salvagings. Birthdays are announced with a loud van siren. Such sirens can be alarming depending on the van's color; fortunately, the siren comes from a red one, Birthmobile: an announcement of a Handmaid in labor. While the sirens announcing Birth Days in Gilead are primarily associated with the celebration of life and hope, they also carry the potential to signify tragic events. In an unfortunate circumstance where a Handmaid's labor results in a stillborn or dead baby, the same siren that heralded hope and joy earlier in the day becomes a haunting death announcement. At this rare moment, Offred genuinely expresses her happiness by rushing to get dressed to get in the waiting van outside to take them to the household where the labor takes place (121). As Offred joins her fellow Handmaids inside the van, she finds that they, too, share the same mix of emotions and sentiments brought about by the siren's announcement. The atmosphere within the vehicle is charged with a unique blend of hope, anticipation, and camaraderie, all intermingled with the awareness of the uncertainties that lie ahead. Offred finds tears running down the cheeks of her neighboring Handmaid, contemplating, “[…] tears of what? Envy,

disappointment? But no, she's laughing, she throws her arms around me, I've never seen her before, she hugs me […]. On this day we can do anything we want. I revise that: within limits" (122).

As in other rituals, the Handmaids march into the designated household under the watchful gaze of the machine guns held by the Guardians, the only permitted men to this ritual. Within the confines of Gilead's rigid regime, most labors are conducted under the supervision of the Aunts, who play a prominent role in overseeing reproductive matters. The exclusion of male doctors from participating in this ritual is a deliberate measure to maintain strict gender segregation; Gilead labels their intervention as "[s]hameful" (124). However, as a contingency measure and simultaneously a reflection of contradiction, a van of male doctors is stationed outside the birthing household to intervene in dire circumstances. Moreover, women in Gilead are not allowed any anesthetics. They are meant to suffer and feel pain in labor under the biblical convention as quoted in the novel: "I will greatly multiply thy sorrow and thy conception; in sorrow thou shalt bring forth children" (124).

The ceremonial practice within the household serves as a stark manifestation of class segregation, distinctly delineating the roles of the Wives and the Handmaids. In the luxurious and exclusive sitting room, the Wives indulge in opulence, relishing an abundant buffet and wine while celebrating the presence of the esteemed Wife of Warren. On the other hand, the Handmaids are confined to the delivery room, receiving meager offerings of milk and sandwiches on a simple tray. Within the labor room, a sense of unity and camaraderie is fostered as the Handmaids encircle Janine, who is currently known as Ofwarren, chanting a ritualistic mantra: "Breathe, Breathe, hold, hold. Expel, expel" (133). The chants

create an ethereal membrane of togetherness that envelops the Handmaids, further emphasizing their shared experience in this confining society (133).

The Handmaids are systematically indoctrinated into this ritual to instill a sense of solidarity and empathy with their peers in labor. Offred is influenced by this collective experience, even physically, as she reports slight pains and heaviness in her belly and breasts (134). This communal sensation of false pain is also observed among the other Handmaids, demonstrating the depth of their emotional connection during the ritual. Amidst the moment's intensity, Offred's mind traverses back in time to the night she delivered her own daughter, recalling Luke's reaction to that intense experience when he mentioned being unable to sleep, experiencing a sense of euphoria (136).

Another surreal scene unfolds as the Wife, adorned in a white cotton nightgown, simulates the labor experience, permitting the other Wives to massage her tiny belly. This peculiar display symbolizes the Wife's longing for a semblance of reproductive power, even though she remains distanced from the actual physical labor. In stark contrast, Janine endures the real and excruciating pain of labor in the master room. When the time comes for the baby's delivery, both Janine and the Wife assume positions on the Birth seat, with the Wife situated behind and above Janine, almost like an eccentric chair, with her skinny legs positioned on either side (135). Offred finds this spectacle of the Wife's seating arrangement oddly reminiscent of toilet seat covers, an ironic observation given the situation's intensity (135). Fortunately, Janine successfully delivers a healthy baby, securing her position and preventing her from being declared an Unwoman and sent to the dreaded Colonies. Both sides receive the baby, the Wives and the Handmaids,

with exceptional joy, an affect that, even though it has its different reason, rarely appears as a uniting one and transgresses the class segregation. The Commander's Wife views the baby "as if it's a bouquet of flowers: something she's s won, a tribute" (136). As for the Handmaids, Offred records the moment for the Handmaids, as despite Janine's tears of exhaustion, "[n]evertheless we are jubilant, it's a victory, for all of us. We've done it" (137).

During this intense and emotionally charged moment, Offred grapples with conflicting feelings towards Janine and the Wives, allowing readers to witness the complexity of her experience. She has a profound empathetic connection with Janine, recognizing her "[a]fter all, she's one of us; what did she ever want but to lead her life as agreeably as possible? What else did any of us want? It's the *possible* that's the catch. She's not doing badly, under the circumstances" (127). The inner confession provided by Offred underscores the shared suffering of the transitional generation as they navigate the complexities of surviving in Gilead while evading brutal death. Against this recognition of Janine's survival efforts, Offred can feel the Wives' communal emotions towards the successful mission of one of the Handmaids, whom they contempt deeply. She narrates that "[e]nvy radiates from them, I can smell it, faint wisps of acid, mingled with their perfume" (136). As the eventful day concludes, and the emotional whirlwind subsides, Offred is back in the household, sharing a silent thought with the other Handmaids:

> we're without emotion now, almost without feeling, we might be bundles of red cloth. We ache. Each of us holds in her lap a phantom, a ghost baby. What confronts us, now the excitement's over, is our own failure. Mother, I think. Whenever you may be. Can you hear me? You wanted a women's

> culture. Well, now there is one. It isn't what you meant, but it exists. Be thankful for small mercies. (137)

Amidst emptiness and the irony laced in her silent thoughts, Offred refuses to relinquish her critical and sardonic tone. Through her reflections, she communicates with her mother's memory, acknowledging the existence of the women's culture, albeit not in the way her mother might have intended. Offred addresses her absent mother, representative of the feminism of the 1970s that Gilead seeks to erase. By employing the term "women's culture" in her thoughts, Offred contemplates the irony of its varied applications, encompassing both the defense of women's rights and the dystopian reality of Gilead. Unyielding in her stance, Offred straddles the border between two temporalities, serving as a witness to the dual manifestations of the same term.

2.3 Offred's Daily Minor Crossings and Uncovering the Hidden Scripts of the Subordinates

James C. Scott in *Domination and the Arts of Resistance* (1990) challenges traditional views of resistance and highlights the importance of understanding the everyday strategies employed by subordinated groups. By examining the hidden transcripts and subtle acts of resistance, Scott sheds light on the ways in which individuals and communities contest power and assert their agency in oppressive contexts. Scott defines 'hidden transcript' as

> to characterize discourse that takes place "offstage," beyond direct observation by powerholders. The hidden transcript is thus derivative in the sense that it consists of those offstage speeches, gestures, and practices that confirm, contradict, or inflect what appears in the public transcript. (4-5)

He concludes that

> the hidden transcript is produced for a different audience and under different constraints of power than the public transcript. By assessing the discrepancy between the hidden transcript and the public transcript we may begin to judge the impact of domination on public discourse. (5)

Furthermore, Scott argues that the art of resistance can have long-term implications for political change. While these acts may not immediately topple existing power structures, they contribute to a gradual erosion of authority and can create spaces for alternative social and political arrangements to emerge.

This section delves into the unnoticed crossings within Gilead society, focusing on Offred's daily experiences and survival through her memory workings. It examines Offred's ability to retain memories from her pre-Gilead life while embodying the role of a handmaid in the oppressive reproduction system. Offred's narrative is a lens to explore Gilead's manipulation of the past and its impact on her perspective as the sole narrator. Through her recollections and reflections, Offred provides insights into the covert operations within Gilead, employing a circular narrative structure to recount her life before and during the regime's establishment. Her daily acts of remembrance become a means of resistance against Gilead's attempt to rewrite history and shape her identity.

2.3.1 Surviving through the Workings of Memory

Offred's assignment as a Handmaid within the reproduction system of Gilead does not diminish her capacity to retain memories of her pre-Gilead existence. This aspect of her character serves to illustrate the influence of Gilead's manipulation of the past on Offred's recollections, thus shaping her perspective

as the sole narrator. Offred recounts her life both during and prior to the establishment of Gilead, drawing primarily from her personal experiences rather than providing a comprehensive account of the public realm's political and social dynamics. By regularly resorting to her memories, Offred grapples with, entangles with, and resists the dystopian present she finds herself in. She retrieves fragments of the past from her memory to reflect upon and comment on her daily life in Gilead. This act of daily remembrance becomes a means of preserving memories that Gilead's oppressive regime seeks to rewrite in accordance with its official historical narrative. Through this deliberate crossing between two temporals, "[…] Offred herself tells two stories which reinscribe and comment on each other: the story of Gilead and the story of America" (Stein 276). Offred undergoes a journey across time from America to Gilead, socially criticizing the two societies, disowning her oblivious behavior in America, and claiming enlightenment in Gilead. Through this active act of remembrance, Offred trains herself to keep her sanity; "[s]anity is a valuable possession; I hoard it like people once hoarded money. I save it, so I will have enough, when the time comes" (Atwood 119). This intentional preservation of sanity through remembrance serves as another form of resistance for Offred. Without this act of remembrance and preserving her sanity, she risks succumbing to madness and emptiness.

Offred's recollections span different stages of her life, capturing her experiences as a child with a feminist mother, as an adult, and as a mother herself, through her relationships with her husband, Luke, her best friend, Moira, and her six-year-old daughter. Furthermore, Offred's narration sheds light on the transformations within familial structures following Gilead's rise to power as she assumes a new role as a Handmaid. By narrating her experiences at different points in time,

Offred provides valuable insights into how her various positions within the family and society shape her perspective. This personal narrative highlights the significance of individual stories, particularly those of marginalized individuals, thereby complicating the act of narrating history, as evidenced in the book's final chapter, "Historical Notes" (see 2.5).

During moments of despair, typically occurring at night within the confines of her bedroom, she perceives herself as a "refugee of the past" and behaves as one who revisits and reenacts the customs and habits she has left behind or been forced to abandon (Atwood 239). Every night, she crosses back to her past, narrating her story to the readers and herself, ensuring that she never forgets and alleviates the long hours of the night. Simultaneously, along with the state of remembrance, she is in a constant state of waiting. Waiting long hours in her room: “Waiting is also a place: it is wherever you wait. For me, it’s this room” (240). Within the confines of the bedroom, especially at night, Offred consciously and selectively recalls her memories to alleviate her solitude. In the state of waiting, she describes herself as “I am a blank, here, between parentheses. Between other people” (240). Despite the mental and physical entrapment, she endures each night. She manages to resurrect her memories, recounting and sharing her insights. The bedroom emerges as a space where the negotiation of the past assumes a distinct role. The bedroom serves as a space for exploring the past and a physical realm that counters the monotony of long nights. Offred meticulously examines the furnished room, focusing on each detail with great precision, in stark contrast to her "careless" attitude toward hotel rooms in earlier times. This stark difference underscores the profound challenges of existing within a dystopian reality.

Offred narrates in extensive detail her experiences with the mundane tasks of her daily life and how they trigger her memories. During one of her trips to the market, she reflects on her past attitude before the time of Gilead, contemplating her nonchalant approach to life, acknowledging that “[she takes] too much for granted; [she trusts] fate, back then” (37). For instance, she reminisces about her indifference towards plastic bags, which were commonplace at the time. Luke used to urge her to discard unused bags to prevent their daughter from playing with them and potentially choking. This memory resurfaces when Offred, on her way to the market, notices the ban on plastic bags due to environmental concerns. This prohibition in Gileadean society triggers Offred's regretful recollection.

Furthermore, Offred is intentionally inclined to romanticize the past during challenging times. She justifies this approach by stating that when people reflect on the past, they tend to remember the beautiful aspects and prefer to believe it was indeed that way (40). Filtering out undesirable and bothersome memories enables Offred and her peers to survive their present circumstances. While walking past the university dormitories and observing the architectural features and old gravestones in the churchyard, Offred associates the white, gold, and blue painted turrets with fairy tales. She notes that the angel statues from earlier centuries within the graveyard have managed to escape Gilead's misuse. The buildings hold no significance for the Gileadean authorities, but for Offred, their preservation suggests the existence of another past. Gilead imposes and propagates its ideological systems through strict rules and discipline, reshaping the urban and historical landscape to enforce its ideology. For instance, the University’s outer wall in the Gileadean context is termed ‘the Wall’ on which dead

bodies are hanged for displaying punishment; the former football stadium is now for Men's Salvagings. Within this oppressive environment, Offred, as a subaltern figure with limited life options, seizes upon any remnants of the past, whether distant or recent, infusing them with beauty and romanticism. Her narration extends beyond the confines of Gilead's dystopian landscape, constituting a parallel realm where she hoards memories and extracts meaning from the past. Irrespective of the value or accuracy of the associated meanings, Offred's narrative establishes a small private space within a larger authoritarian context, materializing her past.

Offred's deliberate and conscious mental effort to preserve representations of the past within the surrounding landscape secures her survival. However, there are instances when the past resurfaces as an assault; she seeks to shield herself from it. In these instances, the past becomes synonymous with nostalgia, manifesting as "attacks" that wash over her like waves (62). These attacks evoke yearnings for an unattainable life, accentuating her loss and sorrow under the Gilead regime. Sensory stimuli often trigger this nostalgic version of the past. For instance, the smell of freshly baked bread in the household kitchen instantly summons memories of her previous life, prompting her to declare, "it smells of me, in former times when I was a mother" (57). The smell of yeast triggers her previous life of enjoying private property and reminds her of her lost motherhood. Offred identifies this memory of the past as "a treacherous smell, and I know I must shut it out" (57). Such recollections awaken anguish and helplessness, undermining her attempts at survival. In another incident, while attending the arranged weddings of a group of young couples (Prayvaganzas) who were too young when Gilead took over, she reflects on their lives if they were

still US citizens. She questions if they are "old enough to remember anything of the time before, playing baseball, in jeans and sneakers, riding their bicycles[.] Reading books, all by themselves […]" (231). By reminiscing about the everyday activities and freedoms that were once part of a whole generation, Offred not only mourns her own lost past but also recognizes the collective loss of shared experiences and the erasure of personal narratives. In this way, Offred's contemplation critiques Gilead's attempts to suppress and manipulate her generation's memories and identities, who witness the transformation.

2.3.2 Revealing the Hidden Scripts of the Subordinates

The character of Offred has long been debated between complacency and heroism, in a manner that reveals a dichotomous relationship between what is considered resistance and what is perceived as complacency. For instance, Carol Ann Howells believes that Offred's insistence on storytelling is her only tool for both survival and resistance; “[s]torytelling is this woman’s only possible gesture of resistance to imprisonment in silence, just as it becomes the primary means for her psychological survival” (127). Also, Carol L. Beran shares the same view that “Offred’s power is her language” (71). Michele Lacombe points out that Offred’s irony is her power. At the same time, David S. Hogette highlights that Offred’s act of resistance is in the regular recollection of her personal history before Gilead. As for Erika Gottlieb, she denies the possibility of resistance, “[s]ince the dystopian regime denies its subjects’ free will, the central character cannot be made responsible for his or her ultimate failure or defeat in the repressive system that overpowers individuals” (109). A fixation on the final tangible result judges this rigid border between resistance and submission. Offred

also shares this rigid viewpoint, as shown in her perception of her rebellious friend, Moira. She approaches her friend with the same radical definition of resistance: “I don’t want her to be like me. Give in, go along, save her skin. That is what it comes down to. I want gallantry from her, swashbuckling, heroism, single-handed combat. Something I lack.” (261) After their brief encounter in Jezebel’s, Offred narrates an alternative scenario that fits her portrayal of Moira:

> Here is what I’d like to tell. I’d like to tell a story about how Moira escaped, for good this time. Or if you couldn’t tell that, I’d like to say she blew up Jezebel’s, with fifty Commanders inside it. I’d like her to end with something daring and spectacular, some outrage, something that would befit her. But as far as I know that didn’t happen. I don’t know how she ended, or even if she did, because I never saw her again. (262)

This scenario displays the idealized portrayal of Moira in Offred’s eyes as an antithesis of Offred’s portrayal of herself as “the wimp, […] but with affection” (234). The critics above adopt this romanticized version of resistance under a tyrannical regime—an either/or version. On the other side, Offred points out the limitedness of the observer in “I don't know how she ended” (262). Despite her romanticism, she acknowledges her ignorance due to the narrow angle of narration that she possesses without condemnation.

To scrutinize Offred’s resistance acts in the contact zones she enters, I refer to Bourdieu’s term of capital in the social space. Bourdieu suggested that “women are not typically capital-accumulating subjects. Rather they are ‘capital bearing objects’ whose value accrues to the primary group to which they belong (e.g. her husband, the family)” (qtd. in Thorpe 493). Although Gilead pushes women to the invisible spaces of society, they still form the core of society through their potential

power of fertility. As a cultural capital, femininity is “the discursive position available through gender relations that women are encouraged to inhabit and use. Its use will be informed by the network of social positions of class, gender, sexuality, region, age, and race, which ensure that it will be taken up (and resisted) in different ways” (Skeggs 10). Indeed, the Gileadean regime converts the gender capital of women to their interest by re-producing their bodies into docile, corporealized bodies. However, even with the risk of harsh punishments and brutal deaths, Offred and her fellows know the power of their femininity. They use their femininity as a tactic, not a strategy, as in Michel de Certeau’s terminology. In *The Practice of Everyday Life,* de Certeau defines strategy as the “calculus of force-relationships” to the institution and, at the same time, “can be isolated from ‘an environment’” (xix). Whereas a tactic is “a calculus which cannot count on a “proper” (a spatial or institutional localization), nor thus on the borderline distinguishing the other as a visible totality” (De Certeau xix). According to De Certeau’s distinction, Beverley Skeggs elaborates that “tactics constantly manipulate events to turn them into opportunities; tactical options have more to do with constraints than possibilities. They are determined by the absence of power just as strategy is organized by the postulation of power” (10). De Certeau gives an example of everyday tactics such as “talking, reading, moving about, shopping, cooking”; such activities function as

> ways of operating: victories of the “weak” over the “strong” (whether the strength be that of powerful people or the violence of things or of imposed order, etc.), clever tricks, knowing how to get away with things, “hunter’s cunning,” maneuvers, polymorphic simulations, joyful discoveries, poetic as well as warlike. (xix)

Before the elites facilitate major border crossings, Offred realizes the gender capital she accumulates in her red-covered body. In her regular passing through a checkpoint surveilled by young-aged Guardians, she narrates the tension she feels taking place between her, the rare, covered body, and one of the young Guardians, the deprived. She raises her head a little more on purpose to let the curious young Guardian see a glimpse of her. As an untouchable, Offred knows she is observed closely by the Guardians, who are actually "touch[ing] with their eyes" (Atwood 32). Offred intentionally "move[s] [her] hips a little, feeling the full red skirt sway around [her]" (32). She knows that those boys have the power to kill her with their guns if they doubt her suspicious moves, but she also knows their weak points. She knows they are deprived of intimacy until they prove to be good Gileadean citizens, and then are granted and allowed a wife. In this deprivation phase, Offred knows the value of her body in public spaces despite its rarity and structured mobility. This unnoticed exercise gives her a fleeting enjoyment without the rooted feeling of shame that usually accompanies her. Despite the possibility of practicing this unobserved act of power in the brief incidents of the checkpoints, she is also aware of the extent of its influence, "the power of a dog bone, passive but there" (32). This act of passive power will follow those guards in their desolate nights, and they "will suffer […] in their regimented beds. They have no outlets now except themselves, and that's a sacrilege. There are no more magazines, no more films, no more substitutes; only me and shadow" (32). In other ways, Offred's power, indeed, lies not in her corporealized body but in the shadow of a once lived-body.

Offred's awareness of the power of her body is manifested later after her days in the Rachel and Leah Center are over, where she is well-trained as an obedient

Handmaid for Gilead and slightly and painstakingly defiant for herself. She knows that the power of her body stems from its rarity and unavailability. In this restricted, segregated community, where sex outside marriage is prohibited, marriage is not available for everyone according to their ranks in the social hierarchy, and young men are also suppressed and deprived of normal sexual life. Through this minor act, Offred reassures herself that another possibility exists beyond her reality. The power of "only me and my shadow" marks aside discourse that parallels Gilead's discourse of control.

In other words, Offred's display of her power at the checkout point is not a momentary reaction. On the contrary, it reveals the meticulous mental power she has grown since her capture in the Red Center. Such mental power signifies her daily suffering to survive two lives, two possibilities. She lives with the mentality of a survivor who has the possibility to survive in this dystopia by abiding by its painful rules, and, at the same time, she keeps a mentality of the possibility of escaping from this dystopia and crossing the borders to Canada. Subsequently, Offred prepares herself for both scenarios, and both scenarios support each other. The scene of the checkpoint presents the collision between both scenarios of survival, where she is obedient but not entirely because of this "small defiance of rule, so small as to be undetectable, but such moments are the rewards I hold out for myself, like the candy I hoarded, as a child, at the back of a drawer. Such moments are possibilities, tiny peepholes" (31).

2.4 Major Crossings, New Contact Zones, and Revelation of the Hidden Scripts of the Elite: Introduction

Offred finds that minor transgressions of borders and breaking the rules occur in the Commander's household. Offred sees Serena Joy, the Commander's Wife, smoking cigarettes—a commodity prohibited by Gilead's laws. This minor transgression of the law reveals an assumption that a secret market and chain of suppliers will allow those cigarettes through Gilead's borders to the Commander's house. The existence of the black market displays Gilead and its citizens as being inhabitants of a large prison. And like inmates of prisons, they break the rules such as "smuggling of food and drugs, looking for partners, gossiping and prostitution" (Dirsuweit 76). All those assumptions point to hidden contact zones that exist in Gilead. In other words, there are individuals every day who cross borders and break the rules, and, most importantly, they prove that the unbreachable rules of Gilead are to be broken or at least undermined.

The main tabooed borders Offred crosses are the doors of the Commander's study room, the Jezebel, and Nick's room. New contact zones are created in those spaces, exposing the Gilead system and destabilizing its dystopian power hierarchy. Those spaces are transformed into contact zones through Offred's body. However, those crossings would not have been possible if not for the Commander and Serena's dauntless act of breaking the rigid rules of Gilead. Initially, both the Commander and his Wife use Offred's silent, docile body as a field to break the rules of Gilead. Offred's body in those incidents of crossings mirrors the weariness of the elite of the rigid regime that they themselves support and stand behind. In those encounters, the role of Offred's seemingly silent,

docile body is important and revealing. The Commander and Serena Joy project their corporeal weakness onto Offred's body and use hers to break the rules that, if discovered, will lead to capital punishment. In those zones, the Commander and Serena Joy expose themselves against Offred as human beings with unfulfilled needs denied by the fundamentalist regime. Ironically, they are the guardians of this system, but they overcome its shortcomings by risking the myth of its impenetrability. Under the panoptic gaze of Gilead, Offred's body "[…] bears the imprint of the other; it has become body-for others, i.e., object, thing, naked body. The other's gaze reifies or "corporealizes" the lived-body." (Fuchs 226)

Offred's body exposes the fragility of the elites' psyche and the inevitability of their disobedience that will eventually undermine the regime that supports their position in the hierarchy. How they allow the rules to be broken, they show those of the less powerful, like Offred, a crack in the system through which she and her likes can sneak. In other words, the elites have facilitated breaking the rules, and, likely, the fall of Gilead will follow. In their act, one can see the suffering that the top hierarchy endures under the rigid rules and rituals of micro-controlling social life in Gilead. On the other side, Offred is allowed in these new contact zones to see the cracks in what sounds like an impenetrable system, giving her the belief that there could be an exit from this dystopia. Offred explores those zones' new terrains not only in the life of the top hierarchy of the Gileadean society but also for herself. In those contact zones, Offred has re-discovered herself and re-created herself as well. In this section, I analyze those encounters, highlighting the change in Offred's inner world.

However, in this section, I trace how the elite of Gilead, represented by Commander Fred and Serena Joy, reveal their hidden agendas and their influence on Offred's reconstruction and the narration of her story, as well as the increase of hope for escape from this dystopia. "[…] [i]t is clear that the frontier between the public and the hidden transcripts is a zone of constant struggle between dominant and subordinates—not a solid wall. The capacity of dominant groups to prevail—though never totally—in defining and constituting what counts as the public transcript and as offstage is […] no small measure of their power. The unremitting struggle over such boundaries is perhaps the most vital arena for ordinary conflict, for everyday forms of class struggle." (14)

2.4.1 "Taboo Dissolved"[4]: Crossing into the Commander's Study Room as the First Contact Zone

Offred gets the message from Nick, the household's Guardian that the Commander wants her in his study room. The message and its content are illegal trespasses. Offred is in a difficult situation; she has no free will to approve or reject the offer. She knows that by approving, she is exposing herself to the rage of Serena Joy, who has the power to reclassify her as an 'Unwoman' and be sent to the nuclear Colonies. At the same time, she does not own the right to refuse an order from the Commander, even if it is illegal. However, she has no options other than taking risks and accepting the invitation—or, in other words, obeying the order. Despite the limited choices, Offred can see the power loophole in the situation. Asking her to come to his room is a call for a want, which is a sign of weakness; "[i]t's like a small crack in a wall, before now impenetrable" (Atwood

[4] "Behind this particular door, taboo dissolved" (165).

146). In return, she knows that she should give away the looks of her eagerness. She realizes that in this room, things will be bargained and exchanged. Moreover, with her little power, she needs to stay put and collected to stand for her end of the enigmatic bargain.

As Offred prefers to call it, this arrangement between the Commander and her becomes frequent, three or four times a week. Offred, in this contact zone, starts to discover new sides of the power elite. For the first time, she realizes that despite his position as the Commander, he does not know much about the lives of her and her fellow maids. He does not know the extent of the strict lives they lead. He is puzzled by her request to bring her a hand lotion because their skins get dry. She is upset when he laughs at their use of butter instead of lotion. Again, he is surprised by her insistence to keep the lotion in the study room, as he shows his ignorance of the regular inspection of the Handmaids in search for razor blades (to prevent them from killing themselves or attacking the people in the household), or books, both are equally seen as dangerous items.

The door of the Commander's study room stands as a separation between two eras: The dystopic present and the old everyday life. Behind the doors are loads of books, pens, and magazines from the pre-Gilead era. In the incident where the Commander offers Offred an issue from *Vogue,* the *normal* past and the *dystopian* present collide. Offred has never taken those magazines seriously, sheets filled with words and images that promise false 'immortality' for women to fill the empty time of waiting at the dentist's or hotel rooms (165). Now, in the Gilead era, she is eager to browse them as a reminder of the past days.

Nonetheless, she feels ‘evil’ according to Gilead’s timing. A feeling that shows Offred has internalized Aunt Lydia’s teaching to the extent that she senses the paradox of the situation.

Even the language is reminiscent of old times, when greetings were as simple as “hello.” Offred is bewildered by the Commander’s spontaneity, which makes his greeting “[u]nder the circumstances […] seems out of place, comical even, a flip backward in time, a stunt” (147). She realizes she is here not to be touched but to play a game of Scrabble. However, she notices that he asks her to play with an “embarrassed *sheepish*” eye (148). While playing board games such as Scrabble, Offred reacquaints herself with the language and customs of her past life. She describes trying to pronounce the words as “[her] tongue felt thick with the effort of spelling. It was like using a language [she] had once known but has nearly forgotten…” (164).

Within the confines of her room, Offred is granted the opportunity to inquire about the underlying logic and motivations behind Gilead, aside from her official re-education sessions at the Leah and Rachel Center. During one of these conversations, the Commander explains to Offred the purpose of the Prayvaganza weddings, shedding light on Gilead's objectives and justifications. According to the Commander, these arranged marriages serve as a means to eradicate "human misery" within Gilead's society (231). Expanding on his explanation, the Commander further asserts that the arrangement of marriages ensures desired outcomes and spares young individuals from the humiliation and difficulties they faced in the past. He prompts Offred to recall the challenges of the pre-Gilead era:

> Think of the trouble they had before. Don't you remember the single bars, the indignity of high-school blind dates? The meat market. Don't you remember the terrible gap between the ones who could get a man easily and those who couldn't? some of them were desperate, they starved themselves thin or pumped their breasts full of silicone, had their noses cut off (231).

By highlighting the societal issues of the pre-Gilead era, the Commander implies that Gilead's regime aims to address these problems and create a more controlled and regulated system. However, his proposed solution fails to address the underlying causes of the issue. Instead of tackling the root of the problem, the Commander and those in power within Gilead opt for a simplistic approach of completely overlooking the complexity of human relationships and individual agency. These conversations between Offred and the Commander serve as moments of revelation, deepening Offred's understanding of Gilead's reality's bleak and calculated nature. They allow her to recognize that there is no significance in her own suffering and memories within this oppressive regime.

Nonetheless, Offred can still see the comedic element in the situation. However, she maintains her calmness and does not show her need to laugh. She is amazed that this board game, once used by senior people, is now used to break the rules in Gilead. A board game that used to make Offred grow bored when she was thirteen, now only touching the counters, she feels 'freedom,' 'luxury,' and 'candies' (148). The session ends with the Commander asking her to "go home" and give him a kiss that she means to give, while Offred, all that she fantasizes about is slipping a lever into his rips and feeling the pouring 'hot' 'sexual' blood of his (150). Offred analyzes the Commander's gestures and relates them to the old times of how men approached women: She is able to categorize his smile as

a “friendly” one, not “sinister or predatory”; “as I’m a kitten in a window […], [o]ne he’s looking at but doesn’t intend to buy” (148). Her first unexpected encounter with the Commander, as much as it allows Offred to view her past life briefly, leaves her with an overwhelming mixture of bewilderment and a desire to cry. At least, the cultural codes in the pre-Gilead time have not been forgotten.

2.4.2 Jezebel as a Second Contact Zone: The Hidden Scripts of the Commanders

In this section, major border crossings and law-breaking unearth hidden scripts from the Elites of Gilead and their subordinates. The Commander takes Offred on a night adventure that demands him to reveal to her the existence of a nightclub in Gilead named Jezebel. Jezebel is meant for the Commanders, never for the Wives or the Handmaids. The Jezebel is evidence of the hypocrisy that the Gilead governing elite endorses. Offred’s entry to Jezebel transforms it into a contact zone, where power relations are negotiated as classified information is exposed about the inside and outside the borders of Gilead. There, Offred is confronted with the secret world of the Commanders, and she meets her dear friend, Moira. Besides the emotional support Offred gets from meeting her close friend, a familiar face from the fading past, she gets to know Moira’s failed escape journey, revealing the existence of resistance networks. Like visible Gilead, clandestine Jezebel is also gender hierarchized. The Commanders and the foreign guests, all males, are at the top of the hierarchy, while women at its base are surveilled by older women behaving as Aunts.

2.4.2.1 The Exposure of the Elite Men

Following their routine gatherings in the Commander's study, he takes a momentous stride with Offred, offering her another major border to be traversed under his custody. He takes Offred to a secret nightclub for the elite men called Jezebel, where Wives are strictly forbidden (244). The knowledge of its existence among the Wives remains ambiguous. The decision to bring Offred, a Handmaid, to such a venue exposes him to danger, but the risk appears insignificant compared to the jeopardy faced by Offred herself. Despite having no agency to reject the invitation, she willingly embraces this precarious opportunity as she craves “anything that breaks the monotony, subverts the perceived respectable order of things” (243).

For this night adventure, Offred will, for the first time, leave the household at night and experience a different role. She steps out from the predictability and rigidity of the Gileadean order to the adventure of the chaos and the unknown, and for this, she goes through an appearance makeover. The Commander asks her to dress up in an attire that is “so glittering and theatrical, and that’s what it must be, an old costume, or something from a vanished nightclub act” (242). Such clothing, to her surprise, is thought to have disappeared. At the beginning of the Gilead era, there has been a gathering

> in New York […] called the Manhattan Cleanup. There were bonfires in Times Square, crowds chanting them […] clean-cut stony-faced young men tossing things into the flames, armfuls of silk and nylon and fake fur […] bikini underpants, see-through brassieres with pink satin hearts sewn on to cover the nipples. And the manufacturers and importers and

> salesmen down on their knees, repenting in public […] on the heads, SHAME printed on them in red. (242)

Again, she realizes that, like old magazines and cigarettes, there is also a black market for such garments. To get out of the house and through the checkpoint, she needs to be covered in a blue coat that belongs to the Wives' uniform. Approaching the last checkpoint, she is asked to be entirely invisible; the Commander asks her to get down in the back seat, as it is a Wives-free zone (244). When she reaches Jezebel's, she has to leave the blue cloak, a symbol for Wives, with Nick. She is given an elastic band with a purple tag on her wrist and asked to tell whoever will ask her inside that she is "an evening rental" (245). For the first time, she feels air on her bare skin. On this unique evening, she is without white wings that restrict her sight field; she "can stare, here, look around […] [Her] head, shorn of them, feels curiously light; as if a weight has been from it, or substance" (246).

Upon entering the Jezebel, Offred is confronted with a vivid tableau from the pre-Gilead era, evoking a sense of nostalgia and contrast: "Women are sitting, lounging, strolling, leaning against one another. There are men mingled with them, […] The women, on the other hand, are tropical; they are dressed in all kinds of bright festive gear" (246). The scene depicts women engaging in relaxed and carefree activities, exhibiting an air of leisure and camaraderie. The presence of men and women together signifies a departure from the strictly segregated and controlled gender dynamics enforced by Gilead. Notably, the women's festive attire evokes a tropical ambiance that starkly contrasts the regime's austere and subdued aesthetics. Some of those women are sex workers from the pre-Gileadean time, and the rest are professional women from the past: sociologists,

lawyers, and business executives have been repurposed and relegated to the clandestine world of Jezebel (249). These women serve a unique function, providing the male members of the elite with intellectual stimulation and companionship through engaging conversations, as they “can have quite a good conversation with [them] if all you feel is talking. They prefer it here” (250). Nonetheless, the bodies of these women are subjected to discriminatory practices, highlighting the ongoing oppressive scrutiny imposed upon women's bodies and serving as a mechanism of control and discipline. Those women have to watch their weight; if they gain ten pounds, they are kept in Solitary till they drop the extra pounds (250).

Conversely, men attending Jezebel are not only the Commanders of Gilead. Offred observes Japanese and Arab men among them, representing business and diplomatic delegates affiliated with Gilead. This convergence and complacency of international actors within the confines of Jezebel emphasize the complex and interconnected nature of power dynamics operating within and outside the regime. Moreover, Offred's emotional response to the scene is multifaceted and bewildering; “[a]t first glance there’s a cheerfulness to this scene. It’s like a masquerade party; they [the women] are like oversized children” (247). However, her contemplation deepens, and she interrogates the authenticity of joy within this fabricated mosaic of the past: “[I]s there joy in this? There could be, but have they chosen it? You can’t tell by looking” (247). In this disorienting encounter, the Commander issues a cautionary reminder to Offred, urging her to maintain a facade of naturalness to avoid arousing suspicion: “You’ll give yourself away, just act *natural*” (my emphasis 247). The word "natural" takes

on a dual temporal significance, blurring the boundaries between the present and the past, intensifying Offred's confusion.

Despite Offred's lack of agency in being brought to the hotel-like nightclub, the risk she takes by venturing outside the confines of her household is deemed worthwhile. This night presents her with a newfound sense of freedom, which she has been deprived of since her capture and confinement at the Leah and Rachel Center. Gradually, Offred begins to uncover the existence of hidden scripts within the Gileadean society, particularly among the elite who have enforced a strictly gender-segregated social order. Paradoxically, this same elite has established Jezebel as their clandestine domain—a secret script of the privileged men in Gilead. Offred comments on the discordant scene eloquently, saying, "I try to remember if the past was exactly like this. I'm not sure, now. I know it contained these things, but somehow the mix is different. A movie about the past is not the same as the past" (247). In this way, the scene at Jezebel becomes a simulation, an interpretation of the masculine fantasy of how women behaved and dressed during the pre-Gilead era. It reduces the nuances of that time and amplifies specific elements to suit the elite's idealized image.

This carefully curated depiction of the interaction between men and women in Jezebel establishes a framework wherein men assume positions of power and women become facilitators of entertainment and information. The Commander emphasizes women's unique role within this context, noting that men often disclose sensitive information to women that they would not reveal to their male counterparts. He justifies this arrangement as "[i]t simulates trade. It's a good place to meet people. You can hardly do business without it. […] You can

overhear things too; information. A man will sometimes tell a woman things he wouldn't tell another man" (249). Thus, Jezebel serves as a place of leisure and a site where covert information exchanges occur.

2.4.2.1.1 Inside the Hotel Room

The night at Jezebel's with the Commander unfolds as he takes Offred to one of the hotel rooms. Like old days, he picks up the keys from the reception and takes the elevator with her to their room. For a couple of hours, the Commander wants to spend time with Offred, not as the Wife-witnessed Handmaid he mates once every month in the Ceremony, but like a mistress from the pre-Gilead time. This transformation entails a change in the power hierarchy; it takes a sense of freedom to be allowed and felt. Their moment in the hotel room is the practical answer to the absence of love.

In her frequent visits to his study room, the Commander casually asks her: "What did we overlook?" (231) Despite the banality of the question that reflects ignorance, Offred answers him directly: "Love" (231). With vanity, he dismisses the futility of this emotion from a position of authority, saying, "I've read the magazines, that's what they were pushing [in the pre-Gilead time], wasn't it? But look at the stats, my dear. Was it really worth it, *falling in love*? Arranged marriages have always worked out just as well, if not better" (232). Nevertheless, he thinks that sneaking her out of the house, bringing her to Jezebel's, letting her wear make-up and put on garments from the old times, and allowing her cigarettes and gin can create a one-night of falling in love. He believes that by setting up a distortion of the old setup, one can cross back to the simple pleasures of the past.

Offred also knows she is on a mission to transform from a Handmaid to a mistress within a few hours. She goes to the bathroom for a private moment with herself—a moment "[i]n a strange way I feel comforted, at home. There is something reassuring about the toilets. Bodily functions at least remain democratic" (263). The toilet becomes a competent temporal parallel world to Gilead. First, she checks the little individually wrapped soaps and the blank towels as a reminder of the old times with Luke in the same hotel. The presence of such objects revives memories of the love that once existed between her husband from the pre-Gilead era and her former self. Getting out to the waiting Commander, she realizes the difficulty of her mission. In his presence, she can only be a Handmaid. Every part of her body he touches only activates her role as a handmaid, as "his fingers encircling the ankle, briefly, like a bracelet, where the tattoo is, a Braille he can read, a cattle-brand. It means ownership" (266). Offred's consciousness of her closed-off body induces a contradictory feeling of guilt about her stiffness:

> The trouble is that I can't be, with him, any different from the way I usually am with him. Usually, I'm inert. Surely there must be something here for us, other than this futility and bathos. Fake it, I scream at myself inside my head. You must remember how. Let's get this over with or you'll be here all night. Bestir yourself. Move your flesh around, breathe audibly. It's the least you do. (267)

In this pivotal moment of the narrative, Offred finds herself on the verge of a profoundly intimate encounter with the Commander, an event that holds the potential to redefine the dynamics of their relationship. It marks the first instance where she will witness him devoid of his uniform: "he looks smaller, older, like something being dried" (267). Stripped of this emblematic attire, the Commander's physical appearance undergoes a perceptible transformation in

Offred's eyes. No longer enveloped by the trappings of his position, he appears diminished, his stature somewhat diminished, and his countenance imbued with the weight of age and vulnerability. Contrary to the Commander's naivety, who may perceive this clandestine encounter as a means of temporarily liberating Offred from the restrictive confines of her role, she, in turn, seizes the opportunity to ascertain him beyond the confines of his uniformed persona. In this exchange, power dynamics subtly shift as Offred becomes aware of his vulnerabilities while he perhaps remains blinded to the profound implications of this unveiling.

2.4.2.2 The Underground Networks:

On that fateful night, Offred's path intertwines with that of her defiant and steadfast best friend, Moira. A clandestine encounter unfolds in the privacy of a bathroom, providing a brief respite from the oppressive shackles of Gilead's slavery system. Within this intimate space, both women divulge their positions within the intricacies of Gilead's web. Moira's demeanor exudes a keen awareness of the elusive and concealed spaces occupied by the Elite and the resistance factions within Gilead. She not only acknowledges the existence of the underground world of Gilead but also embodies its spirit of defiance. She shares with Offred the disturbing tendencies of the Commanders, who derive perverse pleasure from bringing their Handmaids to Jezebel: “[t]hey get a kick out of it. It’s like screwing on the altar or something: your gang are supposed to be such chaste vessels. They like to see all of you painted up. Just another crummy power trip” (255). As Moira skillfully observes, this tendency is a twisted power trip for the Commanders, who revel in the subversion of societal norms they established.

Moira's daring escape from the Center grants her insight into a vast underground network of resistance groups and Gilead spies. She provides a glimpse into the arduous journey of those striving to help U.S. citizens escape to Canada. Moira's own escape attempt, spanning nine months, involves a perilous odyssey from one safe house to another, navigating the elaborate web of these resistance networks. Tragically, her efforts are thwarted just as she approaches the border before boarding the boat that takes her through the borders between the USA and Canada a place teeming with the ever-watchful Eyes of Gilead.

Ultimately captured, Moira endures a form of torture “[does not] leave any marks” (260) yet apparently inflicts profound wounds on her spirit. Later, as infertile and young, she is given the choice to go to the Colonies or work for Jezebel. She vindicates her decision, saying “[…] nobody but a nun would pick the Colonies. I mean, I’m not a martyr. I’d already had my tubes tied, years ago, so I didn’t even need the operation. Nobody in here with viable ovaries either, you can see what kind of problems it would cause” (261). Despite her ordeal, she remains resilient and resolute, refusing to succumb to martyrdom or victimhood. Given a choice between the brutal labor camps of the Colonies and serving as a sex worker in Jezebel's, Moira seizes control of her destiny. As an infertile woman, she opts for the latter, asserting her agency and pragmatism, knowing that viable ovaries are scarce in her new reality. Moira's journey serves as a poignant reflection of the dual struggle waged on the outer borders of Gilead, formerly the USA. Here, two opposing forces collide: those scheming escape plans for Americans seeking freedom before they become Gileadeans and the oppressive regime's relentless efforts to enforce compliance and deny escape. Through Moira's narrative, Offred

is certain now and bears witness that the spirit of resistance is not yet defeated and there is a possibility for her own escape.

2.4.3 Nick’s Room as a Third Contact Zone: Wives’ Hidden Scripts Revealed

Simultaneously with the Commander's perilous transgression of Gilead's laws, which poses a significant risk to both him and Offred, Serena Joy devises her own plan to defy the regime. Overwhelmed by feelings of boredom and discontentment within the confines of her expected role as a Wife, Serena Joy seeks an avenue for rebellion by conspiring with Offred against the Commander. The stark contrast between her former status as a renowned television anchor in the pre-Gileadean era and her present state fuels a deep conflict within Serena, according to Offred’s observation, instilling in her the audacity to challenge the fundamental rules of Gilead's system.

At her advanced age, Serena finds herself unable to conceive and bear children, relegating her to a monotonous existence spent knitting and attending the Birth Days of other Wives. In this context, a child is not only a valuable national resource for a society plagued by infertility but also holds personal significance for Serena, offering the hope to quash the long, monotonous hours of waiting and boredom. However, her desire to have a child may not solely stem from her age-related limitations; it could also arise from her husband's infertility, contradicting Gilead's doctrine, which places the blame solely on women for any reproductive issues. Being one of the female founders of the regime of Gilead, Serena knows well the fraud in this belief, besides her knowledge of her husband’s condition.

In practice, the elite members of Gilead's society understand that the imposed beliefs surrounding fertility are nothing more than a mechanism of control designed to regulate women's bodies and suppress any potential rebellion. In response, privileged women in positions of power exploit their assigned Handmaids to fulfill their own interests, coercing them to engage in sexual encounters with the doctors they frequent or with the household Guardians. Serena Joy specifically chooses to force Offred to mate with Nick, a Guardian. Despite Serena's own desperation, she maintains leverage over Offred by reminding her of the limited time she has to conceive. Furthermore, Serena motivates Offred for this mission by promising to procure a photograph of her daughter—an enticement that also carries risks for Serena. If Offred is discovered in Nick's room, she will face severe consequences, while Serena remains unharmed. Once again, Offred finds herself reduced to a vessel—a hollow body with a functioning uterus—used as a means to cross boundaries and defy established rules. Offred appears to have exhausted all her options in this precarious situation, leaving her utterly powerless.

2.4.3.1 Under the Gaze of Shame

Offred's encounter with Nick in his room triggers a profound sense of confusion within her. Even before their planned meeting, Offred experiences a heightened sense of self-consciousness and deep shame in his presence. She internalizes the all-encompassing gaze of Gilead, evaluating herself through its judgmental ideological lens. In the presence of others, Offred's body oscillates between being unnoticed and conspicuous, performing her assigned role automatically or resisting it, between being a subject or an object, and between being lived or

being had. This is how Fuchs illustrates the effect of shame on the body, as it is "the polarity of being unnoticed or conspicuous of automatic performance or interfering resistance, of being subject or object, being lived or being had" (225). This constant shifting highlights how deeply the lens of Gilead's ideology is internalized in Offred's consciousness and redirected against her own self.

Interestingly, Offred adopts both the male gaze from the pre-Gilead era and the gaze that Gilead imposes upon women. On their way to Jezebel's, she notices Nick observing her through the glass and wonders if his gaze carries a sense of contempt or indifference. To understand herself and her actions through his eyes, she contemplates whether "[…] he know[s] what I've got on under this cloak, did he procure it? And if so, does this make him angry or lustful or envious or anything at all? We do have something in common: both of us are supposed to be invisible, both of us are functionaries" (244). In the privacy of Nick's room, Offred's thoughts further delve into speculation about how he might perceive her. She questions whether he believes she has engaged in promiscuity at Jezebel's with the Commander or others: "[m]aybe he thinks I've been slutting around, at Jezebel's, with the Commander or more" (273).

These thoughts reveal that Gilead's belief system has permeated Offred's consciousness, shaping her self-perception. She unconsciously internalizes the teachings and self-shaming exercises from the Rachel and Leah Center. While Gilead attempts to instill shame in women through its rigid indoctrination centers, it does not create this emotion from scratch. Shame has always existed among women, even in the pre-Gilead era. This is clear from Offred's usage of the term "slutting." It is a term deeply tied to societal attitudes and expectations

surrounding women's sexuality and behavior. Even before Gilead's oppressive regime, societal norms and double standards imposed shame on women for expressing their sexuality or deviating from prescribed roles. Gilead merely amplifies and exploits this affect, turning it into a preferred public practice. At this same encounter with Nick, Offred experiences the affect of shame not only from the perspective of a man but also from the perspective of another woman, Serena Joy. After their successful first encounter, Offred reflects on Serena Joy, imagining her thoughts and judgments. Offred's thoughts turn critical as she imagines Serena Joy's belittling perception of handmaids, considering them willing to engage in sexual acts for simple rewards such as cigarettes (275). Additionally, under the gaze of the past, Offred grapples with feelings of guilt toward her husband, Luke, viewing her actions with Nick as a betrayal. She questions whether the certainty of Luke's death would make a difference in her response (275), highlighting the complex emotions she experiences. Under the affect of guilt, she “falls out of the common world; an abyss has opened between her and the others which cannot be bridged again” (Fuchs 231). Speaking of shame and guilt, Fuchs elaborates that both affect “may be regarded as the main reflective, separating, and at the same time individualizing affects in which the gaze or the voice of the other are incorporated and taken up into the memory of the body” (234). These affects shape Offred's perception of herself and her actions, intertwining with the oppressive gaze of Gilead and leaving her grappling with conflicting emotions and a fragmented sense of identity.

Despite being under several gazes of shame gathered from different times, in Nick’s room, Offred displays a unique act of subversion. Whereas this act of

subversion and its intention are not observed or revealed, Offred makes it count as such and even visible by narrating her story. She states:

> I went back to Nick. Time after time, on my own, without Serena knowing. It wasn't called for, there was no excuse. I did not do it from him, but for myself entirely. I didn't even think of it as giving myself to him, because what did I have to give? I did not feel munificent, but thankful, each time he would let me in. He didn't have to. (Atwood 280)

With this statement, Offred reaches a pivotal point in her story, demonstrating a momentary autonomy of her body and her decisions. At this point, neither rules are broken, nor borders are crossed at the expense of her silent body. Offred crosses the border in Nick's room and breaks the rules for herself. In his presence, Offred is highly conscious of the value of the now as she elaborates that "[w]e make love each time as if we know beyond a shadow of a doubt that there will never be anymore, for either of us, with anyone, ever. And then when there is, that too is always a surprise, extra, a gift" (281). Not only does the space of the bedroom experience a corporeal liberation, but it is also through sex that they manage a temporal liberation from the shackles of the future. Reaching this moment, Offred knows the value of narration and the power of names in his company: "I tell him my real name, and feel that therefore I am known" (282). She wants to extend her being beyond the moment by making her name remembered, even if through one person.

Inside his room, Offred liberates herself from her ties with the past: "Day by day, night by night [Luke] recedes, and I become more faithless" (281). Through her sexual encounter with Nick, which she finds pleasurable, she further distances herself from the past, particularly the pre-Gilead era, to which she clings tightly.

Moreover, as the statement shows, Offred also rises above the stale ideas about women's intentions in sexual acts. In this contact zone, Offred shows maturity and intentionality in her sexual act: she does that for herself, her own pleasure. Her body is no longer objectified to be a gift for any man, regardless of which power structure she is in. Her body is inside this contact zone, free from the weight of gazes and traditional thoughts and ideologies. This moment would not be able to be reached without her being forced to move between three new contact zones, namely, the Commander's room, the Jezebels, and Nick's room. Being made to witness the cracks in the wall of the system (the Wall that is made to hold the dead corpses wrapped in blood-stained white cloth who are caught going against the regime) allows her to experience fear and equally knows that "[f]ear is a powerful stimulant" (280). A stimulant not only for breaking the rules but also for breaking gazes, paving the way for crossing borders never thought of being transgressed.

As Offred's haunting tale draws close, a sudden and ominous interruption shatters her narration. A black van, ominously associated with the Eyes – the dreaded security service of Gilead – arrives to collect Offred under the order of "violation of state secrets" (306). The household is left in bewilderment, and the Commander and his Wife are equally unaware of the reason behind Offred's sudden summons. Offred departs the house in one last forced crossing to an unknown place. This enigmatic departure unfolds against two poignant details: Nick's final words to Offred and her parting glance at the Commander and his Wife. Amidst the uncertainty of her unknown fate, Nick whispers comforting words to Offred, hinting at the existence of a covert resistance network known as Mayday: "It's all right. It's Mayday. Go with them" (305). These words offer a

glimmer of hope, suggesting the possibility of rescue and the continued existence of a defiant resistance against Gilead's tyranny. Nevertheless, as she descends the staircase to the waiting men in black suits, Offred is resigned to her fate, aware that defiance or doubt is futile in the face of such overwhelming power. In this fleeting moment of departure, Offred's gaze falls upon the Commander and his Wife, revealing a remarkable transformation in her perception of them. She describes,

> [t]he Commander puts his hand to his head. What have I been saying, and to whom, and which one of his enemies has found out? Possibly he will be a security risk, now. I am above him, looking down; he is shrinking. There have already been purges among them, there will be more. Serena Joy goes white. (306)

For the first time, she observes vulnerability and fear in their demeanor, a stark contrast to the authoritative facade they once donned. The Commander's sense of invincibility crumbles, and paranoia clouds his thoughts as he contemplates potential betrayals and enemies within his ranks. Similarly, Serena Joy, once a formidable figure of authority, is now visibly shaken and pale, mirroring the fragility of their privileged position. Though Offred's fate remains ambiguous, and her encounter with the Eyes may spell her demise, this final moment carries a profound sense of triumph. In this single act of unsettling the Commander and his Wife, Offred has punctured their aura of power, exposing their vulnerability and fragility.

2.5 Conclusion: Under the Gaze of Narration

Readers discover at the end of the novel that the narrative structure of *The Handmaid's Tale* is retrospective, recounted from a first-person perspective by

Offred in the form of recordings. Using the first-person narrative creates intimacy with the reader but also introduces doubt, as it is revealed that the story is recorded retrospectively after Offred's escape, challenging the present tense employed in the narration. The epilogue, 'Historical Notes,' is a pivotal commentary on Gilead and Offred's account, unraveling two significant revelations. Firstly, it becomes evident that Gilead, the oppressive society that once dominated the narrative, has ceased to exist, becoming a part of the past. Secondly, Offred's recordings become a historical document subjected to verification and authentication by future historians. This last short chapter is a commentary on Gilead and Offred's account. In the 'Historical Notes,' as the narrative transcends into the future, specifically the year 2195, we come to understand that a different community, seemingly egalitarian in nature, assumes control. In the scholarly symposium, Offred's oral narrative is reduced to a mere historical document from which it is a means to elicit information on what is considered 'the ambiguous' community of Gilead. Although this subjective narrative of the first-person narrative creates intimacy with the reader, this chapter also instigates doubt in the reader. Her account is methodologically approached with an affectively distance by a male professor, James Darcy Pixieto, who explains his outlook:

> It appears that certain periods of history quickly become, both for other societies and for those that follow them, the stuff of not especially edifying legend and the occasionally for a good deal of hypocritical self-congratulation. […] [W]e must be cautious about the passing moral judgment upon Gileadeans. Surely we learned by now that such judgments are of necessity culture-specific. Also, Gileadean society was

> under a good deal of pressure, demographic and otherwise, and was subject to factors from which we ourselves are happily more free. Our Job is not to censure but to understand. (*Applause*) (314-15)

In this statement, Pieixoto, the professor, draws attention to this juxtaposition of subjective narration and objective scrutiny and highlights the ongoing debate concerning the treatment of history and the positioning of marginalized voices within its context. He urges caution in passing moral judgments on Gileadeans, emphasizing the need for a culture-specific understanding of historical contexts and societal pressures. This approach is criticized by David S. Hogsette, saying that it “provides readers with an example of how not to read Atwood's novel” (263). Furthermore, Martin Kuester elegantly addresses that “Margaret Atwood, the author, frames James Darcy Pieixoto—and with him many male historians, historiographers, and the authors of historical novels, […] by including him within the covers of yet another historical novel” (147). Atwood presents a thought-provoking alternative exploration of the complexities of history, power, and the voice of the subaltern, challenging readers to critically engage with the story while considering the affects of its narrating voice.

Nevertheless, while recording her voice, Offred is aware of her present position at the base of the power hierarchy and of her future transformation into history. She recognizes that her storytelling is subject to doubt and skepticism, given the complexities of memory and the inherent limitations of language. In preparing herself for this moment of negotiating her narration, she describes her account as

> […] a reconstruction[…]When I get out of here, if I'm ever able to set this down, in any form, even in the form of one voice to another, it will be a reconstruction then too, at yet another remove, it's impossible to say a thing exactly the way it was, because what you say can never be exact, you always have to leave something out, there are too many parts, sides, crosscurrents, nuances; too many gestures, which could mean this or that, too many shapes which can never fully described, too many flavors, in the air or on the tongue, half-colors, too many. (144)

Thus, Offred separates her narration from being a source of fact-finding, instead a 'reconstruction' to help herself, in the first place, to survive and inform her readers/listeners to deal with her story as a story of survival. In other words, "In the process of reconstructing herself as an individual, Offred becomes the important historian of Gilead." (Howells 127). This statement shifts the focus from a desire to inform others of her story to a tool of survival. For Offred, she proclaims that in the process of narrating, she gains strength to believe that survival is a possibility, which is "a heroic undertaking in the shadow of an overwhelming right-wing regime. In comparison, frames have so far been seen as methods of parodically integrating older texts into new ones, or of excluding certain elements from an audience's field of vision […]" (Kuester 142). This approach sheds light on why a subaltern feels compelled to tell their story. Rather than getting herself and her narration entangled in the politics of authenticity, she engages herself directly with a hypothetical listener by addressing them as '*You* can mean more than one. *You* can mean thousands' (50). She fosters a sense of intimacy and trust, avoiding potential challenges to the authenticity of her account from distant historians. Through this personal connection, she shares her story as one of survival rather than succumbing to the pressures of historical accuracy. Besides, in adopting a subjective position, Offred separates herself

from the burden of expectations: she is not an overtly resistant hero nor an entirely submissive Handmaid. Rather, she is a subaltern who tries to survive.

2.5.1 Limits of Storytelling and Storytelling as a Border Crossing

Pieixoto's academic commentary on Offred's narrative delves beyond the surface of a mere male commenting on a woman's story. It explores the dynamics of knowledge and power in the Foucauldian sense, highlighting the hegemonic control over historical knowledge. The critical border that separates Offred's narrative from Pieixoto's analysis is the dimension of time and historical context, emphasizing Offred's statement that "context is all." Offred exists as an oppressed woman within a fundamentalist regime, where her voice is silenced and her language is restricted. In contrast, Pieixoto is a privileged male academic historian born into a liberal environment that encourages the expression of his opinions. Their temporal distance and differing historical roles inherently hinder a genuine understanding of Offred's affective experience and that of the other Handmaids. Pieixoto's pursuit of factuality in Offred's narrative is understandable, given the scholarly context of his conference paper and his personal drive as a scholar. However, this pursuit overlooks the primary motive of Offred's narration, which is to communicate the emotional and affective experiences of her oppressed existence. In the novel, Offred is double-colonized—first in Gilead's era, where her body is subjugated and objectified, and later in the post-Gilead era, where her narrative becomes a mere case study for historical scrutiny. Karen F. Stein aptly contrasts the stylistic differences between Offred and Pieixoto's narratives, saying, "[h]er narrative is tentative, fragmentary, sensuous, moving loosely by a stream of consciousness, by revision. The scholar's narrative is

logical, abstract, and polished. Both, however, make frequent use of puns" (274). Stein goes on to stress the patronizing manner in which Pieixoto treats Offred's account as

> He is to Offred as Sigmund Freud is to 'Dora' (the subject of his analysis of hysteria). Both men depend on the woman to provide material for interpretation; their reputations rest on their power to fix meaning and to explain the women (Bernheimer and Kahane). But just as Freud failed to resolve the problems Dora raised, so Pieixoto fails to discover who Offred was and what became of her. Further, both men use the women's texts for their own purposes, looking through the texts to satisfy their own desires. (274)

Nonetheless, there exists a significant distinction between Sigmund Freud and Pieixoto in their respective relationships with Dora and Offred. For Freud, Dora is his direct patient, and her experiences are contemporaneous to his historical and scientific context, allowing him to analyze and interpret her case within that context. In contrast, Pieixoto grapples with the temporal gap between himself and Offred's experiences, as her narration takes place in the distant past of Gilead's regime. Both Offred and Dora face deprivation of understanding and empathy, but for different reasons. Offred's narrative is denied the widespread reception and universal empathy afforded to, for example, Anne Frank's diary, which serves as a powerful reminder and warning about the consequences of deteriorating circumstances. Despite Pieixoto's rigid and analytical approach to the narration, Offred's personal account reveals the inner world of her journey under fundamental institutions that change her relationship with her body. They transform her body from "an instrument, of pleasure, or a means of transportation, or an implement for the accomplishment of [her] will […]" (82) into "a swamp,

fenland, where only [she] know[s] the footing. Treacherous ground, [her] own territory" (83). Offred records her detailed story in the face of adversity, preserving it for readers to revisit and reflect upon. Her narrative serves as a poignant testimony to her struggles and resilience, inviting us to transcend the borders of time and empathize with her plight. However, in engaging with Offred's narrative, we must also remain cognizant of the inherent limitations and uncrossable borders in the process of historical interpretation. By acknowledging the complexities of her experiences and the broader socio-political context of Gilead, we can approach Offred's account with greater sensitivity and understanding, ensuring her voice is not lost to the passage of time.

Chapter 3: The Dystopian City Chronicles of Ahmad Khaled Towfik's *Utopia*[5] (2008): Challenging Gates and Forming Contact Zones

> Without a certain kind of space, a certain kind of story is simply impossible.
> (Franco Moretti, 100)

3.1 Introduction: Reflection on the Tyrant City

The portrayal of a degenerated Cairo in *Utopia* reflects the socio-economic and political realities of many megacities in the Global South. Diane Singerman's observation about Cairo's resemblance to other megacities highlights the interconnectedness of these urban centers and the common challenges they face. She sums up the neoliberal present of Cairo in its resemblance to other megacities as it "is entrenched in processes of globalization where flows of labor, capital, and information are re-shaping its physical boundaries, the structure of the economy, and its political landscape" (3). It is worth noting that, while Cairo is the primary focus of the novel, the themes and issues it presents can resonate with other cities in the Global South. By and large, Global South cities are less depicted and discussed in the literary scene than Global North cities. Anna Madoeuf and Delphine Pages-El Karoui comment on this observation, saying that,

> [c]ities of the South are presented as, simply or presumed to be, too bogged down in the litany of their dysfunctions to fully take part in the process of imagining or to the extent that they do, it is to conjure up by way of continuities and extrapolations its problems. It is as though their movement to the future is blocked since the process of imagining the future

[5] All quotations mentioned in this chapter are taken from the translated copy, while any further reference to the original Arabic will be referred to in the text.

> amplifies their current issues, which are augmented exponentially by time. (285-6)

The decay in Towfik's *Utopia* results in two binary scenes: gated communities of the affluent minority that sought refuge at the north coast and the abject majority swarming a colossal slum, *Ashwa'iyat*[6], which once was Cairo. Those two scenes are fixated on establishing guarded gates and a wide desert gap. The novel briefly pictures the daily lives of the inhabitants of both worlds, where the role of borders that separate the two worlds plays a vital role in the behavior of their inhabitants and the processes of othering each other. The narrative recounts a rebellious border-crossing that results in the collision of the two worlds.

Samia Mehrez remarks on the narration of urban Cairo in both Arabic and Egyptian literatures in the twentieth century: "Urban space, for writers of the city, has been a significant architect of its social, economic, and political fabric. In this literary production, Cairo becomes a protagonist whose existence is indispensable for the existence of the narratives themselves, not to speak of our own reading and decoding of these works" (4). By recognizing the character of Cairo and its multifaceted role in the narrative as an active participant, the analysis of this chapter can delve deeper into the dynamics of the city, its impact on the characters and their interactions, and the themes of division and otherness that emerge from the portrayal of Cairo as a central element in the story.

[6] *Ashwa'iyat* is the Egyptian usage to refer to slums. The word is plural for a form of *'Ashwa'iya* and means 'the chaotic.' In order to preserve the local specificity and contextual significance of the word within the Egyptian context, the chapter appropriately uses the transliterated form. This choice allows readers to grasp the particularity of the term and its association with the situation of slums in Egypt. However, my aim in this chapter is not to theoretically develop the concept of *'Ashwa'iyat* beyond its narrow reference to slums. Nonetheless, one cannot ignore the richness of the lexicon.

In the Arabic language, Cairo is called *al-Qāhirah*. The word has various meanings: Victorious (over its enemies) and tyrant (see Rodenbeck). Even more interesting, in the Islamic tradition, the adjective *al-Qahar* (the masculine form of the word) is one of the ninety-nine attributes of Allah, which means the Almighty and the Omnipotent. In a sense, the name Cairo ('al-Qāhirah[7]') shares and echoes one of God's attributes related to absolute power, suggesting heavy shades of tyranny and conquest over potential outsider enemies. However, in approaching *Utopia*, Cairo is not under the attack of outside conquerors, but rather it is the tyrant subjugating its inhabitants. In this chapter, I read Cairo as an example of the tyranny of the city over its citizens in tracing its sprawling urban expansion, defragmentation, and infinite images of injustices.

Reading Cairo in *Utopia* is to read into the city's contradictions: the isolated communities despite the porosity of their gates, the extremities between scarcity and affluence, and its claustrophobic mood despite its sprawling expansion in size. In *Utopia*, Cairo is depicted in a future constellation in 2023, suffering putrefaction and condemning the majority of its citizens to rot in the limbo of poverty. At the same time, the city grants its wealthy minority an exit plan to build themselves abundant settlements by the North Coast, leaving the two worlds separated by a vast desert and jarring gates and, nonetheless, connected by a network of secret tunnels underneath. The fact that the two narrative voices in the novel are masculine forces readers to approach this text as a male narrative where they narrate the masculinities of the urban spaces. In these urban spaces, including slums and prosperous settlements, masculinities are shaped by

[7] The city is called such in celebration of the arrival of the Fatimid caliph al-Mu'izz, who made the city the capital of a dynasty that lasted two centuries. (Britannica)

physical borders and hierarchical boundaries, and later contested through crossings. In this chapter, I closely analyze the contested masculinities between the inhabitants of the slum and the closed-off gated communities as one trigger of the self-implosion of the dystopian city.

3.1.1 Utopia through the Lens of Urban Studies

The final scene of the novel *Utopia* (2009), which depicts marches of angry masses toward the gates of an affluent bubble, has gained significant attention in the field of Arabic studies about the Egyptian Uprising of 2011. This scene provides an opportunity for reflection and analysis within academia[8]. However, it is important to note that the novel itself is situated within a pre-2011 social context. This chapter examines the theme of borders through the lens of urban and masculinities studies, offering a theoretical framework for understanding the concept of *'Ashwa'iyat.*

The term '*Ashwa'iyat'* refers not only to urban slums but also describes the broader lifestyle and conditions that urban Cairo has been grappling with for at least four decades before 2011. By engaging with urban studies, the chapter aims to contribute to a theoretical understanding of this concept. It recognizes that the

[8] This novel is widely received and debated in academia, not only within Arabic Literature in the Arab world but also on a universal level. For example, Houman Nazemian at Kharazmi University, Iran, offers a social critique of the novel, drawing upon Lucien Goldmann's ideas to explore the dichotomy between self and other as depicted in modern Arabic literature and the novel's broader worldview. Ghada Saad Hassan's analysis in “Fearful Manifestations: a Comparative Study of the Monstrous Double in Ahmed Khaled Towfik’s Utopia” suggests that examining the novel's portrayal of monstrosity through the cultural lens in which it was produced can benefit from a Foucauldian analysis of power dynamics, aiding in a deeper understanding of the text's cultural, historical, and social context. The novel is also negotiated through translation studies, e.g., Tasnim Qutait in “The Imaginary Futures of Arabic: Egyptian Dystopias in Translation.” She investigates how translators handle local dialects within Egyptian dystopian novels and unveils the factors influencing the creation, translation, and interpretation of Arabic literature in the contemporary era.

issues of borders, urbanization, and masculinity are intertwined and play a significant role in shaping the social fabric and experiences of individuals living in urban Cairo. By approaching the theme of borders through this theoretical framework, the chapter expands the analysis beyond the immediate context of the Egyptian Uprising and delves into deeper social and cultural dynamics that have influenced urban life in Cairo. This approach allows for a more nuanced understanding of the novel and its depiction of urban struggles, shedding light on the broader socio-political context in which the narrative unfolds.

3.1.2 Present Cairo between Gated Communities and Slums: The Binary of Urbanity

The division depicted in Towfik's *Utopia* between the '*Ashwa'iyyat* (slums) and the Gated Communities reflects the stark socio-economic class divide within Cairo, exacerbated by the neoliberal policies that emerged in the 1970s and intensified during the presidency of Hosni Mubarak. This division represents the ongoing contestation between the pursuit of modernity, often associated with Westernization, and the desire to escape poverty and backwardness. Mona Abaza describes this contestation:

> Cairo, like never before, is experiencing insurmountable tensions and contradictions in lifestyles, predicting forthcoming inevitable violence. But the symbolic violence of the unattainable lavish satellite city advertisements, displayed on highways and ring roads that cut across the sprawling slums, is not any less provoking (Abaza 114).

To be able to scrutinize the dystopian urbanity of Cairo as presented in the novel, it is worth introducing a short sketch of Cairo's '*Ashwa'iyyat* and Gated Communities before 2011 and the infamous neighborhood of Shubra (being the

locus of the narrative) to lay the ground for the framework of reading the novel. This framework of understanding aligns with David Sims' approach in his book, which aims to "explain how modern Cairo grows and works" (Sims 13).[9]

According to the United Nations' World Population Prospects, the current population of the Cairo metropolitan area in 2023 is 22,183,000, a 1.99% increase from 2022. (United Nations). The urbanization rate in 2021 was 42.86% of Egypt's population (United Nations). From the start of the nineteenth century, Cairo's population was around 350,000 and reached 2,500,000 in 1947 (Qualey). Simultaneously, during the twentieth century, Cairo went through three major political systems that left an impact on the urban space of Cairo and the socio-economic fabric of its inhabitant, namely, parliamentary monarchy under the British mandate (till 1952), state socialism and post-colonial nationalism of Nasser, and open market economy with the president Anwar Sadat that intensified during President Hosni Mubarak (1981-2011). In his sociological profile of Cairo, Saad-Eddin Ibrahim comments on the political transitional phases as follows:

> Since Mohammed Ali's rule (1805-1849), there have been four big modernisation attempts under Khedive Ismail (1863- 1879), during Egypt's Liberal Age (1922- 1952), under Nasser (1952-1970) and under Sadat (1970-1981). Each of these significant attempts left a lasting impact on the country and the capital city. (26)

[9] While other books which are considered classics, e.g., Andre Raymond's *Cairo: City of History*, Max Rodenbeck's Cairo: The City Victorious (1998), and Maria Golia's Cairo: City of Sand (2004), take the long history of Cairo as a central theme in a descriptive fashion more than exploring the dynamics of the city.

3.1.2.1 On '*Ashwa'iyat*

'Ashwa'iyat is the Egyptian usage to refer to slums. The word is plural for a form of *'Ashwa'iya* and means 'the chaotic.' Throughout the chapter, the transliterated word is used to keep the local peculiarity of the word and the contextual situation of slums in Egypt. In "Who is Afraid of Ashwaiyyat? Urban Change and Politics in Egypt" (2000), Asef Bayat and Eric Denis define the term on an urban basis, saying that

> Ashwaiyyat, the plural for ashwaiyya (literally meaning 'half-hazard'), is the term used in public to refer to their formal communities in Egypt, some 111 of which exist in the greater Cairo area. Official estimates put the total number of these settlements at about 1,034, accounting for about 12 million, or 45 percent, of Egypt's urban population. Land invasion accounts for a very small proportion of these settlements and the vast majority comprise privately owned homes which are built on purchased agricultural land but which lack planning, construction permits and most conventional urban services. (185)

In other words, *Ashwaiyyat* is a blanket term for the informal settlements in Egypt since the 1970s, referring to the phenomenon of the spontaneous urbanization taking place at the periphery of large cities outside the script of the formal administrative definition of cities (see Nicholas S. Hopkins and Kirsten Westergaard). Additionally, it aligns with the classic tendency of megacities where "a structural movement of centrifugal redistribution from the core areas of the big cities to the peripheries" takes place, forming later the other phenomenon of gated communities (Bayat and Denis 188). In her introduction to the edited volume titled *Cairo Contested* (2009), Diane Singerman states that as a reaction to the Egyptian State's abandonment of its "social contract and provisionary role"

(6), the population, as an individual solution, expanded illegally on available agricultural land through building affordable housing. Singerman argues that the expansion of *'Ashwa'iyat* is a manifestation of neoliberal Egypt "to the degree that such housing was often financed by remittances, was in reaction to skyrocketing real estate prices, as Egypt's economy became internationalized" (Singerman 6-7). Besides, the flourishing of informal transportation, e.g., Microbuses, reinforces the expansion of such areas and shrinks time and distances to the big cities (Bayat and Denis 193). On the other hand, the state denies recognition of the increasing number of the urbanized agglomeration, which "would oblige it to make expensive urban provisions such as sewerage, paved roads, and running water. Furthermore, changing the status of a "village" might put certain obligations upon the residents (for example, paying tax) and reduce the power of the local élites" (Bayat und Denis 196)

On the other hand, the local middle classes and intelligentsia consistently viewed rural migrants as responsible for the backwardness of the capital's sophisticated style, transforming it into a city of peasants. In a shocking comment from one of the famous journalists, Mursi Attallah, in his article in *al-Ahram al-iqtisadi* (al-Ahram Economist), he deplores the encroachment of "peasants" on the capital, saying,

> [a]ll the neighboring villages have become part of the capital, and instead of inculcating them with city ways and civilization, the capital has become sick with all the backward diseases of the Egyptian villages. It has become a greater village instead of a great Cairo. (qtd. in Sims 15)

Sims defies this classist claim of Attallah, by pointing out that, first, most of the Cairenes now are the grandchildren of migration from the countryside that might

go back two or three generations at most. Second, one of Cairo's main problems, traffic, and pollution, is mainly generated by "the small minority of the population who are car owners,[and this] is lost on those elite critics, all of whom themselves own cars but see their city as sullied by the 'uncouth peasant'" (16). Moreover, as Asef Bayat and Eric Denis criticize this common assumption pointing out that the urban life in Egypt witnessed a demographic shift in which the rural-urban migration stabilized contrary to Egypt in the 1940s and 1960s (187), and instead, the phenomenon of the "agro-towns" emerged (Hopkins and Westergaard 2).

3.1.2.2 The Phenomenon of Cairo's Gated Communities

This phenomenon, sometimes referred to as "gated enclaves" (Grant 2003), is on the rise worldwide, as it offers the promise of security and appeals to those seeking a sense of community and identity (Baycan-Levent and Gülümser 3). According to urban studies research, Gated Communities are defined as "self-contained separate communities with carefully constructed identities" (Baycan-Levent and Gülümser 1), and their access is privatized (see Low). Setha Low, speaking of the phenomenon of gated communities in the US, refers to it as stemming from an 'anti-urban sentiment' that fears violence and crime (and, in Egypt's case, poverty), which contributes to the loss of a sense of place and class separation (45). Furthermore, the proliferation of "walls, gates, and guards produce[s] a landscape that encodes class relations and residential (race/class/ethnic/gender) segregation more permanently in the built environment" (Low 45). The theme of urban identity is the concern of multiple studies. where they "have the potential to create a strong local identity as they bring citizens together with common interests" (Abdelaziz Farid and Ahmed 340).

Gated communities as an urban phenomenon are spreading in Greater Cairo Region (GCR); 466 gated communities have been developed in Cairo by 2010, to reach 500 communities by 2013 in addition to the number of gated communities that are dispersed across different cities in Egypt (Muawad et al.) They first appeared as temporary housing in the coastal zone in the summertime. By the mid-nineties, the government sold large portions of public land to the private sector, which "offered new options of standards and styles of living with unique urban identities" (Farid and Ahmed 334). Moreover, those gated communities carry the names of "dreams and fantasies […] reflect[ing] cosmopolitan or trans-metropolitan aspirations: for example, there are developments named Beverly Hills and Hyde Park" (Rooney 150). Accordingly, the existence of gated communities is seen as an antidote to the "savage urbanism" that modern Cairo now presents (Sims et. al 15). In response to the nostalgia for an imagined Cairo, some gated communities try to revive the Belle Époque Cairo (Denis 50). The acceleration of the expansion of gated communities has been driven by the affects of fear and disgust. Singerman comments that "[t]hese projects were promoted and legitimated by a 'security risk' discourse that framed central Cairo as menacing, dirty, polluted, unsafe, and unhealthy" (16).

3.1.2.3 Shubra: A Short Overview

The history of the Shubra neighborhood is a testament to the significant cultural, political, and urban movements, changes, and developments that have occurred in modern Cairo over the past two centuries. The importance of Shubra lies in its geographical location in the north of Cairo that ties together the cities of northern

Egypt, Delta. ("*Shubra*") Shubra comprises three districts, namely, al-Sahil, Rawd al-Farag, and Shubra, occupying an area of 18.6 km2 inhabited by a total of 605,723 ("*Shubra*"). Until the mid-1950s, Shubra was not part of Cairo, but became so following the 1952 military coup. The overthrow of King Farouk (reign 1936- 52), as one of the first resolutions of the Revolutionary Command Council, symbolizes the new orientation toward cutting ties with the Muhammad Ali dynasty. This was reflected in the change of Shubra Street names bearing any reference to the royal family. However, Shubra has been a symbol of the rich ethnic and social fabric of coexistence in Egypt's history and its subsequent deterioration. The development of the neighborhood during Khedive Isma'il (1863-79) was to be part of the modernization of Cairo as an opposite of the medieval Islamic part of the city, the old Cairo (AlSayyad et al. 2).

Shubra is derived from the ancient Egyptian word 'Sebru', which means hill that had been transformed in Coptic usage to 'Jebru' to refer to a farm or a village ("*Shubra"*). So, Shubra originated as a village outside Cairo, dating back to 882 AD, as mentioned in Amin Sami Basha's *The Nile Almanac* (qtd. in "Shubra"). Only in 1808 did Shubra undergo a major urban development when Muhammad Ali 8 selected it to construct a large palace. As a result of Muhammad Ali's preference for living in the countryside, Andre Raymond believed that Shubra, among several other areas around Cairo, was exposed to urban developments through building palaces and gardens. Commenting on contemporary Cairo, Andre Raymond goes on to describe the palace and the road that connected Shubra with Cairo (later became the well-known 'Shubra Street') and the developments that took place in the subsequent years as

> [t]he palace was built on the edge of the Nile, and one reached it by a handsome alley planted on either side with acacias and sycamores, an avenue Gerard de Nerval characterized as “the most beautiful place in the world,” and which would be called “the Champs-Elysees of Cairo, the meeting-place of Cairo’s native and European high society.” An English engineer, Galloway, installed gaslights there in 1829. The residence was abandoned after the pasha's death [Muhammed Ali], but urban development followed, and in 1909 a double row of rental houses stood along the old alley, now provided with a tramline. Other palaces built for members of the royal family were also absorbed into the expanding city at the end of the nineteenth century: Qasr [Palace in Arabic] al-Dubara, Qasr al-Ayni, and Rawdah, which were built by Ibrahim Pasha on the island and is today a Club Mediterranee hotel. (306)

The Egyptian and the royal elites continued to consider Shubra as a haven of relaxation and recreation until 1869, when the Khedive Ismail invited kings and ambassadors for the inauguration ceremony of the Suez Canal ("*Shubra"*).

The history of Shubra reveals its transformation over time and the impact of various factors on its social and urban fabric. With the opening of the first train station in Cairo in 1856, Shubra became an attractive destination for internal immigrants, drawing people from the villages surrounding Cairo. The industrial activities in the nearby Bulaq area, including weaving factories and the port of Cairo, further contributed to the urban expansion of Cairo towards Shubra. In the mid-twentieth century, other waves of immigrants contributed to the growth of informal settlements. Subsequently, the infiltration of chaos into the vast district has been responsible for the erosion of the foundation of urban life for the middle class: “[t]hey complain about the disappearance of social clubs of a good standard, the deterioration in education and health standards in schools and hospitals, the absence of parks, and the neglect of cultural events” (“*Shubra*”).

Nowadays, Shubra has lost much of its diversity in contrast to Janet Abu-Lughud's observations on the neighborhood in the 1970s: "Shubra contains wider diversity if compared to minor neighboring communities, relating to the social and economic status, ethnic makeup and type of housing" (211).

3.2 Future Cairo as a Dystopia: Urbanity between Segregation and Chaos

Ahmed Khaled Towfik's narration of Cairo "escapes traditional literary representation of Cairo, as an Arab city with its labyrinth alleys and impasses that was so dear to the great novelist Naguib Mahfouz, as a modern downtown that was long the heart of intellectual or artistic life" (Madeouf and Pages-El Karoui 298).[10] Towfik's narration extrapolates on the urbanity of Cairo and dismantles the city from its connectedness of the alleys and impasses, structuring it into 'bored bordered societies'. With an ironic note, Towfik begins with a short epigraph saying that "[a]ny resemblance to places and individuals in our present reality is purely coincidental." This note, along with a choice of depicting the narration in a near-future depiction, works as a political criticism and commentary on the government's urban choices before the breakout of the people's uprising in 2011.

Written in 2008 as a futuristic dystopia, *Utopia* depicts Egyptian inhabitants who are geographically confined to living either in gated communities or slums. In a near-future scenario, Towfik depicts Cairo in 2023 as facing a dissolution of political, social, and economic coherence, where most of the population is left in

[10] *Utopia* and its likes after 2011 contribute further to deconstructing the grand narration of the city in the Western classics like Edward William Lane's Modern Egyptians and the European translations of The Arabian Nights (cf. Derek Gregory's "Performing Cairo" in *Making Cairo Medieval*).

a Hobbesian state of nature[11]. This situation arises due to the dissolution of the central government and the decline of the middle class. Like Margaret Atwood's Gilead, the text neglects to mention the head of these wealthy elites. Consequently, Cairo as geography is liquidated into places of cruelty, namely slums and gated communities, separated by a vast desert and hidden secret tunnels beneath. The affluent flee the city to settle by the North Coast in colonies well-guarded by retired US Marine forces, whereas the poor swarm Cairo, which becomes a mega-slum. The novel portrays two characters' emotional and spatial stagnation, as well as their struggle to break free. Alaa is the protagonist who lives in the wealthiest bubble, Utopia, and Gaber is the protagonist from Shubra, which has collapsed into a 'metropolis slum.' The two segregated dystopian societies are organized through tribal laws. With the collapse of the state entity, laws become void. However, every side generates rules and regulations that provide protection and survival for each community.

The book tells of an American chemist in 2010 who formulated 'Biroil' as an alternative energy source to replace fossil energy permanently. With the global expansion of Biroil, the oil wells in Iraq and the Arab Gulf area are deserted, and, as a result, oil-engined vehicles there are all left broken. Instead of the Gulf countries exporting oil, they are forced to import 'Biroil' monopolized by the US, pushing them to the edge of bankruptcy and poverty. For Egypt to survive the new world order, the owners of Utopia, as representatives of the country, sign a fifty-year monopoly contract to sell the only valuable commodity in Egypt: the

[11] Referring to Hobbes, it is used to be a description made by journalists like Abdel Fattah Naser in *Al-Wafd* newspaper in 2009: "The informal cities are perceived by many in Egypt as representing a Hobbesian locus of lawlessness and extremism, producing a 'culture of violence' and an 'abnormal' way of life" (qtd. in Bayat and Eric 185).

antiquities of ancient Egypt (their ancestors). Besides, Israel opens a canal that substitutes the Suez Canal; simultaneously, the High Dam in Aswan breaks. On the interior side, tourism collapses; police disappear; salaries and services halt; the tax system vanishes. As the novel briefly narrates, this deterioration of Cairo is an extension of a new world system and a new Middle East geopolitical map created by an energy invention.

The narrative revolves around the most popular and prosperous settlement, Utopia, in which its citizens are known as the Utopians and *al-Aghyar*, who fail through the narrative to introduce themselves with any identity except being 'the poor.' Both the national unity and Egyptian identity have dissolved, paving the way for class identification to take over solely. There are no more Egyptians; only the wealthy citizens are named after their settlements, or the poor, the "thieves," as a collective nomination, while the rich call the poor "*al-Aghyar*." Caroline Rooney comments on this dystopian reality that

> [r]egarding the extreme dissociation of worlds, the implication of the novel is that capitalism, especially neoliberal capitalism, overrides national boundaries in creating new boundaries that consist of miniature states or internal colonies of privilege with their security fences, but where these mini-states are networked with each other by means of international capital and military connections. (150)

The novel does not describe an apocalyptic event that led to this dystopian situation. The novel highlights the effect of the slow process of deterioration, which is characterized by ignoring the alarming signs and the absence of social responsibility from the side of the rich, and the complete failure of the

government[12]. The main plotline centers on what becomes a trendy practice, or 'sport' as it is named in the gated communities. The younger generation, who has never experienced life outside the gates, invented this practice of human hunting, allowing them to sneak outside the gates against their communities' laws into the 'metropolis slum.' The entire act of sneaking out and breaking the rules turns into a complete adventure which qualifies as an antithesis of the pressing emotion of boredom that overwhelms their lives. The adventure is conditioned to hunt one of the slums' inhabitants, kill her or him, cut off a body part (e.g., hand, leg) and bring it back on the same day to the gated communities as a trophy and proof that the adventure has taken place. Usually, the young Utopians get back in a theatrical scene where they are rescued by helicopters flown by the US guards shooting the angry masses upon the murder of one of them. Back in Utopia, the trophy also symbolizes masculinity, as most of those trips are set off by young males and accompanied by their girlfriends to show off in front of them. In the novel, the adventure is embarked upon by Alaa[13] and his girlfriend, Germinal, both second-generation Utopia inhabitants. Their adventure faces unexpected difficulties and allows them to spend a longer time in Shuba and meet Gaber and his sister, Safiya, the first-generation inhabitants of the *al-Aghyar* generation. The two Utopians stay at Gaber's shack and under his protection till their return. A confrontation occurs between the two men resulting in the tragic death of Gaber,

[12] Specifically in the last ten years of the reign of President Hosni Mubarak, the ties between him and the moneyed elite solidified. Samia Nakhoul mentions, "Seventy to 80 businessmen sit in parliament as members or allies of the ruling party. Their critics say they lobby for, and pass legislation tailored to their interests" (Nakhoul).

[13] The novel is composed of five parts divided into two titles, 'The Predator' and 'The Prey,' alternatively. All parts are written from the two perspectives of the Predator and the Prey in first-person narrative. "Predator" comprises three parts of the five; the Predator refers to Alaa, the Utopian protagonist, and "Prey" refers to Gaber, the other protagonist from *al-Aghyar*. The titles stress the death game that has become trendy among Utopia's teenagers.

Safiya's rape, and, later, a march of fellow inhabitants of Shubra towards the gates of the Utopia.

3.2.1 Symbiotic Relation between Slums and Gated Communities

In this novel, urban borders beget rigid hierarchical boundaries creating multidimensional effects. Namely, those borders generate their rules and order, arrange the space, discipline bodies, grant urban citizens new identities, and, most importantly, generate their own rules and order. The urban borders in this dystopia impose exclusion and segregation and simultaneously breed a sense of unity inside them. In contrast, the hierarchical boundaries are un-penetrative. Despite the militarization of the gates, crossing through them is never denied but monitored and regulated. In other words, such crossings reinforce the power hierarchy and keep maintaining this hierarchy functional and productive.

Despite the gates of the coastal settlements and separating desert, the inhabitants of both communities, *al-Aghyar* and the Utopians, remain strongly connected. As much as both the natural and the artificial separations prevent the chaotic collision between the worlds of the rich and the poor, they impose a conflict-free co-existence that is prone to an explosion at any chance of a crack, and those gates effectively organize the movement affirming the symbiotic relationship between both sides. Every morning special trucks carry the workers from *al-Aghyar* through the desert, and only by their IDs are they authorized to enter the gates of the Utopia under the watchful surveillance of the retired US Marines, who do not hesitate to shoot any of them if they are slightly suspected of threat to the safety of rigid rules. Or as Gaber put it "[i]t's easy to leave Utopia, but it's impossible to get in to it without a 'slavery card'" (141, Orig. 174). *Al-*

Aghyar is only permitted in slave labor, e.g., housekeeping and sewage; those of *al-Aghyar* who work are considered fortunate. Utopians are in dire need of *al-Aghyar* to take care of such business. Besides, the metropolis slum forms the sole market for business and monopolies the rich control inside their settlements that keep them rich. These businesses monopolize mainly medicine and telecommunication.

In this sense, the physical crossing is unidirectional: The supervised poor cross to serve the rich, while the rich avoid interaction outside Utopia's gates and stay protected from the angry poor. From that place, despite the rigid gates, movement across the gates demonstrates a symbiotic relationship between the abject and the affluent; they both need each other to survive equally and fear and threaten each other. Those crossings create well-regulated contact zones. Within those contact zones, the affluent maintain to stay on the top of the power hierarchy controlling the crossing and the role of *al-Aghyar* to ensure their obedience while staying at the bottom of the hierarchy and contained outside the gates. At the same time, the affluent are aware that the more strictly those contact zones are ruled, the angrier the population of the metropolis slum become. *Al-Agyhyar* are described from the perspective of the Utopians as "[t]hey don't talk and don't raise their eyes, but you can smell their unpleasant mix of hatred, malice, flattery and suppressed anger" (28, Orig. 40). On the other side, *al-Aghyar* are allowed to see the wonders of the paradise-like Utopia and the affluent behavior of its inhabitants. They have a good source of money and drugs. Nonetheless, those 'fortunate' slave laborers generate mythical yet attractive narratives of those living behind gates. At the same time, those narratives breed nothing but jaundice and

resentment in the souls of all-*Aghyar* and work as a reminder of their misery and abject reality.

Like Utopia is a forbidden place for *al-Aghyar*, *al-Aghyar*'s territory is also a banned space for the younger generation who never witnessed anything but affluence inside the gates. Both areas are attractive for sneaking, promising exploration and adventure, and a breakout from the stagnation of life. As for *al-Aghyar,* they dig secret tunnels connecting them to Utopia's heart. Those tunnels are not accessible to all the population lest they be discovered. They are controlled by thugs *al-Aghyar* needs to pay to allow them to sneak into Utopia for a short robbery trip. On the other side, sneaking into *al-Aghyar*'s territory becomes a target spot for the trendy 'sports' among the young Utopians to bring back the rush of adrenaline and the emotion of fear lost in their abundant life.

For *al-Aghyar*, their crossing goes unnoticed and is arguably ineffective in destabilizing the strict power hierarchy, as they can successfully cheat the order. The novel does not detail the daily encounter between *al-Aghyar* as workers and their masters inside Utopia—only glimpses, nor on their unnoticed trips for thefts. We only learn about those interactions in the form of stories by *al-Aghyar* in the truck (5.1). Despite sneaking and undermining the borders being shared on both sides, the daring crossing of the Utopians still underscores their position at the top of the hierarchy. However, the novel is preoccupied with one rare incident and its ramifications that turn the power hierarchy upside down, creating a new contact zone that allows the abject temporarily to have the upper hand over the affluent.

3.2.2 Life of the Affluent: The Predator

We learn about the Utopians' lives through Alaa's narrative voice. Alaa is a sixteen-year-old teenager from the second generation who lives a dystopic oxymoron: existing in a boring utopia. Existing in Utopia is to be challenged by boredom. He defines Utopia as the "artificial paradise [….] where looking for a way to pass every minute of your life consumes you" (9-10, Orig. 19). Despite the affluence and security, he struggles with his existence inside Utopia and his identity as a Utopian. Another part of his identity is built on being an inverse of *al-Aghyar* and what they represent. Although he antagonizes *al-Aghyar*, he finds a reason to envy them. For him, "[n]othing changes. Sometimes it seems to [him] that [they] are prisoners, and the people outside are the free ones. It reminds you of the Nazi concentration camps you see in war movies" (11, Orig. 20). Locked inside the gates, Alaa grows claustrophobic. The brutality of the isolation in fiction, as described by Alaa echoes real experiences when some youth from Cairo respond when they first moved to one of the high-end compounds with their families. In a recent interview in Egyptian Streets magazine, a university student at the German University of Cairo, an elite private university, comments on his experience in moving away from the old middle-class neighborhood, Mohandessin, “When we moved into what is literally the desert, it’s almost as if I forgot how to communicate with people, being so remote and distant, geographically and also emotionally at one point” (Egyptian Streets)[14].

[14] Later, he moved back to the old family apartment in Mohandessin, close to Cairo’s city center, while his younger brother preferred the new compound’s life.

Alaa says, "it's weird that you notice how boredom makes your sexual behavior aggressive and sadistic" (9). Dystopian boredom inside Utopia transforms everyday pleasures, like enjoying food or sex, into an expression of anger and violence. Deforming the body becomes aesthetic practice done carefully by plastic doctors. Alaa has a wound on his forehead that arouses enough repulsiveness and sexual appeal but also looks artificial enough to avoid disgust. Alaa's generation creates artificially controlled horror that imitates the real one outside the gates. By showing off a wound in public spaces, the affluent body intentionally locates itself indifferently between being offensive to the older generation but still not too disgusting to the peers of the same age. This ambivalent situation dissolves the border between everyday aesthetics and disgust. In contrast, the only border left for him to be challenged is the gates of the Utopia that protect him from the flood of poverty.

Alaa and his peers are free to abuse drugs at younger ages ranging from marijuana, LSD, and "philogistine" (a fictional new drug). "In one hour, I've done everything, and there's nothing left in life that interests me or that I want" (17, Orig. 27). Teens have unprotected sex resulting in girls getting legal abortions. Living in a space that lacks boundaries has deflated this human instinct of being curious. The only unconquered border is the one that separates the affluent from the abject, who are the embodiment of terror and cruelty. This state of absolute boredom and stagnation causes twists in the usage and the significance of some affective words and their synonyms. It becomes rare to use words like "stimulate your curiosity or enthusiasm" (11 Orig. 20). Whereas words like 'terror,' 'terrible,' and 'cruel' are synonyms of 'seductive,' 'excitement,' and 'ecstasy.' Inside Utopia, Arabic is no longer an official language; it is left for *al-Aghyar*.

Alaa's generation exhibits a form of historical amnesia, characterized by what John Clarke defines as "the disposition to omit, forget or delete aspects of history that are, at least, inconvenient for the politics and policies of the present" (153). Alaa himself expresses his disinterest in history, stating that he is more concerned with the present and future rather than the past and how things came to be (22, Orig. 33). Unlike contemporary Egypt[15], there is a complete acceptance and normalization of relations with the Israelis in Utopia. Mosques, churches, and synagogues coexist peacefully in this utopian gated society, but this cultural and religious diversity seems limited to the privileged few. Israelis in the Utopia who work as plastic doctors reproduce war wounds from the six-day war of the twentieth century as a modern appropriation aesthetic feature. Although Alaa is aware of the Arab-Israeli conflict and has personally experienced its impact, having lost an uncle in the six-day war, he remains indifferent to the past. His identity is solely rooted in his present historical context. In his introduction, he describes himself as a

> [s]ixteen years old, and you don't belong anywhere except Utopia. You're a Utopian resident, softened by a life of luxury and boredom. You cannot tell an American from an Egyptian to an Israeli. You end up unable to tell yourself apart from the other people. If it weren't for the remnants of lust in your veins, you couldn't tell men from women. (6, Orig. 15)

Against historical amnesia, the identity of Utopians is closely tied to their sense of place, as Achilles Mbembe elucidates that "[t]here is no identity without territoriality, that is the vivid consciousness of having a place and mastery of it, whether by birth, because one has conquered it, or because one has settled there

[15] Despite the signature of the Camp David Accord and the peace treaty between Egypt and Israel in 1979, the general popular mood of the Egyptians is still against the normalization with Israel.

and it is now part of self-representations. The territoriality par excellence is locality, that, *home*, the small space and inherited estate […]" (26). Using Mbembe's definition, Utopia's identity is forged within a secluded location, isolated by its gates on the northern coast and detached from any historical associations. Temporality holds no sway in Utopia; there is only an enduring present, overshadowed by the apprehension of sharing the same fate as the parallel present of *al-Aghyar.*

On a generational level, there is observable friction between the parents' generation, the founders' generation responsible for the segregated communities, and the children's generation, the second Utopian generation, who are born inside the gates. As for the latter generation, they never experience the misery and fear of poverty and the transformation into gated communities nor feel gratitude for the isolation, as "everything is theirs by birthright" (12, org. 21). Whereas the former generation still lives with guilt and the memory of the past which explain the continuity of religiosity among the first generation. In contrast, the second generation eliminates any feature that connects them to religion despite the vast existence of mosques, churches, and synagogues. In a sarcastic tone, Alaa explains the insistence of the parents' generation to keep religiosity, as "the adults cling to all that because they're afraid of losing everything in an instant—of losing their privilege, of finding themselves outside. They still don't feel that they deserve the life they're living […]" (12, Orig. 21). Thus, they exert more effort by performing "a great number of pilgrimages and prayers to avoid this [of al-Aghyar] bleak fate" (38, Orig. 52). On the other hand, the first generation also develops their addictive consumerism as a mechanism to cover up both guilt and boredom. Larine, Alaa's mother, spends most of her day shopping for goods

she will never use to cover up the frustration of a sexless marriage with his father, Mourad Bey. Alaa comments on her behavior, saying that “[i]t’s because of boredom. It’s because of frustration” (17, Orig. 27).

The interaction between the founder generation and the second one embodies the contiguity between order and chaos. The founder generation is responsible for family courts deciding on private property violations. The settlements are united and ordered by high respect for private property and “plenty of willingness to appease” (15, Orig. 24). Family courts replace proper legislative courts and function under the "all-purpose motto: Do what you want, as long as you do not infringe on the property of the rest of Utopia's residents" (25, Orig. 37). In one instance, Rasim, a friend of Alaa, is brought to one of these courts, charged with destroying and stealing part of a mall while being heavily drunk. The case is settled through compensation paid by his father. In return, Rasim experiences “the excitement, the tension, and the shame of stealing” (14, Orig. 24). Such tribal laws are agreed on as long as they sustain the stability of the status quo of peace in this community, as they guarantee coherence in this society from collapsing into the void of chaos or, say, sliding to be like *al-Aghyar*.

3.2.3 Life of the Abject: The Prey

Gaber is the narrative voice of *al-Aghyar* through which we get an idea of how life is experienced in collapsed Cairo. Although there are not many details on the events that led to the current situation in the novel, the protagonist, Gaber, from the poor, provides us with insights in a documentary form from past reports published in the pre-dystopian newspaper. Gaber is probably in his thirties, a

university graduate who remains jobless. He has witnessed the gradual collapse of his city, describing it in his first monologue:

> "[i]t's like watching the sun at sunset. You never know when the day finished and night has begun. […] I only remember that things grew worse without an abrupt change. Each time, the difference between yesterday's situation and today's was slight, so a person closes his eyes every night, muttering to himself: 'That's life. Life is still possible. You are still capable of finding food, shelter, and some treatment. So let tomorrow come.'" (47, Orig. 63-64)

In *al-Aghyar*'s territory, the aspects of poverty and the disappearance of the central government are reflected everywhere. Cairo sinks into a colossal slum of shacks with an overflow of sewage and garbage; chronic diseases afflict most of the population; abject poverty and normalization of prostitution prevail. Naturally, the firm gates of the Utopia are erected as protection from those who fall down the social ladder, swarming their affluent, clean territory.

Gaber, in a way, points out that the ability to survive, regardless of the circumstances, allows the transformation of Cairo into a chaotic mega-slum. Standing minimum quality of life transforms the space into a hostile world, where the reasons for survival become rare. In a concise description, Gaber characterizes his society as one where a nine-year-old child looks like 'an old, experienced prostitute' (66). One prominent feature that marks Shubra after the segregation is the disappearance of the security state and its bordering of the public spaces. Now places are accessible in principle without the disciplinary powers of the police asking mostly male citizens for their IDs or rendering males' appearances suspicious. As much as the existence of the police is mainly to resume order and security, their disappearance causes chaos—an allusion to

Mubarak's famous statement during the uprising in 2011: "a choice between chaos and stability."

Shubra deteriorated into a cluster of shacks made of tin and bamboo plunged into "a mixture of mud, leftover washing water, and overflowing sewage" (39-40, Orig. 54). Public utility companies have disappeared to leave electricity and water "an individual problem for each one of them. Whoever can get an electric generator or dig a well does all right; the rest just have to make do" (37-8, Orig. 51). The value of the currency sinks dramatically resulting in massive inflation. For example, a heap of filthy used clothes is offered at a hundred pounds, while it is only worth a quarter of a dollar, and due to rocketing prices, *al-Aghyar* prefers, at most times, bartering. (39, Orig. 53) In a sarcastic tone, Alaa, the Utopian, is puzzled, saying that "[t]he enigma of this country is that there is a buyer at all times and at any price, which proves that Marx was probably an idiot when he imagined that the balance would tip when the poor are no longer able to buy" (38, Orig. 51). Medical care and hospitals have disappeared altogether, and there is widespread consumption of herbal medicine sold on the streets. Despite poor conditions and diseases, fertility rates are still high compared to the birth rate inside Utopia, which hits zero. Like for the Utopians, religion continues to play a role in the lives of *al-Aghyar,* as it stands for a practice of hope and desperation. *Al-Aghyar* is still religious in the 'hope' that they would be lucky in the afterlife.

Dystopian Shubra seems, at first sight, a chaotic place, yet it still retains its order and law. Like Utopia's inhabitants, *al-Aghyar* organizes their tribal laws to permit a coexistence in such a hostile environment. To get protection, one has "to stick to gangs. Stick to the strong who take what they want. You have to gain their trust

and convince them that you're necessary. But you shouldn't attach yourself to them more than you have to and lose your life when they lose theirs…" (59, orig. 78). Those gangs frequently fight inside the subway's deserted tunnels. Their fights reflect the abject status of scarcity as they center around a street dog to be slaughtered and grilled after starving for a few days. Benefiting from both the spread of addiction and the gang's protection, Gaber makes his living as a drug dealer by selling a diluted concentration of the drug, Phlogistine, at a high price to the young. He justifies his job that "[t]he best fraudster, without exception, is the one who adulterates drugs. This saintly man works for people's benefit, [...] He's a social reformer raking in money" (65, Orig. 88).

Besides, *Al-Aghyar* suffers from urban amnesia. The inhabitants have no memory of urban landmarks, e.g., the previous existence of movie theaters or subways; even they do not know the function of those places anymore. After a short conversation between Gaber and his friend, Zenhom, the former angrily comments, "[t]he son of bitch has no idea what 'cinema' means, but he argues in vain" (48, orig 50). Nevertheless, *al-Aghyar* are quite aware of the responsibility of the Settlements in their misery. This awareness is kept vivid in their daily life due to the trendy practice of their being hunted by young Utopians. Whenever Utopians sneak into their territory, they are rescued by a helicopter flown by the retired US Marines firing the angry crowds. This frequent act leaves *Al-Aghyar* with "more blind, black hatred that could find no outlet to pour itself" (78, orig. 103). In one of these attacks, a friend of Gaber, Azouz, dies and is left with one arm, and the other is taken inside the gates of the Utopia as a trophy, while his other friend, Mursi, is killed in random shootings like many others. Azouz's brother, however, swears to retaliate against the death of his brother.

As no one is exempted from work in Cairene slums, women are no exception. It becomes familiar to find women standing in front of those shacks providing sex for money. In such dystopic circumstances in the slums, it is challenging to expect heroism from others, especially women, who mostly become sex workers. In one incident, Gaber loses his eye after a failed attempt to protect his first girlfriend in a bloody fight with the monstrous pimp, el-Sirgani. As a result of this experience, he acquired a valuable survival lesson in a hostile environment: to avoid becoming excessively entangled in such circumstances. He reflects, "[...], but I know of my limits and I know that's what has kept me alive" (59, Orig. 78). After this painful lesson, Gaber has limited his care and protection to Safiya[16]. Safiya is sick with tuberculosis, and for the lack of medication, she treats herself with an infusion of herbs and warming her chest. Gaber wants to believe that she will recover while she is sure she "will die in a puddle of blood" (130, Orig. 162).

On a personal level, Gaber, like Alaa, struggles with his identity: "I ended up not belonging to the [*al-Aghyar*] and not belonging to Utopia. In every situation, I am strange, different, peculiar, foolish, uncomfortable and unintegrated" (109, orig. 138). Unlike Alaa's identity that is constructed on his attachment to the place he lives in, Gaber's identity is rooted in his relationship with his sister. Despite his estrangement and unlike the broken family ties inside Utopia or slums, Gaber demonstrates a uniquely close relationship with his sister, the only remaining family member. Protecting her becomes his purpose in life: "[he] wouldn't die and leave Safiya to steal or shake her behind, selling the only thing she has to sell. [He] wouldn't die and leave her to women who scratch her face and call her filthy

[16] Safiya means' leader's portion of the loots,' or it can mean diverted from the triple Arabic verb root, 'safa,' which means purify. Her name, therefore, signifies preciousness and purity—attributes that set up the frame through which Gaber treats his sister.

names. [He] wouldn't die and let her go hungry. [He] wouldn't die and let her live without a life" (61, Orig. 81). As her name suggests, Safiya is precious and pure; purity refers to her virginity. Safiya and Gaber prove the opposite in a society where survival is for the fittest, where there is no good reason to behave with kindness or a minimum of morals. He describes his relationship with Safiya as "[he] didn't play the role of the knight. I played the role of the cloak itself" (61, Orig. 81). In their relationship, one can see minor resistance and resentment toward their reality that lacks the bare minimum of morality.

3.3 One Gate, Two Dystopias: Boredom(s) and Death

Before analyzing the new contact zone created by the encounter between Gaber and Alaa, it is essential to elaborate on the affective motivation behind the death game. The trendy practice of hunting *Al-Aghyar* in their territory demonstrates boredom's pivotal effect on border-crossing and in transforming the significance of death. First, it is helpful to examine the connection between the border (crossing) and the emotion of boredom. Because of the physical existence of the gates and the rigid structural borders, the persistent feeling of entrapment overwhelms the daily lives of Alaa and Gaber. One element that marks the dystopian realm in the novel is the bleak status of waiting and stagnation. The roots of the emotion of boredom instigate the centrality of death in both communities.

The association between boredom and death highlights the interconnectedness of these experiences in the narrative. As a pervasive and universal emotion, boredom affects both communities, shaping their perceptions and behaviors. The emotional impact of boredom fuels the fascination with death and the willingness

to engage in the hunting game, where the lives of *al-Aghyar* are treated as disposable, and their deaths become a source of entertainment. Overall, exploring boredom in the context of the dystopian setting sheds light on the transformation of death into a spectacle and its role in breaking the cycle of monotony. It underscores the interconnectedness of emotions, social structures, and the quest for meaning in an oppressive and stagnant environment.

3.3.1 Boredom in Daily Life

In this section, it is interesting to note the different motivations for seeking entertainment and distraction between urban and rural youth in Egypt. While urban youth may seek fun as an escape from the pressures of Islamic piety, rural youth may resort to entertainment as a way to combat the monotony and hopelessness of their everyday lives. The role of religion in alleviating boredom is also noteworthy, as it provides a sense of connectedness and purpose in the face of existential ennui.

In the face of the Islamic revival movement that has taken place in Egypt starting in the 1970s, Asef Bayat observes in his article, "Islamism and the Politics of Fun," that youth have resorted to fun and entertainment for their sake. He concludes that their choice works as an escape from the pressure of the movement's project of moral improvement, which calls upon its followers to strive toward life abiding by the commandments of God. On the other side, Samuel Schiekle, in his anthropological research, extends the research on entertainment to Egyptian youth in rural areas. Schiekle finds that entrainment is not anymore because of the pressures of the Islamic movement but of boredom because of economic and social stagnation. Rural youth resort to entertainment practices to

pass the time and avoid boredom. Accordingly, in the face of the "existential boredom [which] implies a denial of hope," the role of religion and piety comes to alleviate the harshness of this emotion and provides a sense of "connectedness" (266). In this sense, religion becomes a source of relief more than pressure. Such an attitude resonates with behaviors in the slums and the settlements of the dystopia.

Boredom can be defined as "something expected does not occur" (Fenichel qtd. in Spacks 5). Patricia Meyer Spacks states that boredom is a universal and central social problem in the twentieth century (and by extension to the twenty-first) (3). Spacks argues that we should see boredom as "a social construction" and as distinctive as social and economic classes. In perspective, she echoes Adam Philip's observation that "we should speak not of boredom, but boredoms, because the notion itself includes a multiplicity of moods and feelings that resist analysis; and this, we can say, is integral to the function of boredom as a kind of blank condensation of psychic life" (qtd. in Spacks 7). In his article, Schiekle focuses on the poor rural areas of Egypt, where they exercise killing time as a way to combat "monotony and hopelessness of everyday life" (260). He specifies that boredom among rural youth "is primarily framed as deprivation, not saturation" (Schielke 256).

In *Utopia,* hopelessness and boredom at the backdrop of endless waiting are the primary affects immanent in the text as a reflection of the state of the urban degeneration of the metropolis and the suburban isolation. Those two emotions underlie the dystopian citizens' lives and dictate their actions. The citizens attempt direly to break free from the void of those two emotions before the cruelty

of the bordered/ entrapped spaces erases them. As a result, violence occurs as the one common byproduct between those two communities, “as a symbol of their dehumanization and the total extinction of ethics—the disappearance of all moral principles” (Madoeuf and Pages-El Karoui 290-1). There is an underlying belief that there is more to life than abject poverty and limitless abundance—more to expect. As both suffer entrapment and endless waiting for something to break the monotony and predictability of their lives, the manifestations of those two kinds of boredom vary. Before advancing to how the emotion of boredom facilitates the exposure and significance of death, it is equally important to view how boredom infiltrates language and dictates its performance before attempting to cross the gates toward al-Aghyar territory.

3.3.2 Narrating Boredoms of Two Dystopias through Enumerations

In this section, I analyze the effect of boredom on language usage and its performance inside the narrative. In the novel, there are recurrent enumerations through lists that I consider manifestations of boredom. Robert E. Belknap defines lists as “plastic, flexible structures in which an array of constituent units coheres through specific relations generated by specific forces of attraction” (2). He describes the nature of lists as ‘versatile’ (2), that “may convey a specific impression; its role is the creation of meaning, rather than merely the storage of it” (3). Belknap differentiates between the meaning generated by pragmatic lists and the ones found in literary works. While the former lists provide information in a more direct, simple fashion, the latter ones are more complex and ambiguous, inviting “the reader to generate his or her sense of meaning, to piece matters together in whatever way seems right” (Belknap 5). Drawing on this

understanding of the role of lists, Christian Junge, in his article, “Doing Things with Lists—Enumeration in Arabic Prose,” investigates more profoundly the role of lists in Arabic Prose with a particular focus on the 19th-century Arabic prose, usually referred to as Nahda (‘awakening’). He analyzes the list in Arabic prose through four essential elements: Items, length, arrangement, and frame. In his definition of the factor of the frame, Junge defines it as “a kind of hermeneutical game manual that prevents arbitrariness and yet facilitates a multitude of readings” (287).

Reading Gaber’s and Alaa’s lists can give insights into each one’s life of deprivation and saturation and the related affects. Despite the intense details of their lives, they decide to describe some parts of their dystopian lives in a minimalized fashion. All lists in the text appear before meeting each other except one Alaa compiles after meeting Gaber. Those lists suggest a recipe for a dystopian life inside and outside the gates, languishing under existential boredom, stagnation, and long waiting. Moreover, the vertical shape of the lists introduces a performative function to the text; they interrupt the chaos that swarms the text forming a unique moment of temporary order and minimalism. In other words, boredom amid turmoil re-introduces language to create an ordered, minimalistic description of reality.

On the one hand, Alaa perceives the life of his generation as a game. In the following list, he catalogs the predominant behavior of his generation who suffers isolation and an absence of meaningful life:

> Excitement.
>
> Crime.

Assault.

Breaking the rules.

Provocation.

Violating taboos.

Disorderly conduct.

Misdemeanor.

Destruction.

Tension.

Adrenaline.

Change.

Disobedience.

Dissolution.

Shock.

Privilege.

Astonishment.

That's the name of the game. (15, orig. 24-25)

The list here consists only of a single word followed by a full stop, as Junge describes this practice as “cut[ting] the items short and thereby exposing the bare word material […]” (284). The choice of words brings synonyms of breaking the rules and the accompanying emotions of euphoria. The list establishes causal intertwinement between the intentional breaking of laws and the pursuit of intense feelings of ‘excitement,’ ‘adrenaline,’ ‘shock,’ and ‘astonishment.’ This generation’s life is centered around continuous attempts to experience intense emotions, e.g., provocation, shock, and astonishment, believing such feelings

can restore a sense of liveliness. Instead, this excess life within guarded gates only intensifies the void they feel.

On the other hand, Gaber repeats his list twice in vertical and horizontal fashions. Gaber expresses his position in life through deprivation and elimination. However, the core of his list (and, by extension, his life) is having a dream. The dream here is synonymous with anticipation of an unknown and obscure action. Through a long list that works as a checklist, he declares that he can go 'without' basics of life (e.g., food, shelter), values (e.g., dignity), human connections (e.g., family, friends), or commodities (e.g., shoes, trousers). For him, life is reduced to two main things, his sister, Safeyia (who gives meaning to the present), and dreams (the desire for a purpose for the future). His list reads as follows:

> A person could endure life without shelter.
> Without food.
> Without a drink (perhaps for several days).
> Without clothes.
> Without a roof over his head.
> Without a sweetheart.
> Without dignity.
> Without a family (except Safiya).
> Without a refrigerator.
> Without a phone.
> Without a television.
> Without a tie.
> Without friends.

Without shoes.

Without trousers.

Without phlogistine.

Without a condom.

Without headache medicine.

Without a laser pointer.

But he couldn't endure life without dreams.

Since childhood, I hadn't experienced life without dreams.

[…] Only at twenty did I realize the brutal truth: that I had to live without dreams. (51-52, orig. 68-69)

Gaber's list describes deprivation and reduction; amid the chaotic life and place, he can create order through those vertical lists. Gaber is purposeful when it comes to the essence of his miserable life. 'Dreams' are the space where the lack of things and connections can be possible. In this imaginary space, anything can be present; 'dreams' are the synonym for meaning. Unlike Alaa's description, despite the extravagance and limitlessness, the absence of life is lacking. However, before his murder, Gaber recites the same list[17], where the vacuumed space left for dreams is filled with an intentional, meaningful decision: "One day, I will die, and I'll come back to haunt them in the guise of a demon or a ghost, and I'll make their lives hell. None of them will be safe, no matter how much they try to hide from me. But I won't kill these two" (109, Orig. 139).

This life of deprivation and limitation is textually reflected in Gaber's narration of his romantic life. He lists his love stories in the formula of the name of his girlfriend

[17] This list has been dropped from the translation, only found in the original

between brackets and a verb vertically: “[(]Azza[)] laughs. Azza moves. Azza scowls. Azza winks. Azza is elated. Azza argues. Azza wriggles. Azza whispers. Azza smiles. Azza thinks” (54, org. 72). This list is repeated twice with the other girlfriends, Nagat and Awatif (see 56-58, org. 75-77). Those lists are constantly interrupted once the woman ‘thinks’ and a serious conversation on the relationship’s future crops up. Like these shortlists, those stories are short and interrupted by any plan. Poverty and the inability to build a family are the reasons Gaber cut off the relationship. Gaber’s life/ lists have no space for plans, only obscure, undefined dreams.

After the crossing and the encounter between Gaber and Alaa, the latter describes the former in the form of a list:

> His ears are filled with wax.
> His toes are ulcerous and stick out of his pathetic sandals.
> His glasses are soldered together.
> His eye is ruined.
> His future is bleak.
> His sister is an animal with consumption.
> His food is rotten.
> His books are out of date. His dreams are smothered in their cradle.
>
> His ideas are obsolete.
> His fingernails are black.
> His hair is gone curly and matted with dirt.
> His name is Gaber.
> His people are riffraff.
> His friends are scum.
> Despite all of that, he walked like a human being and talked like a human being.
> Despite all of that, he didn’t throw himself at my feet, begging me to cut his

> arm off.
> Despite all of that, he slapped Germinal and threatened us. (97, org. 124-125)

The repetition of ‘despite’ stresses Gaber’s life of scarcity and the astonishment at his behavior in the face of such a life. Gaber’s attitude deconstructs Alaa’s stereotypical narratives on *al-Aghyar*, triggering a feeling of awe than is generated from a different source. In this case, astonishment is generated from unbelieving that one of *al-Aghyar* can behave as a human with dignity and see the Utopians as equals.

In his comment on Borges’ passage of enumeration in his preface to *The Order of Things*, Michel Foucault says that the list of words that might defy a particular connection is heterotopic. He explains further that

> it is not simply the oddity of unusual juxtapositions we face here. We are all familiar with the disconcerting effect of the proximity of extremes, or, quite simply, with the sudden vicinity of things that have no relation to each other; the mere act of enumeration that heaps them all together has a power of enchantment all its own (xvii)

In other words, Foucault notes that the nature of listing is to “break(s) up all the ordered surfaces” (xvi) and to “transgress (…) the boundaries of all imagination” (xvii) to detect new systems and relations. Those lists are narrated to draw attention to Alaa and Gaber's commonalities and exceptional personalities in their chaotic communities. The narration of the lists attempts to create unexpected space of order and expression of each character’s voice and comments on their lives.

3.3.3 Slum Hunting: Narratives of Death

In this section, I propose that the practice of slum hunting is a critical antithesis of 'slum tourism.' Slum tourism is another synonym of what is called 'poverty tourism.' In their book on slum tourism, Fabian Frenzel et al. mark that it has become a trendy practice in the Global South (1). They point out that "the main characteristic of this phenomenon—often also called 'slumming'—is the touristic valorization of poverty-stricken urban areas of the metropolises in so-called developing or emerging nations, which are visited primarily by tourists from the Global North" (Frenzel et al. 1). 'Slumming' was coined in England around 1840 in which "a burgeoning practice of members of London's higher classes visiting the East End, often guided by police officers in civilian attire, journalists and clergymen" (Frenzel et al. 2). Historically, slum tourism started in New York 1880s when wealthy tourists from London were eager to get guided visits to Manhattan, Chicago, and San Francisco (Frenzel et al. 2). In the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, slum tourism has stretched from sightseeing on the other side of the city to the other side of the world—namely, the Global South (see Steinbrink and Pott 2010). Slum tourism was started in Egypt in 2005 by the American eco-activist T.H. Culhane, who established 'Solar CITIES Urban Eco Tours' (Solar CITIES 2008). He planned a guided tour through the slums of Darb-al-Ahmar and Manshiyat Nasser ('Garbage City'). While the potential of poverty sightseeing is to have empathy, slum hunting is a sheer derealization of the other. The Predator justifies the deadly practice by saying, "Isn't that strange. I've read a lot about the subject. Did you know that hunting tribes of Bushmen were a sanctioned sporting activity in South Africa in the last century? In 1870, the last Bushmen from the Cape died out from all the hunting" (24, Orig.36).

3.3.4 Slum Tourism to Slum Hunting

Death is omnipresent in the lives of both *al-Aghyar* and the Utopians. The death incidents are abundant and random in *al-Aghyar*'s territory; either it happens to them, e.g., the Marines shooting at them from helicopters or at the gates, or they inflict it on each other. Stuck in the limbo of waiting, the Predator and the Prey have internally given in to the idea of exposing themselves to death. Utopians willingly expose themselves to death, e.g., through car races or slum hunting. Despite death being part of their daily lives, through the crossing, Gaber's and Alaa's exposure to death creates a contact zone that might promise them a meaning of life beyond boredom and despair. In this zone, death will provide Gaber with "the dream beyond sex." As for Alaa, he is supplied with excitement and astonishment beyond his expectations. In this section, I focus on the evolution of death's significance as a motivation for the Utopians to cross the physical border. To understand the appearance of this game of death, one should focus on how death is perceived on both sides and the role of the gates in transforming the meaning of death.

The US marine-guarded gates are not only to keep the affluent separated from the abject but also to protect the former, who are constantly afraid of being attacked by the latter. The continuous probability of danger lurking at the gates of Utopia is a defining emotion shaping the second generation, who have never experienced life outside the gates. When this generation is kept in the gates to ensure their safety, they never experience danger. The extreme status of affluence and material availability dulls the emotions of excitement and ecstasy in the second generation.

In the novel's opening scene, Alaa and Germinal witness the death of one of *al-Aghyar,* who tries to sneak into Utopia and is shot at once by the Marines from a helicopter. Alaa describes the emotional reactions of his girlfriend, Germinal, saying,

> Germinal gasped in terror.
> Germinal gasped in ecstasy.
> Death: the great game we haven't yet played. (5, orig. 13)

To duplicate this affective experience, Alaa and Germinal sneak outside the Utopia to 'play death' and feel 'terror' and 'ecstasy' again. In *al-Aghyar*'s territory, the intrusive helicopter with the retired US Marines appears on a rescue mission to pick up one of the second-generation adventurers (see 3.3). As Gaber narrates the scene, he describes the angry crowds as a reaction to the random shootings and systemic violations of the Utopians ' lives and deaths. One can see how the same killing scene elicits two different emotions, excitement and anger, which work in an interdependent dynamic. Hunts are constantly increasing to illicit ecstasy; the more they occur, the more anger they cause. This dynamic predicts an inevitable clash between the two sides that will destabilize this dystopian reality. The core idea of hunting is to expose oneself to death. Although a sizable number of *al-Aghyar* are already visible inside the Utopia, Alaa and his peers prefer to get out of the gates of affluence, safety, and boredom to experience danger. In their experience, facing threats and the proximity of death is their only way to regain a feeling of life and liberate themselves from the control of confining borders.

Judith Butler's analysis in *Precarious Life* highlights how violence and death can be facilitated in political contexts. Butler's critique primarily focuses on how the

US justifies the suspicion and killing of "other" people in the context of the War on Terror. However, the argument can be extended to apply to other politically tense situations where systematic violence is employed to control fear or mask national vulnerability. According to Butler, the privilege of life is not equally granted to everyone but is instead contingent upon discursive constructions of ethnic, political, and social commonalities. Those who lack these commonalities are denied this privilege, and their lives are deemed invaluable, rendering their deaths ungrievable (34-36). The discourse surrounding these lives derealizes and renders them unreal, resulting in violence that fails to injure or negate them because they are already negated (33). In situations of political fragmentation, Butler refers to this process as the "violence of the derealization" (33), which forms a vicious circle of violence targeting spectral bodies (34). This analysis highlights the ways in which discourses and power dynamics influence the valuation and devaluation of lives in precarious political situations. It highlights the importance of understanding the mechanisms through which violence is enacted and how it perpetuates social divisions and inequalities.

Accordingly, Alaa not only derealizes the lives of the *al-Aghyar* but also perceives the manifestation of class distinctions in the way death is experienced and performed. The manner in which death occurs sets the classes apart and reinforces the border between them. As a means of distancing himself from the abject and affirming his self-worth, Alaa refuses to embrace death as suicide. He explains:

> [w]hy don't we kill ourselves? I don't know. Suicide seems vulgar, relatively common. All that foolishness reminds you of [*al-Aghyar*]. The lovelorn youth sets himself alight—the vulgarity of it! Kerosene, a flicker of light, a

> poor neighborhood, and some chickens. Chickens, of all things of it, make my stomach turn. The father who failed to feed his children, the girl who swallows a bottle of aspirin. (20, orig. 31- 32)

While he confesses that death unites those outside and inside the gates, performing an ending is all that stretches a line between the two parties; in Alaa's logic, the superiority and elegance of death imply that they should be the killers who take *al-Aghyar's* 'worthless lives.' In the ambivalent opening scene of the novel and the start of Alaa's entry, he describes a vague killing scene of *al-Aghyar* as "[a] man worn out of running. A man worn out by hunger. A man worn out by desperation" (4, org. 11). He goes on denouncing the desperate man's last-minute fight to live instead of complete surrender to death saying,

> [d]on't fight it, you idiot! What would a few more moments of living with the Others [al-*Aghyar*] give you? What haven't you accomplished in the past twenty years that you planned to accomplish if you'd stayed alive? This flight of yours is no different from a cockroach fleeing on the kitchen wall, or an amoeba sliding under the lens of a microscope. It's the call of instinct, that's all. It's a flight reaction that nature planted within you. You should learn how to disregard it so you can get the rest you deserve. (4, org. 12)

'Years of subjugation' becomes the temporal agreement that separates people from other creatures and pushes them to lose their sense of humanity. He gathers his impression about *al-Aghyar* from those who work inside the bubble: "They don't talk and don't raise their eyes, but you can smell their unpleasant mix of hatred, malice, flattery, and suppressed anger. Years of subjugation have made them closer to animals. Day by day, they lose part of their humanity until they end up truly horrible creatures" (28, Orig. 40).

3.4 Out of the Gates: Experiencing Shubra

The three smaller zones within the contact zone of Shubra—the truck, Gaber's shack, and the tunnels—serve as stages for examining interactions and transformations that contribute to the collective revolt and the destabilization of the dystopian order. These zones enable a closer examination of the scope and shift in power dynamics between the predator and prey, particularly through their border crossing.

The truck serves as the initial contact point between Alaa, Germinal, and *al-Aghyar*. It is within this confined space that power dynamics begin to shift. Initially, Alaa and Germinal are seen as the prey, vulnerable, and at the mercy of the workers in the truck. Gaber exerts control and enforces discipline as the dominant figure, but the Utopians also find opportunities to challenge his authority and assert their own agency. Gaber's shack becomes another contact zone where power dynamics continue to evolve. Here, Gaber breaks his silence and speaks on behalf of the *al-Aghyar*, challenging the Utopians and expressing his anger and suffering. In this space, Gaber gains a voice and a chance to assert his own power and perspective. On the other hand, Alaa maintains strategic silence to avoid further provoking Gaber's anger. The power dynamics within the shack fluctuate as both parties depersonalize and dehumanize each other; the encounter also fails to allow mutual understanding and empathy to emerge.

The tunnels, discovered later in the story, serve as a hidden space that connects the two worlds of *al-Aghyar* and Utopia. These underground passageways represent a transformative contact zone where Alaa and Germinal are able to escape the abject conditions of the slums and return to the comfort of their own

world behind the Gates. The tunnels symbolize a form of liberation and offer a potential challenge to the boundaries and divisions enforced by the dystopian society. By analyzing these smaller contact zones within Shubra, we can observe the nuanced shifts in power, the negotiation of identities, and the potential for transformative interactions that contribute to the collective revolt against the oppressive system. These zones highlight the complexities of border crossings and the potential for resistance and change within a dystopian world.

3.4.1 First Contact Zone: The Truck

To sneak out of Utopia, Germinal and Alaa need to be disguised as one of *al-Aghyar*. To escape the land that killed the emotions of excitement in their generation to the land that might promise them 'ecstasy,' they have to be one of *al-Aghyar*. They entice two of *al-Aghyar*, a man and a woman, to work in Utopia with a hamburger sandwich, exploiting their hunger and attacking them separately. They take the workers' garments and "transform[..] into […] poor, dejected; coarse, awful-smelling clothes" (29, org. 42). Besides, they undertake their adventure under the influence of drugs to intensify their feeling of "[e]uphoria," as "adrenaline [is] coursing through [their] veins" (29, org. 42). However, this search for ecstasy comes with its price; the moment the truck sets off, Germinal and Alaa immediately trade their safety by giving up their power to *al-Aghyar* who shares the truck with them.

Through Part One, narrated by Alaa, *al-Aghyar* remain silent, allowing the Predator's voice to dominate and shape how they are perceived. As imitating the abject is a challenging performance for Alaa, he decides to adhere to silence. In the truck, the power hierarchy has been upside down; Germinal and Alaa can no

longer demonstrate their superiority if they want to stay alive. Forced into silence, they can experience the silenced *al-Aghyar*. Before setting off on his adventure, Alaa always experienced what he describes as “the menace silence of *al-Aghyar*.” This behavior often triggers disrespect and justifies not empathizing with their suffering. He interprets their silence as a submission and complacency to their status quo. Now, he and his girlfriend are silenced to cover themselves lest they are exposed and killed. However, Alaa is confident that he will be exposed, regardless of his disguise under the filthy garments, once he is outside the gates.

Due to the strategic silence of the Utopians, *al-Aghyar* voice themselves and get the chance to reverse the lens toward the Utopians’ private lives. At this moment, the power balance shifts toward them, as they are in a position of evaluating Utopians. The Predator and his girlfriend discover that ‘the sheep’ know more about the dark side of their private lives and of their parents than they think they know. Alaa experiences a new side of *al-Aghyar* in the truck—the power of gossip. They exchange among them, in sardonic tones, gossip and secrets of elderly Utopians. Ian Campbell comments on the function of gossiping that *al-Aghyar* “try to survive by wits or brawn in the accelerated Darwinism of greater Cairo” (544). Through a brief conversation, Alaa discovers that his community is fully exposed to the daily gossip and rumors circulating among *al-Aghyar*. In a conversation with a woman, described by Alaa as “a man with a hole, that all” (31 Orig. 44). Upon the woman’s question to Alaa about whom he works for, he mentions his father’s name, Mourad, to find out more about him. Once she utters his father’s name, the woman starts mocking his father’s homosexuality. For the first time, Alaa learns something about his father’s sexual preference, urging him

to think if this woman is" spreading rumors without a shred of truth (...)" (34, Orig. 47).

Due to her striking beauty, the woman suspects that Germinal serves as a servant to Hamzaway Bey, a close associate of Alaa's father. Frightened and unable to communicate fluently in Arabic, Germinal nods in response, prompting the woman to offer a brief but detailed characterization of Hamzawy. She portrays him as a despicable individual - a scoundrel, thief, and illegitimate child (31, Orig. 44). The woman further reveals that he has a penchant for attractive women and maintains a harem of maids. Despite being over sixty years old, he engages in sexual activities with multiple girls in a single bed, an insatiable appetite attributed to the lavish diet of lobsters and the daily consumption of a new medicine called Libidafro, which he imports from France (32, Orig. 45).

Later, Alaa stumbles upon the shocking revelation that this very woman, despite not being conventionally beautiful by Utopian standards, has suffered sexual assault at the hands of Hamzawy and subsequently become pregnant with his child. This distressing truth leaves Alaa with numerous unanswered questions about the fate of this unborn child, representing a unique fusion of Utopian and *al-Aghyar* lineage. In this complex situation, Alaa finds himself temporarily entangled in the influence of *al-Aghyar*. Still, he also recognizes the allure of uncovering a labyrinth of secrets, anticipating "inflamed (...) imagination" and a moment to sense "the pain of ecstasy" (35 Orig. 48).

3.4.2 Dystopian Shubra

Shubra, a vast contact zone, consists of smaller zones where significant confrontations unfold between Alaa and Gaber, specifically, the streets and Gaber's shack. Within the grotesque streets of Shubra, Alaa confronts the harsh reality of *al-Aghyar*'s territory, a reality that surpasses his initial expectations. Surrounded by the embodiment of poverty, Alaa does not empathize with the less fortunate; instead, he becomes even more entrenched in his sense of entitlement to wealth and seclusion. This experience only reinforces his belief that seeking protection behind Utopia's gates is the only means to escape such ugliness.

The moment Alaa and Germinal get off the truck, "[…] nameless faces melt into the darkness and crowds" (36, Orig. 46). After a short wandering among the dead chickens sold as fresh meat, inflation, fake medication, and cheap alcohol, Alaa "conclude[s] that these people were just pretending to be alive. […] They pretend to be human" (37, Orig. 50-51). Interestingly, this remark on *al-Aghyar*'s pretension of living also extends to the Utopians, who pretend to be alive despite their suffering of isolation, boredom, and meaninglessness. Alaa realizes that "all of this was uglier than it needed to be. More disgusting than it needed to be. More real than it should be" (40, Orig. 54). All those ugly scenes arouse in Alaa nothing but disgust and hatred for *al-Aghyar* (40, Orig. 54-55). The reality of ugliness and disgust gradually erodes the simplistic idea of excitement and adventure that he aspires for. The effect of reality propels Alaa to reminisce on his first sexual encounter with Katie, the American girl, at the beach. This moment feels for him like falling "from the peaks of Olympus to crawl through the mud […] learn[ing] that reality is uglier than [he] can imagine" (40, Orig. 55).

Walking through the tin and bamboo-made shacks, one's feet sink in the muddy ground with leftover water and sewage. In front of these shacks stand sex workers in what appears like a seductive pose, "filthy repugnant-looking" women older than thirty-five (40, Orig. 54-55). Now, Germinal and Alaa are aware of the cruciality of their situation. Alaa thinks that one of those sex workers is their best choice to finish their adventure, believing women are easier prey than men. Wrongly enough, he soon discovers those women are not alone but protected by male thugs. Even worse, Alaa decides to go for Sumayia, who is protected by el-Sirgani, the most dangerous thug in Shubra.

Simultaneously, Gaber instantly spots the two Utopians at the bus stop while waiting for his friend, Safwat, to bring him some of the Phlogistine to sell for his business. Gaber identifies them quickly as Alaa and Germinal try to perform poverty in the sea of poor filthy bodies, but, instead, he glimpses them for their "fear, which was unusual. In our world you didn't often see fear; instead, there was a kind of surrender to fate and hopelessness" (66, Orig. 88). Alternatively, he "[sees] amazement. [He sees] disgust. (He sees) loathing. (He sees) apprehensiveness" (66, Orig. 88). In their first encounter, the two worlds collide for the contradicting two sets of affects they display. Getting curious about them, Gaber decided to follow them, witnessing Alaa hits violently Sumyia unconscious. While attacking her, they are spotted by a group of *al-Aghyar* who are grouped around him, screaming the most savage shot: "They aren't like us! They're from Utopia!" (43, Orig. 59) Gaber is able to protect them by distracting this group by showing them the most precious drug, Philogestine. Throwing at them the small bottle of the Philogestine, they start to fight aggressively among themselves, forgetting about the two predators.

3.4.3 Second Contact Zone: Gaber’s Shack

Following the incident, Alaa and Germinal find refuge under Gaber's protection. The clash between their worlds is embodied in the space of Gaber's shack. Inside the shack, the power dynamics of the dystopian world are inverted between Alaa and Gaber. Gaber seizes the opportunity to break the silence of the *al-Aghyar* and speak on their behalf. Alaa, in order to save his life, remains silent, although he feels disgusted by the situation, which contrasts with his initial expectations.

Both sides secretly dehumanize each other, viewing one another as cockroaches. Gaber experiences a profound hatred towards Alaa and Germinal in their presence, comparing them to cockroaches (103, Orig. 131). This hatred is a rare and sincere emotion for him, as life in the slums has numbed his capacity for such feelings. On the other hand, Alaa sees himself as an observer, like an entomologist studying the activities of cockroaches (87, Orig. 113). Despite Gaber saving his life, Alaa maintains a detached perspective, viewing the *al-Aghyar* from the vantage point of a helicopter. This aerial view prevents Alaa from empathizing with or understanding Gaber's anger and suffering as a representative of the *al-Aghyar*.

Despite being aware of his imminent death, Gaber adamantly declares his refusal to kill the two Utopians and instead insists on protecting them and facilitating their safe return to their settlement. He expresses his detestation for reciprocal violence and emphasizes that the Utopians, though misguided, are not to be equated with rats driven by instinct. Gaber's decision to avoid bloodshed amidst his intense emotions of hatred and anger remains enigmatic in a context where death and killing are commonplace and expected.

One possible reason behind his choice is his desire to assert superiority over the Utopians and even his own people. Gaber experiences a sense of alienation as an outsider to his society, further fueling his deep-seated anger towards his fellow individuals. In this way, his decision to spare the Utopians can be seen as a manifestation of his longing to maintain a sense of superiority and distance himself from the prevailing violence.

To assimilate the two Utopians and to take revenge on their class, Gaber subjects them to disciplinary measures and acts of humiliation. Germinal, in particular, faces public humiliation when she tries to retrieve her stolen cell phone, which is being sold in a market. Her failed attempt leads to a gathering of people who intend to teach her a lesson, which, in this community, involves public gang rape. Gaber intervenes to save her by fabricating a story that garners sympathy from *al-Aghyar*. He claims she stole the cell phone to check on her brother, whom the Utopians have kidnapped. However, in addition to rescuing her, Gaber takes the opportunity to exert his control and display his power by forcefully slapping her. As for Alaa, Gaber compels him to engage in manual labor and experience a day of work as a man in the Shubra neighborhood. Gaber plans to take Alaa to a chicken slaughterhouse, where he will have his first encounter with physical labor, blood, and dead flesh. To survive his challenging days in Shubra, Alaa has no choice but to accept Gaber's enforcement and comply with his demands.

3.4.3.1 The Acts of Rape: Contestation of Masculinities

In the shack, women’s bodies become a space of contested masculinities, imposition of power, and a way of revenge. Despite that, both the females, Safiya and Germinal, are victims of the two men's attempts at rape; nonetheless, they

assist in the rape of each other. Remarkably, both men never know about the other's attempt at rape, believing he is alone in achieving victory over the other.

Gaber starts with his attempt to rape Germinal with thorough assistance from his sister. Safiya sedates Germinal and cleans her body in preparation for her brother's attempt, believing that her brother deserves to get a special girl from Utopia. Starting to rape her, Gaber is fully aware of the notoriety of his act, confirming to himself that he is good enough by not killing the two Utopians. In a stimulating monologue, he justifies the action as "[v]ictory! This is the only victory I can achieve" (115, orig. 146). Alaa perceives Germinal's body as a representation of the entire affluent class, and in doing so, he sees himself seeking retribution for the loss of temporality that plagues both the past and the present. At this point, Gaber stands in opposition to the entire Utopian society, waging a solitary battle with his worn-out body burdened by poverty. With his anger in the face of the sedated body of the Utopian girl, Gaber suffers erectile dysfunction. Taken by surprise, Gaber gets into a vortex of thoughts in the hope of rationalizing the failure of his body. He claims that every girl is Safiya. Therefore, his body refuses to rape the sedated girl. With the spiraling feeling of inferiority, Gaber confesses to himself that "[t]he problem is that a psychological barrier, an internalized servility has been created inside [him]. The problem is that I myself am convinced that he is better, more amazing, more complete, and perhaps more pious" (118, orig. 149).

With his existential confusion, he starts having even more significant doubts about his intention of not killing the two Utopians, not to prove his superiority but rather his inability to kill them. He discovers that his inability to achieve an erection

is due to his failure to attend to his moral code. He hastens his plan to return the Utopians to their settlement, perhaps hoping to find solace. Gaber's failed attempt at rape ends with double defeat, not only as one of *al-Aghyar* but as a man and a human of superior morality. His defeat in front of the sedated Utopian body is a defeat on individual and class levels, a defeat that is worse than death as it shatters his dream. Given these circumstances, I interpret Gaber's decision to bring the two Utopians back to their homeland as a suicidal mission. Unable to end his own life, and in the face of his defeats, he surrenders to the idea that he deserves to be the prey of the Utopian predator. In his surrender, he abandons his sister to face the brutality of Shubra alone.

As soon as Gaber leaves the shack to settle the arrangements for the escape plan, Alaa takes advantage of his absence and asks Germinal to stay outside; he wants to make out of raping Safiya another souvenir of the trip. Being sedated during Gaber's attempt to rape, Germinal never learns what happened to her. Therefore, Germinal's response is slightly different from Safiya's. Out of jealousy of Safiya and disgust of Alaa, Germinal is angry at Alaa's impulse to have sex with Safiya, exposing them to Gaber's rage; "[h]er face look[s] its ugliest, combining wildness, disgust, and ferocity" (130, orig. 162). At this point, they both realize the symbolism of Safiya's virginity and how precious it is to herself and her brother. Ultimately, Germinal stays outside the shack to warn Alaa if Gaber will appear before he finishes.

Brutally, Alaa forces Safiya to sleep with him without sedation, convinced that she indeed welcomes a lad from Utopia who wants to consummate with her. He expected her "to melt at the mere thought that I desired her. Among [*al-Aghyar*],

the men aren't really men. […] [the Utopians] easily make conquests of their women all the time […]" (131, orig. 163). Alaa is persuaded that hunger, diseases, and pollution destroy potency. Against all his arrogance and certainty, Safiya ferociously defends herself; she "put[s] up a fierce and vicious fight. She resist[s] like a wild agitated bull. She scratch[es]. She hit[s]. she kick[s]. She [spits]. She scream[s]. She howl[s]. She stiffen[s]. She [cries]. She call[s] me names. She curse[s]. She bite[s]" (131, orig. 163). Once more, Alaa describes Safiya's resistance and self-defense in a horizontal list. This list performs a textual simile of a flatline, the death of Safiya's virginity, and Gaber's purpose in life foreboding his death. Eventually, Alaa rapes her and threatens to kill her brother if she divulges what he has done to her. He leaves her sad and silent to the extent that Gaber notices the change. Alaa contemplates that, to his surprise, he meets for the first time in his life a girl that genuinely resists him as "[t]here is always a trace of hypocrisy and pretence" (134, orig. 167) in the Utopian girls. Gaber will lead the Utopians outside Shubra, unaware of the harm that befell his sister.

3.4.4 The Third Contact Zone: The Tunnels

Abd el-Zahir, Gaber's friend, informs him that people in Shubra doubt that the two who stay in his shack are from Utopia. Upon Gaber's denial, Abd el-Zahir, in a sharp, threatening tone, says,

> [s]top the swearing. […] We want them. […] If it's clear that they are from Utopia, then we'll play an excellent game with them. Not even flies will find their bodies, and maybe we'll bargain over them. And if it turns out that they're poor like us, then we'll find them a job and a life. […] I don't know what their importance to you is, but they definitely aren't more valuable than Safiya. (124, orig. 156).

Gaber knows they are important to him: They are his last chance for salvation in this dystopian world. So, Gaber returns to the shack and announces to Alaa and Germinal that he expedites his plan of their escape tonight, chiefly after the rumors of being Utopians increase.

Safiya takes on the task of smearing Alaa and Germinal with black grease covering their faces and dressing them in clothes filthier than they are wearing to sneak them into the dark. First, Gaber takes them on a bus that usually takes the workers from *al-Aghyar* from Shubra to the gates of Utopia. Upon hearing the conductor screaming "Utopia this way," Alaa feels deeply homesick as it is "homeland. In spite of everything, it is the homeland. I'm someone who doesn't belong to a place or to an individual or a principle" (136, orig. 170). He observes the tired faces of workers heading to settle on the coast, including bakers, rubbish collectors, and rat-hunters, all of whom look malnourished and exhausted (137, orig. 170). The bus stops in the middle of the desert road, and the three of them get off the bus in "[t]he darkness of night and the desert; the darkness of possibilities and ideas" (139, orig. 172).

Through the escape plan, we learn that *al-Aghyar* has built secret tunnels[18], reaching Utopia's heart. The revelation of secret underground tunnels between the colonies and the territory of *al-Aghyar* demonstrates that the space separating the two worlds is not empty. While there are limited details about the origins of the tunnels or their purpose, they aid Alaa and Germinal in escaping the abject

[18] It should be clarified that the concept of tunnels connecting Cairo's desert to Utopia on the North Coast is fictional. However, they may allude to secret tunnels in North Sinai, Egypt, that linked the region to the Gaza Strip. These tunnels typically began in one local's home, ended in another's on the opposite side, and were often utilized for smuggling goods. They were constructed in response to the Gaza Strip's population being trapped by the Israeli blockade.

conditions and returning to their comfort zone behind the gates of Utopia. This underground network adds depth to the narrative and highlights the interconnectedness between the different realms.

To be able to use the tunnels, he has to pay for armed thugs who control the entry to the tunnels with money or drugs. Gaber will give them new names to sneak them through the tunnels: Hanafi and Nafisa. The two names work as camouflage to convince the thugs that the two belong to *al-Aghyar.* Asking the thugs to wait for him, Gaber descends the ladder with Alaa/ Hanafi and Germinal/ Nafisa venturing into the unknown with an uncertain fate lying ahead. Observing the efforts of Gaber to protect and bring them back to their homeland, Alaa angrily questions Gaber's intentions. Alaa is never convinced of Gaber's intentions to save them, as he believes that "[n]o one does anything without a price. The price may be money. it may be a job. it may be a body. It may be a feeling of superiority. It may be a story you tell your friends, your eyes gleaming with pride. It may be undeserved self-esteem" (141-2, Orig. 175). But he only gets the simple answer from Gaber: "[b]ecause I want to do it" (142, Orig. 175). Christian Junge provides an insightful commentary on Gaber's profound statement of dignity and autonomy, highlighting how the intellectual Gaber effectively communicates radical dissent while retaining his humanity, an essential element of his concept of conscious hatred (Junge "On Affect" 262). However, Junge poses a critical question: "So far so good—but what if Gaber's engagement turns out to be in vain?" (Junge "On Affect" 262). As they reach the other side of the tunnel, Alaa acknowledges Gaber's nobility, calling him a "noble human being" (142, Orig. 176), while Germinal expresses her gratitude, saying, "You are incredible, Gaber" (143, Orig. 177). These words of admiration may provide some satisfaction to

Gaber, yet he remains resolute and does not adopt an indifferent attitude that would signify surrendering to death.

Unexpectedly, upon their return to the familiar air of Utopia, Alaa commits a shocking act of violence against Gaber. He strikes him on the back of the head with a rock, killing him instantly, and quickly severs his arm as proof of their adventure. Germinal is left in shock and disbelief by Alaa's treacherous actions. Despite the apparent surrender or engagement, as contemplated by Junge, Gaber's sacrifice serves as an unexpected catalyst for a collective upheaval within Utopia. His actions appear to ignite a spark for change, influencing others to reconsider their circumstances and take action.

3.4.5 Infiltrating Utopia: The People Demand the Overthrow of Utopia

Alaa and Germinal liken their crossing to Shubra and back to a journey through hell, despite emerging unscathed, as if they had “stuck [their] heads between the crocodile’s jaws and emerged” (146, Orig. 180). Although they return physically unharmed, the crossing has altered them. Upon their return, they are hailed as heroes among their peers. This adventure and the murder of Gaber propel Alaa into manhood, with the severed arm serving as a gruesome symbol of his initiation into Utopia’s world of manhood (147, Orig. 181).

Moreover, he becomes a man with a story to share at the gatherings where “[r]ivers of booze and phlogistine flow […]” (147, Orig. 181). The story speaks with arrogance about the stupidity of Gaber, who deserves his murder, and belittles the futile resistance of his sick sister. Alaa grows to be at the center of those gatherings where his story is constantly altered to sustain his newfound

status. Meanwhile, Germinal, who is mostly silent throughout the narrative and is even beaten by Gaber on the streets of Shubra, undergoes an expected transformation. When they are back, Alaa hears Germinal humming a line from a poem Gaber used to recite: “We are two peoples, two peoples, two peoples. Look where the first is and where’s the other. Draw the line between them, brother” (146, Orig. 181)[19]. Germinal unwittingly adopts Gaber’s revolutionary lines into her own despite it being directed against her and her people. While the gates separate the rich and poor, *al-Aghyar* build tunnels that pass beneath this dividing line, allowing them to penetrate the settlements for minor thefts. Shortly after returning to the homeland, the excitement and adrenaline from the hunting dissipate, and boredom creeps back into Alaa’s life.

On the other side, *al-Aghyar* channel their anger over Gaber's murder into a vengeful plan to retaliate against the Utopians. In the same desert that witnesses the murder of Gaber in its tunnel, they cut the road on a huge convey carrying Biroil—vital for the Utopians' engines and transportation (151, orig. 185). *Al-Aghyar* take the convoy’s drivers hostage for a brief period, treating them well and setting them free. Meanwhile, they empty the convoy from the Biroil and replace it with their own sewage. Such an incident does not cause much disturbance among the Utopians, and they do not take much notice of the plan—they never think of *al-Aghyar* doing any scheming. A few days later, after all the engines inside Utopia are. fueled with *al-Aghyar*’s excrement. A few days later, the Utopians wake up to a shocking realization. Their engines have been fueled with *al-Aghyar*’s excrement, leaving them isolated within the country without

[19] Those lines are from a poem titled “Al-aḥzān al-ʿādiyya,” (Ordinary Sorrows), written in 1981 by ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Abnūdī’s (1938- 2015). He is one of the pioneers of Egyptian colloquial poetry, where social-political expression and commentary are central.

functioning transportation and surrounded by the foul smell (152, Orig. 186). Shortly after this incident, Mourad, Alaa's father, mentions that their security forces detect movements of *al-Aghyar* towards Utopia's gates, seeking revenge for the death of one of their own who had helped two young Utopians return home. As the rebels approach the gates, US marines begin evacuating Utopians' houses. At this moment of crisis and chaos, Alaa is disappointed by his father's panic, commenting: "What I expected from my father was anger, not fear. To show disdain, not quiver. To be furious, not nervous. To curse, not blame. Leaving? Scattering in all direction?" (155, Orig. 190) In anger, leaving his parents behind, Alaa runs determinedly to the frontlines where the Marines defend the Utopia. Though he has little experience with arms, he takes one and starts shooting at the advancing rebels, witnessing an unprecedented rebellion. The novel concludes with this ambiguous scene in which Alaa and the Marines are confident they will be able to disperse the hordes after losing the first hundred casualties.

3.5 Conclusion

> Egypt shall gather them up, Memphis shall bury them.
> Hosea 9:6

The gates of Utopia are not only to keep *al-Aghyar* from infiltrating the wealthy community but also to assist in protecting them from poverty that takes over Cairo. The two Utopian characters in the novel defy the gates of Utopia and the rules set by their parents to escape the boredom and isolation of their gated community. Both the rules and the gates are to maintain the young Utopians' safety, which sustains the dystopian reality. Boredom and hopelessness are

powerful affective motivators to seek social mobility and escape their suffocating reality.

In the concluding scene, the act of crossing the borders by *al-Aghyar* is overt and confrontational, symbolized by their open attack on the gates. They consciously traverse the desert in plain sight, diverging from the clandestine approach of using tunnels, which traditionally represents a form of covert resistance. Whereas the conventional use of tunnels reinforces the existing dystopian hierarchy and the prevailing fear associated with gates, the act of walking in large groups becomes a proclamation of a transformative *kifāya* (enough) moment, reflecting the collective desire to dismantle the oppressive power structure of the dystopia (see Junge "On Affect"). Christian Junge conceptualizes these disruptive instances as exemplifying what he terms "*kifāya* rhetoric" prevalent in Egyptian literature prior to the events of 2011. Junge elucidates that this "*kifāya*" sentiment encapsulates an urgent and unwavering yearning for resistance, regardless of the costs involved (266). Thus, Gaber's decision to escort the two predators to the borders of Utopia serves as a further acknowledgment of the prevailing dystopian order while concurrently realizing his personal aspiration for a transcendent "dream of something beyond" (47, Orig. 63).

Therefore, Ian Campbell offers a perspective on Gaber's death that it "represent[s] not so much the return of the repressed but rather the failure of art—or in Gaber's case, intellectualism—to transcend the death-in-life that is the lot of the Others" (550). It is only when *al-Aghyar* express their anger and breach the affective boundary of fear that the broader Egyptian space transforms into an unrestricted arena devoid of a centralized authority and hierarchical structure,

allowing for diverse future possibilities and competing discourses striving for legitimacy. This convergence of voices in the now borderless spaces of confrontation within Egypt represents a polyphony of perspectives (Resheq and Majdoubeh 189). This polyphony finds textual manifestation in the final verses that conclude the narrative, where lines from popular songs embraced by the young Utopians, known as Orgasm Songs, intersect with verses from the poetry of al-Abnūdī. While the practice of hunting *al-Aghyar* has long been underway, it is the combined occurrence of Gaber's murder and Safiya's rape that galvanizes the necessary momentum and generates the unpredictable interplay between power and resistance, inherent in dialectical dynamics.

3.5.1 The Predator and the Prey: Dual Facets of Class Segregation

Gaber and Alaa, despite their differing societal and hierarchal positions, emerge as extraordinary individuals within their respective contexts. While the chapter titles in the novel may suggest a dichotomy between victim and aggressor, both voices reveal shared attributes that transcend the significant social and economic disparities between them. Three significant commonalities shape the lives of these two voices: their acute awareness of their existence within a dystopian milieu, their familiarity with history and philosophy, and most notably, their arrogance and inclination towards performative escapism. Despite their distinct motivations, both individuals are united by their degrading perception of *al-Aghyar*.

Both Gaber and Alaa immerse themselves in extensive reading amidst societies that no longer prioritize expertise or education, where ignorance prevails as a norm. They echo a similar sentiment, affirming that "when you've crossed the

farthest boundary of consciousness, you realize that consciousness expands to include within itself other boundaries, ruled by habit, boredom, and monotony" (13, 16, Orig. 23, 26). However, within the confines of this dystopian backdrop, such knowledge fails to emancipate; instead, it engenders a profound sense of nihilism. This nihilistic sentiment, in turn, fuels their proclivity to detach from their communities. On the one hand, they become consumed by self-absorption, inwardly fixated on romanticized dreams that serve as a means to perform a symbolic death, an escape from the bleak realities of the dystopian world.

Alaa possesses a profound understanding of historical processes and revolutions, having engaged in extensive reading. From the French Revolution to the Iranian Revolution, he is familiar with numerous historical narratives (13, Orig. 22). However, these historical "stories" fail to captivate his interest. On the contrary, Alaa holds the belief that nothing of consequence occurs outside the confines of the fences, dismissing those beyond as mere sheep devoid of the capacity for anger (22, Orig. 34). Isolated behind the fences, he considers the prospect of revolution as inconceivable for the passive and sheep-like *al-Aghyar*. Nevertheless, Alaa's arrogance, coupled with his deliberate disregard for *al-Aghyar*, exacts a heavy toll. Despite his extensive knowledge of history and philosophy, he pays the price for his hubris. Drawing upon Antonio Gramsci's framework, Alaa embodies the archetype of the traditional intellectual aligned with the entrenched landed aristocracy, safeguarding their interests while remaining detached from the struggles of the masses and acting counter to their interests (*Anthology* 113-119).

On the contrary, Gaber shares Alaa's negative perception of Egyptians or al-Aghyar. He expresses his infuriation by stating, "[s]ometimes I feel that Egyptians are people who deserve what happens to them. A submissive people, lacking resolve, who bend before the first whip that lashes the air" (62, Orig. 83). Moreover, he goes on to label Egyptians as "good-for-nothing," "sluggish," and "bums" (62, Orig. 84). While these characterizations stem from his deep anger, which corresponds to his dire circumstances, they also contribute to a culture of victim-blaming. In Gillian Slovo's *The Riots*, Camila Batmanghelidj highlights the demonization of the underclass, noting that labeling the poor as lazy creates division and humiliation within society. The portrayal of the underclass as "amoral" is particularly significant in shaping their behavior (43).

Gaber's description of his own community serves as an attack on himself, reflecting his existential dilemma of feeling "strange, different, peculiar, foolish, uncomfortable, and unintegrated" (109, orig. 138) within his own society. Furthermore, his anger is fueled by his extensive reading and knowledge, having consumed a vast array of literature until the words blended. Consequently, Gaber envisions revenge in the form of a spectre, vowing, "One day, I will die, and I'll come back to haunt them in the guise of a demon or a ghost, and I'll make their lives hell. None of them will be safe, no matter how much they try to hide from me" (109, orig. 139). Gaber justifies and forgives his own inaction due to his overt anger, contrasting it with his peers' lack of anger and elitist discussions about history and politics. However, both Gaber and Alaa fail to recognize the imaginative capabilities of *al-Aghyar*, which transcend the boundaries of the dystopian reality and the burden of knowledge that limits Gaber and Alaa from perceiving beyond their own reality.

In his *Prison Notes*, Gramsci observes, "All men are intellectuals, one could therefore say: but not all men have in society the function of intellectuals" (115). He discusses their role in sustaining, modifying, and influencing the thinking and behavior of the masses, acting as conveyors of consciousness (*Pre-prison*, 14). Alaa and Gaber can be considered dystopian intellectuals; however, they fall short in serving themselves and their communities. Their arrogance blinds them to the greater good and prevents them from working toward improving their societies.

Alaa's failure lies in his impulsive nature, which jeopardizes the safety of his settlement due to his adventurous spirit and his underestimation of the growing anger among *al-Aghyar*. Additionally, he fails to shoulder his historical and social responsibilities, disregarding that such responsibilities have no statute of limitations. On the other hand, Gaber, consumed by persistent despair and anger, exhibits a sense of superiority and arrogance toward his society. He fails to embody the role of an organic intellectual and only attains iconic status after his death, becoming an inspiration to the very society from which he felt estranged. It is through his murder that he has an impact on the masses residing in the slums.

3.5.2 Death and Revolution

Ironically, despite their knowledge of historical revolutions such as the Iranian Revolution and the French Revolution, Gaber and Alaa fail to believe that *al-Aghyar* could rise against Utopia. Gaber maintains a bitter and sarcastic tone towards his people, constantly belittling any mention of revolution. He dismissively suggests that if a revolution were to occur, they would begin by devouring their indulgent and privileged members (60, orig. 79). According to

Gaber, the lack of historical and social awareness among *al-Aghyar*, combined with their consumption of cheap drugs, renders them incapable of staging a revolt. He ridicules his friend Abd el-Zahir's plans to attack Utopia, considering them intellectual self-gratification (50, orig. 67). Gaber attributes this dismissal to his friend's drug-induced state, deeming his plan impractical. Furthermore, Gaber consistently degrades his people, mocking their aspirations to steal resources from the Utopians through the tunnels. He derides their attempts to emulate Egypt's resistance against British colonialism (1882-1952), accusing them of futile mimicry and emphasizing the need to focus on their circumstances instead: “[y]ou think you’re fighting the English in one of those old black-and-white films. Knock off this chatter and think about how we’re going to find us a new dog” (141).

Gaber exhibits a tendency to curse his fellow people while positioning himself as a prophet, claiming to have a prophecy that aligns him with the anger of Old Testament prophets towards their own communities. He parallels a prophet who celebrated the besiegement of his city by the Babylonians, perceiving it as a restoration of honor even if it resulted in his final moment of ecstasy (63, Orig. 84-5). In this foreboding statement, Gaber reveals the contradiction between his lack of action and his self-perception as intellectually superior to his society, akin to an intellectual or prophet. Despite his education and broad knowledge, Gaber fails to translate these assets into meaningful action, instead attributing his frustrations to the inaction of his less-educated peers. This mixture of superiority and frustration over his own inability to act leads him to belittle the ideas and plans of his fellow people, dismissing them as merely influenced by cheap drugs. He sarcastically suggests that if a revolution were to occur, it would not be driven by a desire for equality but rather to satisfy those who have been deprived of their

perceived entitlement to a substance called phlogistine (50, orig. 67). Gaber contends that due to their regular drug use and lack of awareness about Egypt's history and culture, his people are incapable of planning for a revolution.

Similarly, Alaa also mocks the notion of *al-Aghyar* rising against their oppressors, attributing their lack of dignity and absence of anger to their subjugated state. In a disturbing scene of rape, Alaa rebukes Safiya, suggesting that while rebellions occur across the world, she and others like her passively accept their allotted fate, seeking solace in faith and contentment (132, orig. 165). However, a twist in the plot unfolds as *al-Aghyar* does rise in response to the death of its "intellectuals" and experiences feelings of anger and betrayal. This transformation also applies to Gaber, as the intuition of his own impending death serves as evidence that the secluded "intellectual class" can effectively drive social reforms[20].

The influence of Gaber's life on his people may be insignificant, while his death holds great significance. While Gaber may not be the first victim of the Utopians' violence, it can be argued that his actions and the values he upheld during his lifetime played a pivotal role in igniting the subsequent wave of anger. Despite not embodying the archetypal model of hegemonic masculinity prevalent in his society, Gaber earns renown for his unwavering commitment to righteousness, his deep cultural knowledge, and his unwavering defense of Safiya's social

[20] This interpretation is opposite to Ian Campbell argument on Gaber's death that the "intuition of his own death then becomes an argument that the intellectual class, insofar as it remains a secluded "class," cannot drive social reforms" (Campbell 549). This perspective highlights the limitations faced by intellectuals who are disconnected from the broader society. Gaber's personal experience reflects the notion that intellectuals, if isolated from the masses, cannot drive transformative changes effectively. The realization of his mortality underscores the argument that a detached intellectual class cannot effectively bring about the necessary societal reforms.

standing. These qualities and his consistent embodiment of them contributed to forming a collective narrative that bestowed meaning upon his death, fueling the anger and motivating the community's upheaval.

Building on Michel Foucault's concept of technologies of the self, Farha Ghannam expands this idea to include the narratives and stories surrounding the deceased, which she refers to as "technologies of immortality." Ghannam suggests that these narratives are not limited by empirical reality but derive their social and religious value from their ability to construct a moral reality that produces performative effects (632). By considering cultural and theological roots, Ghannam introduces an additional layer of explanation to understand collective upheavals. According to her, death is not viewed as an endpoint but rather as a signifier of a better afterlife, transforming it into a space of interpretation.

In the case of Gaber, his identity as the community's last intellectual and his role as a protector of his sister Safiya contribute to the construction of a narrative by *al-Aghyar*. His murder becomes an opportunity for them to weave a story around his death, attaching anger and meaning to it, thus giving purpose and motive to their uprising. Additionally, the fact that Gaber met his end while performing a noble deed, bringing back the two Utopians without killing them, aligns with Ghannam's concept of a "good ending." This notion refers to a death that befalls a Muslim while or immediately after engaging in a pious act that adheres to Islamic teachings and is believed to warrant God's mercy and blessing (635). Overall, Gaber's influence on his people transcends his physical presence. His death becomes a catalyst for the construction of narratives, the attribution of meaning, and the mobilization of emotions within the *al-Aghyar* community.

Chapter 4:

Exploring the Anatomy of the Empire's Labyrinth of Order: Center, Margins and Beyond in J.M. Coetzee's *Waiting for the Barbarians* (1980)

4.1 Introduction: An Apocalypse of An Empire

In *Waiting for the Barbarians*, the nameless colonial Empire's political border suddenly becomes a tangible locus of tension, significant crossings, and transgressions. However, the narrative transcends the physicality of the border, delving deeper into an elaborate examination of the ramifications stemming from the destabilization of the political border on the structural and epistemological borders that the imperial systems cultivate within their systems. The physical, political border that marks the end of the Empire's territory witnesses multiple outward and inward crossings, engendering a ripple effect of contact zones beyond and within the officially recognized border. Within these zones of interaction, one encounters the structural border, which demarcates a clear division between the mindsets and approaches employed by the power elite, comprising the police and military apparatuses situated in the heart of the Empire (the center), and those of the civil population residing on the border, the very frontier of the Empire (the margin). These distinct groups employ disparate approaches when engaging with the Empire subalterns or adversaries of the Empire. Furthermore, the interplay between the physical and structural borders begets an epistemological border, which in turn distinguishes between the contrasting conceptions of 'civilization' as perceived within the confines of the border—embodied by the Empire itself or the agricultural community residing in

the town—and the notion of 'barbarianism' existing beyond the border, encompassing the Nomads and Fisherfolks who dwell in those territories.

Within this chapter, I examine, as voiced solely through the Magistrate[21], the intricate entanglements experienced by a member of the power elite as they find themselves positioned at the crossroads of precarious borders, specifically in the political, structural, and epistemological realms. Furthermore, I navigate the complexities and intermingling of border-crossings, which deconstruct binaries and complicate what is once perceived as clearly demarcated boundaries, rather than offering definitive resolutions. In this light, I align with Patrick Lenta's reading of the novel as "a mode of resistance to the civilized/ barbarian binary that operates today […] to produce and maintain an exclusionary conception of who is normatively human and who is undeserving of the protection afforded by human rights." (72) By analyzing "Waiting for the Barbarians," I draw upon Judith Butler's concept of the derealization of lives, as explored in the preceding chapter, and extend its implications beyond the marginalized and vulnerable populations, shedding light on the far-reaching consequences of such practices not only for the less powerful but also for those who represent and wield power. The objective of this chapter is twofold: Firstly, in the subsequent section, I demonstrate the collision between the Empire's two modes of domination and how this clash contributes to the Magistrate's crisis of identity. Later, I explore the blurring and eventual collapse of the dividing boundaries, particularly through the embodiment

[21] As both the empire and the magistrate are anonymous, both words shall henceforth be referred to as proper nouns for the sake of clarity and specificity.

of the tortured body, destabilizing the hierarchical power structures entrenched within the Empire.

At the novel's core lies the narrative of an anonymous magistrate who represents an unknown empire in a border town. Adopting a singular first-person perspective, the Magistrate describes his crude journey from a dutiful civil servant of the Empire to a disobedient outcast. As we explore the labyrinth of his introspective monologues, we gain deeper insights into the bewilderment, burden, and inherent limitations associated with the borders that shape his sense of self. Through the Magistrate's arduous navigation of both structural and topological borders, he grapples with the lived experience of victimhood and oppression. He finds himself existing outside the confines of the power elite, embodying a state of uncertainty and confronting the hidden facets of torture that insidiously permeate the depths of the human psyche. In this novel, the traditional colonial setting diverges from the conventional focus on the colonized, instead centering on the extraordinary journey of a representative of the power elite who transcends various levels of borders in order to comprehend the narrative of pain, while simultaneously undergoing personal encounters with it. Pain, in this context, emerges through brutal acts of torture inflicted upon the colonized. The personal odyssey undertaken by the Magistrate, traversing various borders, serves to illuminate the inherent ambiguity surrounding the perception of pain—its fluctuating status between visibility and credibility, as well as its ability to remain hidden despite leaving indelible marks upon the physical body. This exploration of pain brings to the forefront the intimate connection between the Magistrate's sense of self and the act of border crossing. Johan Schimanski and

Stephen F. Wolfe astutely observe that “[i]dentity is unthinkable without the border processes, whether individual or communal” (12).

For thirty years, the Magistrate dedicated himself to the service of the Empire, diligently fulfilling his duties within a marginalized border town—an embodiment of unwavering faith in the supremacy of the Empire's legal framework. Throughout his extensive career, he never once returned to the Empire's capital, contentedly residing within the confines of the border town. In this peculiar situation, he finds solace in the paradoxical interplay between his steadfast refusal to return to the center of power in the capital and his unwavering commitment to upholding and implementing the Empire's laws. Consequently, while confined within the limits of the small town's borders, the Magistrate developed a profound sense of self that became intimately entwined with the Empire’s perception of the Nomads and Fisherfolks outside the town’s gates as backward and uncivilized. Approaching his retirement, he witnesses turbulence and an apocalyptic situation to the Empire’s domination on this borderline. The escalation on the quiet border resulted from the sudden declaration of emergency powers in the background of rumors that the Northerner Nomads, or ‘barbarians’ as named by the Empire, were preparing for a ‘great war’ (11). When Colonel Joll and Officer Warrant Mandel are dispatched from the imperial capital, their primary objective is to lead military campaigns against the Nomadic tribes residing beyond the political borders. Their mission entails forcibly repelling the Nomads back into the mountainous regions. In an effort to safeguard the tranquility of his own sedentary existence, the Magistrate endeavors to dissuade Joll from embarking on this aggressive endeavor. He shares his peaceful encounters and interactions with the various indigenous groups residing outside the confines of

the town gates. Moreover, the Magistrate cautions Joll about the perils associated with venturing beyond the gates, as this demarcates the end of the Empire's territorial reach and familiar terrain, rendering them devoid of any reliable maps depicting the desert routes beyond. However, despite the Magistrate's earnest recommendations and dire warnings, Joll remains resolute in his insistence upon pursuing a path of violent discipline, particularly in his relentless pursuit of subjugating the perceived "undisciplined barbarians." Tragically, this obstinate course of action ultimately leads to the annihilation of the Empire's army and the subsequent exposure of its physical borders, which once demarcated its dominion.

As a result of the initial military campaigns led by Joll, a random group of fisherfolk and Nomads is indiscriminately captured and brought back to the town. Motivated by a desire to uncover what he perceives as a plot against the Empire, Joll exercises excessive violence during the interrogation process, leading to the death of some captives and the defamation and disabling of others. Throughout the course of the escalating conflict, the Magistrate finds himself in stark disagreement with Joll regarding the necessity and efficacy of instigating a war on a previously peaceful frontier. However, Joll's unwavering determination overshadows his dissenting voice and disregards it. As these atrocities unfold, the Magistrate struggles in vain to distance himself from the violations occurring within the jurisdiction of his town and shield himself from the shame associated with the desecration of human bodies. Despite his efforts, he finds himself unable to prevent or halt the unfolding chaos. As the winter season approaches, Joll temporarily suspends his campaign, returning to the capital with the intention of resuming his mission in the coming spring. In contrast, the Magistrate is left

behind, grappling with the weight of his heavy conscience as he confronts the aftermath and enduring chaos caused by Joll's actions, isolated in his solitary contemplation.

The trajectory of the Magistrate's life takes an unforeseen turn when he stumbles upon a Nomad Woman who was abandoned and reduced to begging on a frigid winter day, a poignant reminder of Joll's captives left behind. Driven by a spontaneous impulse, he brings her into his apartment and soon discovers the harrowing extent of her suffering—she bears the physical scars of severe torture, with impaired vision and crippling legs. From the outset of their encounter, the Magistrate finds himself caught in a complex emotional web, oscillating between an erotic attraction to her and an insatiable curiosity regarding the circumstances surrounding her ordeal.

However, these conflicting emotions are overshadowed by his lingering doubts concerning his own masculinity as he grapples with questions surrounding her femininity and the palpable distance that separates him from those who inflicted such brutality upon her—the representatives of the capital. This disturbing encounter intensifies the Magistrate's inner conflict throughout the winter season, leading him to a resolute decision. He is determined to embark on a perilous journey, crossing the official border of the Empire, in order to bring the Nomad Woman's back to her people. This decision carries profound risks and challenges, necessitating traversing the established boundaries and venturing into unfamiliar and dangerous territories. Nevertheless, driven by a profound sense of guilt and self-righteousness and a desire to rectify the injustices inflicted upon the Woman,

the Magistrate undertakes this expedition, forging a path that challenges both his personal and societal boundaries.

Following his arduous journey through the desert in rough weather, the Magistrate returns to the town only to find that Joll has reappeared and is now accusing him of treason. From this pivotal moment onwards, the Magistrate's life takes a dramatic turn as he is transformed into a prisoner, subjected to humiliation and ostracism by the Empire and the town's inhabitants. The locals of the town, who are initially familiar with the Magistrate as a respected figure of authority, undergo a significant shift in their perception of him. Following Joll's accusations of treason and the subsequent events unfold; the townspeople begin to view the Magistrate with suspicion and contempt. No longer viewed as the esteemed magistrate, he is now perceived as an aging madman. Amidst this ordeal, the Magistrate endures further torment as Mandel, in collaboration with Joll, subjects him to torture and mistreatment. As Joll continues his campaigns, bringing in a second wave of captured nomads, the Magistrate's plight worsens when he intervenes during a public torture session, further exacerbating his already tarnished reputation.

The town becomes a hotbed of chaos and rumors as the campaign progresses. It falls victim to attacks from unknown groups, presumed to be barbarians. Adding to the turmoil, soldiers from the Empire's army descend upon the town, engaging in looting and the harassment of women. Locals of the town flee under the cover of darkness, seeking refuge from the impending threat. Eventually, the remaining soldiers retreat, leaving the town vulnerable and exposed, gripped by the pervasive fear that the barbarians will strike at any given moment. Amid this

tumultuous situation, Joll returns to the town, a mere shadow of his former self. In a brief exchange with the Magistrate, he reveals that the army has not engaged in combat but rather fallen victim to an orchestrated trap by the nomads in the heart of the desert, decimated by a sudden and devastating storm. Joll, fleeing back to the capital, abandons the town, leaving the Magistrate to grapple with the weight of his ambiguous circumstances. Resuming his place in his apartment, the Magistrate finds himself entrusted with the responsibility of preparing the town for the harsh winter season. However, his authority is now uncertain and ambiguous, no longer as a representative of the Empire but as one of the town's inhabitants with a wealth of administrative experience.

4.1.1 Present Tense and Its Allegory

Contrary to the previous works analyzed in this study, *Waiting for the Barbarian* is neither narrated as a futuristic extrapolation nor a direct reference to South Africa. J.M. Coetzee's choice to write about an unspecified time and geography liberates readers from the limits of associating the injustices in the tale with the socio-political specificity of South Africa. Coetzee states the Magistrate "could as well be Russian and Khirgiz, or Han and Mongol, or Turk and Arab, or Arab and Berber" (Coetzee, qtd. in Moses 116); this statement opens the text to be considered in a broader context outside the borders of history and geography of South Africa. Coetzee dwells on the space that forms what Tersa Dovey refers to as "the potential area between the [political and the poststructural], which is concerned to theorize how discourses emerging from diverse contexts and exhibiting different formal assumptions, may produce *different* forms of historical engagement[...]" (5). He stands on an ambiguous position between political

responsibility and historical representation and the intersection of politics and language beyond the immediate historical moment. Moreover, this choice proclaims the universality of the narrative, intensifying the tale's dystopic effect.

Critics like Lance Olsen and Barbara Eckstein perceive Coetzee's novel as a model of postmodern fiction that does not confine itself to a specific context. (see Olsen and Eckstein). Although Eckstein and Olsen share the same departure point about the novel's nature, they reach two different conclusions. Olsen notes that the language in the novel is "cut off responsibility" (53), where "we are in a monologue with nowhere to go, nothing to say, no one to say it to, a web of linguistic misfirings that disintegrate before anyone has heard, a field of blankness and a desolation that there has to be such blankness" (55-56). Olsen disregards the function of this 'monologue of blankness' to capture a rare situation of the colonizer's conscience in crisis and its impetus and consequences.

Eckstein confirms that Olsen misses the point that the novel is about bodily pain: "[t]his body in pain [in the novel] has everything to do with the language of the novel" (176). In an interview, Coetzee emphasizes that he wrote *Waiting for the Barbarians* to trace "the impact of the torture chamber on the life of a man of conscience," highlighting that "[…] the torture room provide a metaphor, bare and extreme, for relations between authoritarianism and its victim" (363). To approach the metaphor of the dark room of torture, Coetzee designates that "[t]he true challenge is: how not to play the game by the rules of the state, how to establish one's own authority, how to imagine torture and death on one's own terms" (364). Using the present tense and a first-person perspective, Coetzee purposefully engages the reader in the visceral realm of bodily sensations. This narrative

technique effectively immerses the reader in the immediate and intimate experience of pain, shedding light on its profound impact on the tortured individual's psyche.

In addition, this narrative technique of the present tense and a first-person perspective effectively portrays the Empire's entrapment in the present, hindering its ability to situate itself within a broader historical continuum. Within this continuum lies an enigmatic past, wherein nomadic communities were marginalized and pushed beyond the Empire’s borders, often overlooked or forgotten in the Empire's self-perception. Simultaneously, a foreboding future suggests the Empire's inevitable decline and eventual demise. Coetzee employs a deliberate strategy of concealing the names of key entities in his novel, including the protagonist, the empire, and the specific time and place in which the story unfolds. The narrative unfolds through the perspective of the Magistrate, an unnamed civil servant within an unspecified empire. Notably, the Magistrate is referred to by his title even after losing his position, emphasizing the profound significance of his role within the hierarchical power structure and foreshadowing the identity crisis he later experiences. He resonates with Hannah Arendt’s description of the modern “mass man” as a product of totalitarian systems that are “yearning for anonymity, for being just a number and functioning only as a cog” (qtd. in Rennsman 101). In contrast, Colonel Joll and Warrant Officer Mandel, two other officials from the empire, are identified by their titles and surnames. In other words, unlike the unknown Magistrate, this selective naming choice points out their active participation in wielding authority.

Ultimately, Coetzee's narrative invites reflection on the conscience of an empire's civil servant and examines critical junctures in the life cycle of empires, shedding light on moments of stagnation and decay. It shines a probing light on the conscience of an empire, capturing the tension between the Empire's self-image and its underlying vulnerabilities. Through this examination, Coetzee invites contemplation on the intricacies of imperial systems as they navigate the precipice of their own exhaustion.

4.2 One Empire, Multiple Manifestations: The Center Versus the Margins

Within this narrative, we observe to the collision between two contrasting approaches to border management—the approach of the capital and that of the margin. As residents of a distant and technologically advanced capital, both Joll and Mandel embody the security mentality, transforming them into the enforcers of border security for the Empire. Their mission to traverse the political borders of the Empire serves as a testament to the multifaceted responsibilities that proximity to the center of power (the capital) entails. These responsibilities include the securitization of borders and the moral choices involved in excluding and derealizing the lives of individuals outside the border deemed suspicious. Joll and Mandel seek to establish the border as a fixed and secure measurement of protection for the Empire, consolidating their position of power at the apex of the hierarchical structure. This fixation on the border and the need to maintain its perceived stability reflects the security mentality of the distant capital and the securitizing force it exerts on the borderlands. In this sense, the border symbolizes the unequal power weight between the center and the margins.

In contrast, throughout his career, the Magistrate has witnessed the permeability of the border as a dynamic frontier zone facilitating interaction between the townspeople and neighboring native groups residing near the town's gates. Unlike the rigid and fortified borders favored by the distant capital, the Magistrate's border reflects a different approach that acknowledges the region's complexities and nuances. The town's border/ gates accommodate the movement of people and ideas, recognizing the interdependence and interconnectedness between diverse local groups living in proximity. This portrayal of the border highlights the Magistrate's understanding of the local context and his willingness to navigate the region's complexities with a more flexible and inclusive approach. However, as the gates are open under the Magistrate's jurisdiction, promoting a degree of interaction, this does not imply equitable power relations between the Empire and the native groups, e.g., Nomads. Despite their historical entitlement to the town as their place of origin, these native groups are admitted and treated as outsiders, labeled as barbarians within the hierarchical framework established by the Empire. In other words, the significant commonality between the Magistrate and Joll lies in their respective interpretations of the term "barbarians" and how they use it to define themselves. The Magistrate perceives the barbarians as a regressive "other," needing laws and discipline to attain a state of civilization. Accordingly, the Magistrate's duty is to enforce the Empire's rule of law—a symbol of civilization. Through this enforcement, the inside of the border is signified by civilization, while the outside of the Empire's rule of law is represented by barbarianism. This way of management signifies the Empire's times of peace in which it imposes the rule of law to buttress its domination and superiority. In times of war and crisis, the

Empire tends toward securitizing its borders, othering those who do not belong to this territory, justifying violence against them, and, hence, derealizing their lives.

Living on the margins of the Empire has its privileges: the Magistrate enjoys a quiet life in the town where he, as a colonial viceroy, can distinguish among the different indigenous groups living around the border. He has some knowledge of the native languages; he is an archeologist who excavates wood slips from the ruins he has discovered outside the town gates, devoting hours to deciphering hieroglyphics in vain. In his spare time, he spends his days "hunting and hawking and placid concupiscence" (9) after the native way, while he is waiting impatiently for the day of his retirement, hoping that maybe the Empire acknowledges his death by mentioning him in the papers:

> I am a country magistrate, a responsible official in the service of the Empire, serving out my days on this lazy frontier, waiting to retire. I collect the tithes and taxes, administer the communal lands, see that the garrison is provided for, supervise the junior officers who are the only officers we have here, keep an eye on trade, preside over the law-court twice a week. For the rest I watch the sun rise and set, ear and sleep and am content. When I pass away I hope to merit three lines of small print in the Imperial Gazette. I have not asked for more than a quiet life in quiet times. (8)

This is how the Magistrate identifies himself; he is a loyal servant of the Empire who intentionally keeps a distance from it. As the Magistrate has never returned to the capital, he loses much of the capital's official harshness. Nonetheless, he reminisces nostalgically on his days in the capital, where in "the pavilion gardens […] musicians perform for the strolling crowds and one's feet rustle through fallen autumn chestnut leaves; a bridge [he] remember[s] from which one sees the

reflection of the moon on the water …" (53). However, he bases his administration in the border town on decency and decorum; for instance, he moves the shambles from the marketplace to the outskirts of the town (131). Before Joll's campaign, the Magistrate offers an ideal example of the Empire's citizenry; he lectures one of the locals, the Empire's subjects, on the importance of keeping the order of law: "Remember, I too have devoted a life to the law, I know its processes, I know that the workings of justice are often obscure" (138). Through those years, he develops benevolent relations with locals of this part of the geography under the Empire. From the narrative, we learn that the locals of this frontier are quite diverse yet find a form of co-existence among each other.

Right from the beginning of the narrative, a clear disparity in knowledge and understanding emerges between the Magistrate, who is actively involved in civil work and interacts with diverse groups, and Joll and Mandel, whose ignorance regarding this diversity is evident. The capital, which represents the seat of power, lacks the comprehensive knowledge and information regarding the existence of such diversity and the possibilities of peaceful coexistence. This gap in knowledge sets the stage for contrasting perspectives and experiences between the Magistrate, who is exposed to the realities of diversity in his daily interactions, and Joll and Mandel, who remain oblivious to this aspect. On the first encounter between Joll and the Magistrate, the discrepancy between both is apparent. The latter shows a great deal of naivety, something that an official can acquire when he is far away from the headquarters of power for a long time. Joll is surrounded by mystery as he does not talk much and wears sunglasses. At the start, the Magistrate cannot identify what sunglasses are for; for him, it is his first time seeing them. This little detail in Joll's appearance shows much of the gap

between the capital's advancement and the primitiveness of the margin areas. In an ironic remark, the Magistrate thinks Joll is blind. This remark constructs an ongoing sub-theme in the narrative: the paradox of blindness. Although the Magistrate and Joll physiologically have not lost their eyesight, they are metaphorically blinded by their position in the power hierarchy. As representatives of the act of dominance, dominance forms a shielding veil for the Magistrate and Joll to see beyond their job descriptions. They fail to see the native tribes living around the Empire's border as equal humans.

In another incident, as they entertain themselves in the evening talking about hunting, Joll narrates one of his most extraordinary adventures on the frontiers, "when thousands of deer, pigs, bears were slain, so many that a mountain of carcasses had to be left to rot" (1). As the Magistrate secretly questions Joll's extravagant behavior, showing a lack of respect for the ecological culture on the border, he educates Joll on the natives' way of fishing and hunting. However, Joll does not get the gesture. In an eloquent statement, the Magistrate sums up the core difference between him, the civil servant, and Joll, the interrogator, saying, "I cannot pretend to be any better than a mother comforting a child between his father's spells of wrath. It has not escaped me that an interrogator can wear two masks, speak with two voices, one harsh, one seductive" (8). He astutely acknowledges that an interrogator can assume dual identities, employing both harsh and seductive voices. This comparison reveals how both parties, in their treatment of the colonized, diminish their agency and dehumanize them, likening torture to a justifiable form of domestic abuse.

Joll and Mandel stir chaos and cause suffering for the Empire's subalterns and themselves. Colonel Joll arrives as a representative of the Third Bureau to instigate a military campaign as a protective procedure against an alleged attack from so-called barbarians (the northern Nomads) and declare a state of emergency powers. His arrival signals the start of the narrative and the changing importance of the town from a neglected place to a strategic border frontier—a transformation of the town into a new contact zone despite the campaign taking place outside the official political borders of the Empire. Despite the importance of the potential crossing of the political and physical border of the Empire on which the town lies, Joll's initial crossing of the invisible sub-border between the Empire's center and margins instigates the dystopic events in this narrative.

Joll brings violence the moment he steps into the border town. The minute he arrives, he is ignorantly stubborn to separate between two groups of people, those inside and those outside the gates. Although there is not much difference between the two groups of natives, those outside the gates of the 'frontier' become enemies. Later, the town's inhabitants will internalize this viewpoint as they hold their silence in front of the brutality that unfolds. Joll's violence starts with capturing fishermen (an older man and a boy) and torturing them. Through three raids and torture scenes, the Magistrate introspectively crosses physical, psychological, and epistemological borders back and forth, blurring the line between the self and the other.

Both Joll and Mandel are the two characters that represent not only the Empire's center but also a symbol of young age and ambition in the career of the national security of the Empire. Meanwhile, the Magistrate is a civil servant who keeps the

order of the Empire’s law and is close to retirement after spending his entire career in this town. Both sides have different job descriptions and roles: the former deals with times of crisis and war, and the latter is the Empire’s strategy in peacetime. In addition, age and personal experience are essential in dictating how each side reacts in the upcoming crisis. The Magistrate is aware of how those officers perceive him as “a minor civilian administrator sunk after years in the backwater, in slothful native ways, outmoded in his thinking, ready to gamble the security of the Empire for a makeshift, insecure peace” (54).

Despite possessing extensive knowledge that can rival the officers hailing from the metropolis, the Magistrate remains grounded in humility, acutely aware of the limitations of his own understanding. While engaging in a disagreement with Joll regarding the use of violence against unfamiliar people, the Magistrate acknowledges the historical rights of the indigenous groups, affirming, "[T]hey have lived here all their lives, they know the land. You and I are strangers—you even more than I" (12). This acknowledgment of his own ignorance serves as a critical point of differentiation between those who serve the Empire in the Capital and those residing in the periphery. The inherent proximity to power becomes a pivotal factor contributing to the propensity for violence, often leading to a blinding effect on one's perception.

As Joll ventures beyond the sub-border, traversing the threshold between the Empire's center and its marginalized periphery, the boundaries that define the Magistrate's sense of self as a dutiful civil servant and a knowledgeable devotee to the locals begin to blur. Simultaneously, the demarcation between civilization and barbarism, as well as the distinction between being immersed in the historical

narrative and being excluded from it, becomes increasingly hazy and indistinct in the eyes of the Magistrate. Michael Valdez Moses, in his article “The Mark of the Empire,” refers to Hegel’s understanding of history as a perspective to locate the Magistrate’s experience on the frontier before and after the arrival of Joll. Hegel, in *The Philosophy of History,* emphasizes that “[i]t is the State which first presents subject matter that is not only adapted to the prose of History but involves the production of such history in the very progress of its own being” (qtd. in Moses 61). In other words, the state's power influences the narrative construction of history. Before Joll’s and Mandel’s arrival, the borders of the town (which were the borders of the Empire) were permeable and relaxed; the walls, despite the gates, allowed flexible movement of native tribes (fishermen and nomads) who belonged historically to the place before the establishment of the Empire and its borders. These tribes used to get in, sell their products, and live peacefully where they live, outside the town’s gates. Joll’s and Mandel’s presences seize the town from being a natural contact zone between those tribes and the townspeople by restraining movements across the gates and rendering those outside enemies.

4.2.1 The Burden of The Empire: Lining the Borders and Defining Barbarianism

Joll’s and Mandel’s crossings blur the fragile line the Magistrate maintains throughout his service in the border town. This line is drawn between him being the civil representative of the Empire’s law and the man who goes native and shares culturally more with the people of the agricultural settlement than with those who come suddenly from the Capital. Interestingly, in his monologues, the Magistrate refers to the northern nomads as ‘barbarians,’ but later, he insists on calling them ‘nomads’ when pleading against the capital officers. A verbal reference reveals the undecided, liminal space he inhabits. The difference

between the Magistrate, the civil servant, on the one hand, and Joll and Mandel, the military and the police officer, on the other hand, is how the Northern Nomads are others for the former and enemies for the latter. But in both cases, the Northern Nomads are labeled as 'Barbarians.' Both believe in the superiority of their civilization, which has introduced much progress and advancements to the primitive place. Also, unlike all the other characters in the previous two novels (Gaber and Offred), the Magistrate is the best example of a good dystopian citizen who is fully content within the dystopic circumstances, given the fact that he belongs to the top hierarchy. In the Magistrate's world,

> [i]mperialism converts anxiety about one's arbitrary location in time and space into an assertion that if nowhere is my home, everywhere is my home. I belong anywhere by my superior technology and civilization (the higher power of the mind). If I am there, you are the other (Eckstein 192).

Marking off the Empire by a physical and epistemological border, the Magistrate builds his moral basis to rationalize his belonging to the Empire.

Being a representative of the Empire long after its establishment, the Magistrate takes his position in the hierarchy for granted; never has he questioned the cost at which the Empire established itself. Being close to retirement age complicates his situation, as he strives to preserve the status quo at any price. This endeavor is what he describes as "I believe in peace, perhaps even peace at any price" (15). Throughout his service, nothing motivates him to question his position and contribution to the dystopian state. During those years, he aims to preserve his fragile, ambivalent identity. This identity is based on his subjective perception of himself as a civilized Empire civil servant and a well-integrated foreigner to the local primitive culture. Maintaining the line between those two adjacent identities

helps him form the moral basis on which he justifies the Empire's existence. With a true conviction, he perceives the Empire, which he represents as an embodiment of civilization, as antithetical to those living outside the town's gates. As for them, the Empire labels them homogenously as 'barbarians.' There is no differentiation between fishermen and nomads. Neither the Magistrate nor the capital officials know any of those native groups' languages or histories, nor is there a motivation for acquiring this knowledge. Although the Magistrate is not inclined towards violence, he perceives the northern nomads as " mainly destitute tribespeople with tiny flocks of their own living around the river" (4). The Empire stands tall behind the gates, self-sufficient, protecting itself from barbarianism and wilderness.

From his subjective measurement, advanced weaponry, urban life, hygiene, and writing distinguish the Empire from the stateless borderless Nomads. Nonetheless, the Magistrate can have peaceful relations with the local groups and differentiate among them culturally. Although he never tries to learn their tongues, he knows they are peaceful groups from their long co-existence. Despite the Magistrate's honest attempts to distinguish himself from the deeds of Joll and Mandel, he remains rooted in the broader discourse of the Empire's superiority. In his view, they are barbarians in their 'uncivilized' manners, but not brutal. This disputation over the definition of barbarianism will trigger the conflict of the practices of dominance between the margins and the capital. In one of his reflections, he highlights what credits the Empire as superior, saying that "[n]o one can accept that an imperial army has been annihilated by men with bows and arrows and rusty old guns who live in tents and never wash and cannot read and write" (157). Those criteria form the Magistrates' and the Empire's subjective

perception of its place in the world, shaping the Magistrate's responsibility to dedicate his career to enforcing and observing the Empire's law.

Furthermore, the confrontation between the Magistrate, on one side, and Joll and Mandel, on the other, over violence and bodily torture explains the complex relationships between eliciting truth, enforcing the law, and achieving justice. It is on the Empire's self-definition of these core concepts (truth, law, justice) that bases its legitimacy. The three pillars are backed by a robust discourse on the other/ enemy and the securitization of its borders. The narrative is a contestation between those two kinds of representatives over the nature of walls, the essence of truth and justice, and the definition of the enemy/other. Due to thirty years of peace and being a pacifist and idealist, he sees the relationship between the Empire and its subalterns as a simplistic direct relation between the concepts of law and justice. All through his service on the frontier, he believes that he carries the burden of civilization and the responsibility thereof to enforce its law. He takes pride that there are no "facilities for prisoners," as crimes are only limited to stock raids whose penalty "is usually a fine or compulsory labor" (2), a crime the Magistrate considers serious.

In a significant incident, while he still has jurisdiction over the garrison, he examines a case of a young peasant who must commit to the army for three years as a punishment for 'stealing a chicken,' another magistrate makes a sentence in a far-off town (152). As the peasant starts serving on the border town's garrison, he attempts to escape to see his mother and sisters in his distant hometown. Eventually, he is brought back again before the Magistrate for a new punishment.

In this incident, long before the campaign of Joll, the Magistrate shows how the Empire instrumentalizes law in creating an illusion of justice.

This interconnectedness between the Empire's narratives of the imperative of law and the illusion of justice serves as a tool to keep its subalterns in check during peaceful times. This interconnectedness also allows the Empire to remain distant from its subjects while othering and dehumanizing them. In this court session, while the Magistrate lectures the young peasant, he insists on saying that "[w]e are all the subject to the law, which is greater than any of us. The magistrate who sent you here, I myself, you—we are all subject to the law" (152). With full conviction, the Magistrate propagates equality before the law; he is deeply rooted in this discourse. Nonetheless, the Magistrate can see the peasant's disappointment and frustration with that grandiose talk about the law overlooking the effect of the exaggerated penalty on its subject. The Magistrate denies the peasant his feeling of injustice and justifies it by saying,

> [y]ou think you know what is just and what is not. I understand. We all think we know,' I had no doubt, myself, then that at each moment each one of us, man, woman, child, perhaps even the poor old horse turning the mill-wheel, knew what was just: all creatures come into the world bringing with them the memory of justice. 'But we live in a world of laws,' I said to my poor prisoner, a world of the second-best. There is nothing we can do about that. We are fallen creatures. All we can do is to uphold the laws, all of us, without allowing the memory of justice to fade. (152)

In this statement, the Magistrate shows a deterministic view of the Empire's rule of law and its world view: 'we are fallen creatures;' severing any imagination of a utopia of justice. This statement echoes Hannah Arendt's description of totalitarian lawfulness, which

> def[ies] legality and pretend[s] to establish the direct reign of justice on earth, executes the law of History or of Nature without translating it into standards of right and wrong for individual behavior. It applies the law directly to mankind without bothering with the behavior of men. The law of Nature or the law of History, if properly executed, is expected to produce mankind as its end product; and this expectation lies behind the claim to global rule of all totalitarian governments. (*Origins* 462)

Being a civilized Empire compared to the local groups living outside the gates, its laws are the second-best alternative for primitives; the Empire's laws are inevitable. The Magistrate implements the law of the Empire to keep its interests intact and maintain the discipline of the 'primitive' subalterns. For him, his aim, which justifies his existence, is blindly applying the law without questioning the lawbreaker's sense of injustice. The Magistrate never questions if there is equality in the ordinary life between the colonizer and colonized that pushes a young peasant, who knows the penalty beforehand, to steal a chicken. He does not allow the 'memory of justice' to be present as a way to rethink the 'worlds of laws' in which he significantly kept its mode active. For him, justice is a concept related to the strict application of laws, not the rights and well-being of the subalterns in their daily lives. Paradoxically, he expresses that despite his blind defense of the enforcement of the law, he faces now and again a temptation to step down from his position and desert the courtroom altogether. Even though he denies the peasant's feeling of injustice, he confesses in a monologue commenting on this incident that "'[w]hen some men suffer unjustly,' I said to myself, 'it is the fate of those who witness their suffering to suffer the shame of it'" (152). While "the specious consolation of this thought could not comfort [him]" (152), it foreshadows his struggle later between his lifelong practice and the extension of this practice. Despite the Magistrate's occasional moments of doubt, he wants to believe that

the peasant's incident is a 'minor' drawback of the law with no future consequences. He thinks those minor drawbacks will not soon return to him, embodied in significant events pushing him to take a stand and forsake his fragile peaceful life. With the same logic, the Magistrate uses with the peasant, Joll insists that "[p]risoners are prisoners" (23). He knows it is not within his power to argue further with Joll under such exceptional circumstances.

4.2.2 Torture: The Empire's Narrative of the Border

The Empire creates a narrative around the border—a history of antagonizing the nomads. One direct outcome of this narrative is the imposition of a contact zone, where the colonizer (The Empire) is at the top of the hierarchy and as part of an absolute hegemony. This narrative necessitates ignorance so that the nomads remain aliens for and silent to the Empire and, therefore, seen as barbarians. The deliberate ignorance of their language, customs, and cultures maintains the perception of the nomads as exotic and mysterious. And this mystery begets more antagonism. This spiral correlation between ignorance and antagonism paves the way to derealizing those nomads and facilitates a systemic torture process. The lack of a common language or the knowledge of the nomads' languages nullifies procedural interrogation (verbal questions and answers). Therefore, inflicting pain through torture is the only way Joll can find the truth—the pain of the tortured body. This is explained when he briefly tries to explain to the Magistrate that "Truth is Pain" (5).

The Magistrate has to confront the ugly face of the Empire: Torture. He initially thought that the Empire trains its representatives to be qualified torturers. Allegedly, he believes that serving in a border town has rescued his soul from the

curse of torture and its related shame. Early dialogue between Joll and the Magistrate about the relationship between truth and pain constructs the rational justification of power in derealizing subjects who do not belong to the Empire. It marks the friction between their different practices of dominance. In Joll's worldview, it is through reaching truth that pain should be enforced (for the omission of any other tool as language) to sustain the Empire's dominion. The subalterns who are potential enemies always have something to hide. To reach the sought truth, there should be a violent investigation; the body should suffer and get scarred to elicit truth, or in his words, "[p]ain is truth; all else is subject to doubt" (5). Joll's iconic statement resonates with Fanon's comment on the French war in Algeria: "[t]orture in Algeria is not an accident, or an error, or a fault. Colonialism cannot be understood without the possibility of torturing, violating, or massacring. Torture is an expression and a means of the occupant-occupied relationship" (66). This statement aligns as well with Michel Foucault's comment on torture as "the locus of extortion of the truth" (*Discipline and Punish* 42). Violent investigation and systematic torture become in Joll's practice not only an obligation to protect the Empire but even an act of heroism.

As Joll explicitly mentions immense pain as fundamental to interrogation and the Magistrate fails to reason with his logic, the latter finds himself unable to believe this indifference toward the infliction of pain except thinking that Joll must have a secret purification ritual. The Magistrate reflects on how torture would affect the psyche of Joll as a professional torturer. Contemplating the enigmatic character of Joll, the Magistrate finds himself pondering a significant question: "How he [Joll] felt the very first time [of torture]: did he, invited as an apprentice to twist the pincers…" (13). This statement captures the Magistrate's introspective musings

as he delves into the psyche of Joll, seeking to comprehend the emotions, sensations, and moral implications associated with Joll's initiation into a world of brutality and cruelty. Though he reflects on how Joll starts his career in systematized torture, he also does not deny the possibility that Joll might be suffering stealthily from agonized conscience; he thinks that Joll might have "a private ritual of purification, carried out behind closed doors, to enable him to return and break bread with other men. Does he wash his hands carefully, perhaps, or change all his clothes, or has the bureau created new men who can pass without disquiet between the unclean and the clean?" (13) In this incident, it is remarkable to show how the Magistrate is emotionally detached from the world but still trying to rationalize it. Later, when tortured, he can patch the gap between rationalizing pain and feeling it.

Through the Magistrate's suppositions on the psyche and inner world of Joll, Coetzee demonstrates glimpses into the dark world of the torturer. Referring to testimonies of torture from Greek Junta Trials[22] in 1975, Edward Peters, in *Torture,* speaks of how torturers also suffer throughout their training and are impelled to escape their countries. Peters details the selection process of the torturers and the various stages of their training to become one. Usually, potential torturers are selected from conscripts or lower-level police personnel with family backgrounds and political sympathy toward the regime (182). Later they are exposed to "intensive political indoctrination that emphasizes the danger to the country constituted by 'communists,' 'fascists,' 'terrorists,' or 'imperialists'" (182). They are offered 'substantial privileges,' e.g., higher ranks, higher salaries, and

[22] 'Greek Junta' refers to the Regime of the Colonels who established a right-wing dictatorship in Greece from 1967 to 1974.

favors to their families. Such privileges are given for the lack of social capital those potential torturers crave. For that reason, they are mainly chosen from rural or urban lower-class recruits.

Following the selection procedure, Peters elaborates on their brutal training to be transformed from a human into a torturer. Their training program starts mainly with them being "beaten […] forced to beat others, perform self-abasing acts in front of their colleagues, and accept both unquestioning obedience to superiors and excessive brutality among colleagues as a norm" (183). The normalization of pain facilitates their work later by giving them high tolerance toward both inflicting pain and observing bodies in suffering. After training, they are gradually integrated into the regime's systematic torture procedures. Now recruits are first introduced to "guarding prisoners, whom they routinely see being violently treated by others, then on arresting squads, and finally are assigned to torture details themselves" (183). Any time during this phase, if any of the recruits start to show hesitation or resistance, as per usual, "they are threatened by the loss of privileges and ignoble dismissal from the service, punishments for their families, or they themselves may be beaten and retrained until they comply" (183). Barbara Eckstein comments on the torturers' qualification process that they "know better than those who have been neither victim nor torturer the reality of intense pain and the sense of powerlessness it creates" (184). Considering Peters' detailed description of training banal officers at the bottom of the power hierarchy to be torturers, we gain insight into how training methodologies establish an emotional divide between the torturer and the captive, effectively obstructing the development of empathy. Put differently, the training bestowed upon torturers systematically eradicates any potential for empathy, stripping the violent

procedures of their empathetic significance. The meticulously structured phases through which a torturer must progress further reveal the element of their docility as they conform to the prescribed guidelines and relinquish their individual agency in the process.

The regime/system not only demands the control of those at the bottom of the hierarchy, e.g., colonized, subalterns, and citizens, but molds the docility of its representatives and the practitioners of its ideology with much precision. They sustain the imagination of the regime's terror and veneration in the eyes, minds, and bodies of the dominated. In such a system, one fails to trace back the chain of injustices to one person; part of the wickedness of such totalitarian systems is that evil is not only banal but is also minutely divided, compartmentalized, and distributed among many personnel of whom, as the Magistrate says, "the Empire does not require that its servants love each other, merely that they perform their duty" (6).

4.3 The Magistrate's Willful Blindness: The Hut as First Contact Zone

> The knot loops in upon itself; I cannot find the end.
> (*Waiting for the Barbarians* 23)

The concept of bodily pain and iteks emerges as a transformative force, shaking the foundations of the Magistrate's simplistic understanding of justice and the role of law. The arrival of Joll, the merciless agent of the Empire, sets in motion a sequence of events and new contact zones. Joll's initial act involves the capture and brutal interrogation of an elderly fisherman and his nephew, conducted without the presence or consent of the Magistrate. The Magistrate enters the hut to find the corpse of the old man in a shroud; upon tearing it, he sees "[t]he grey

beard is caked with blood. The lips are crushed and drawn back; the teeth are broken. One eye is rolled back, the other eye-socket is a bloody hole" (7). This scene demonstrates the Magistrate's inability to face the truth of torture, as he pretends that his lack of knowledge of the techniques used will exempt him from the ethical consequences. By only witnessing the aftermath of the violence enacted on the prisoners, he deceives himself into thinking that he is not involved in their agony. However, his aloofness from the actual practices of torture and his willful blindness do not protect him from the moral accountability of his role and emotional ordeal. In this narrative, we explore the effects associated with the outcomes of torture more than the process itself in the obscure chamber of torture.

The Magistrate thinks he can secure his imaginary world by escaping the center of the Empire. Yet once he "enter[s] the hut holding the lantern high, trespassing, on what has become holy or unholy ground, if there is any difference, preserve of the mysteries of the State" (6-7), he is trapped into the maze of the curse of torture. Before this moment, the Magistrate is, as Lars Rensmann's comment on Hannah Arendt's 'mass man' in totalitarian societies, "[i]solated and disinterested individuals no longer care much about their own lives, and they are often ready to sacrifice the lives of others" (101). Arendt mentions totalitarianism reduces, in a unique way, humans under its authority to mere objects, erasing their individuality as the moral person dies (Arendt, *Origins* 453). Crossing the hut's threshold is considered a remarkable crossing in the Magistrate's narrative and his unwavering determination to witness the dead, tortured body. There is no turning back; he will be on a journey to regain his moral personality.

The Magistrate demonstrates naivety or, perhaps, avoidance of confrontation, seeing that there is no acceleration after the brutal death of the older man. Four days later, Joll sets off on his campaign and captures fisherfolk living in small settlements by the river outside the town's gates. The group is sent to the town as prisoners ‘incommunicado’ for him until he returns from his short campaign (18). The group comprises men, women, and children subjected to interrogations. In the situation, the Magistrate again faces the same crisis on a larger scale; a group of ‘savages’ (20), as he describes them, are about to be painfully interrogated because of the sheer ignorance and arrogance of the capital of the Empire.

Despite Joll’s orders to keep the ‘prisoners’ incommunicado, the fisherfolk’s coercive relocation creates a contact zone between them and the townspeople. As the town has no prison facilities for locking them in, the Magistrate is forced to fence them in the yard, where they are visible to the townspeople, but still confining the nomads’ movement. In a way, the native people are depicted in a zoo-like setting. This arrangement hinders potential attempts at empathy from developing among the townspeople and expedites the widespread acceptance and currency of violence against the nomads. Interestingly, although the townspeople are much less modernized than the capital’s inhabitants, they feel superior to the native groups living outside the town gates. Being part of the Empire, they believe they are distinguished by being civilized, which facilitates their dehumanizing of the fisherfolk and the nomads. In an incident, a soldier harasses one woman from the fisherfolk, which ends with stones being thrown at him by her folks to protect the woman. Trying to keep his distance and indifference, the Magistrate describes him as “ugly, […] but who knows” (21).

Nevertheless, he fails at that point to see his ignorance and arrogance. Although he can differentiate “between fishermen with nets and wild nomad horsemen with bows” and knows that they speak different languages (19), he holds a rigid superior approach to them. Driven by his civilized ideals, the Magistrate ensures that innocent prisoners receive ‘fair’ treatment. So, he orders his soldiers to ensure they are fed, kept warm at night, and most importantly, made invisible, so no “idlers coming in to stare at them” (20). Despite the so-called fair treatment and the Magistrate’s attempt to avoid a conscience crisis later, he intentionally deactivates empathy towards them.

On the contrary, he condemns their complacent behavior, and, at the same time, he criticizes that they are easily tempted to get “out of the state of nature” (20). In a long monologue, the Magistrate records his ideas on how the fisherfolk are seen through his eyes, the eyes of the civilized representative of the Empire. Crammed in a small space, knowing nothing about what awaits them, the fisherfolk develop familiarity and contentment with the status quo. The Magistrate disapproves of the native groups' behavior, remarking that “these savages seem to forget they ever had another home. Seduced utterly by the free and plentiful food and the bread, they relax, smile at everyone, move about the barracks yard from one patch of shade to another, doze and wake, and grow excited as mealtimes approach. Their habits are frank and filthy” (20). With a tone of mockery, the Magistrate exhibits a discerning awareness of his superior positioning in history that dictates a narrative for the so-called savages:

> When we return them to their homes along the river, I hope they will have many far-fetched stories to tell their neighbors. I hope that the history of their captivity enters their legends, passed down from grandfather to

> grandson. But I hope too that memories of the town, with its easy life and its exotic foods, are not strong enough to lure them back. I do not want a race of beggars on my hands. (20)

As previously discussed, a pivotal element distinguishing the realm within the gates from the external domain is the implementation of the law, which the Magistrate perceives as the foundation of civilization. Through law enforcement, a demarcation is established between the realm of civilization inside the gates and the state of nature existing beyond their boundaries.

Soon, the town's local citizens start treating fisherfolk as 'animals,' and rumors spread that they are diseased and contagious. Swiftly, the kitchen staff who prepare the food for them "refuse them utensils and begin to toss them their food from the doorway as if they were indeed animals" (21). Dehumanized, no one thought of the crying, sick baby captured with his mother. Eventually, the baby stops crying, dying in his mother's arms, and she refuses to give up his corpse. The corpse is taken forcefully from her for hygiene reasons to be buried. As the Magistrate notes, she stays all day covering her face while her people avoid her. On this note, the Magistrate questions his move: "Have we violated some custom of theirs… by taking the child and burying it? I curse Colonel Joll for all the trouble he has brought me, and for the shame too" (21). He realizes that he is slowly getting lost in the cursed maze of torture and self-blinding arrogance toward natives; he now "[…] know[s] somewhat too much; and from this knowledge, once one has been infected, there seems to be no recovering. I ought never to have taken my lantern to see what was going on in the hut by the granary" (22-23). It is not only the curse of torture that will cause the Magistrate's ordeal but also the curse of death and his disregard for the rituals of the unnamed people.

4.4 Pursuit Of Reconciliation with The Tortured Body: The Apartment as Second Contact Zone

> O horror, horror, horror!
> Tongue nor heart cannot conceive nor name thee!
> Confusion now hath made his masterpiece.
> Most sacrilegious murder hath broke open.
> The Lord's anointed temple and stole thence
> The life o' th' building
>
> *Macbeth*, act I, scene III

This section aims to analyze ways the proximity of the body of the tortured victim manifests itself, effectively influences the bystander perpetrator (the Magistrate), and compels the perpetrator's estrangement in the labyrinth of guilt and desire for reconciliation. In this section, I focus on the relationship between the Magistrate and the Nomad Woman,[23] whom Joll has tortured on his first raid. The dynamic of their relationship mediates sexuality in a colonial context to embody an elusive pursuit of reconciliation and connection between the victim and its perpetrator on one side and to present the interplay between the Magistrate's aging and his position in the power hierarchy on the other. This ambivalent relationship allows later the shift in the Magistrate's stance from a supporter of the Empire to its opponent. In Joll's first raid, he conducts violent interrogations in which severe torture is inflicted, killing some of the captives. Despite the narrative's usage of the present tense, the narrative refrains from detailing the torture scenes. Coetzee employs a concise and restrained style to

[23] The appellation of the female nomad remains undisclosed. Significantly, the Magistrate refrains from disclosing her name. In light of this, I opt to designate her as "the Nomad Woman" to afford her a distinctive identity, while intentionally selecting the term "nomad" over "barbarian" to eschew the perpetuation of subconsciously racist undertones embedded within the Magistrate's language. Simultaneously, by retaining the descriptor "Woman," I consciously avoid endorsing the infantilizing perspective imposed by the Magistrate's colonial vantage point.

depict the scenes of torture, focusing less on the graphic details and more on the psychological impact of the violence on the Magistrate and his ethical transformation.

Among the tortured group are the Nomad Girl and her father; they are both brutally tortured. She is half-blind and disabled, and her father is killed. After Joll's temporal departure at the start of the winter season, the Magistrate notices the Nomad Woman begging on the street. At once, he brings her in and questions her about her background. As he knows that she is left behind after the raid and cannot get back to her people due to her severe disabilities and the winter season, he decides to give her shelter in his place and assigns her as a scullery girl.

Probably the faint pangs of guilt and fear for the rupture of his peaceful life are behind the Magistrate's inviting her to his apartment, as he expresses himself that "I feel a quiet affection for her which is perhaps the best that can be hoped for between an aging man and a girl of twenty; better than a possessive passion certainly" (24). However, soon enough, the tortured body of the Nomad Woman alters the space and destabilizes the Magistrate's inner peace even further. In this unique contact zone, her tortured body becomes a rigid border, at which the Magistrate questions his masculinity and laments his lost youth. Through proximity to her tortured body, he starts his journey of self-questioning in the "search for secrets and answers, no matter how bizarre, like an old woman reading tea leaves" (47). At this moment, despite the questions and confusion, he wants to believe that "[t]here is nothing to link me with torturers" and that "a

bed is anything but a bed, a woman's body anything but a site of joy? I must assert my distance from Colonel Joll! I will not suffer for his crimes!" (47-8).

His erotic relationship with the Nomad Woman alters his bedroom from a comfort zone where he typically practices his colonizer masculinity to a contact zone in which he is not anymore protected from the traumatic effects of violence inflicted by the Empire. From the first moment, there is an enigmatic erotic attraction the Magistrate feels toward the Nomad Woman. During the winter season, the duration of their encounter, the Magistrate is compulsorily drawn to her by an ambivalent mixture of a sexual attraction to her femininity and moral responsibility towards the visible torture marks on her body. The two binaries of this mixture are structured in a complex affective mode causing him to fluctuate from resenting her to the desire to penetrate her silenced, tortured body. This fluctuation develops into his impulsive decision to embark on a risky trip into the desert to return the Woman to her people as an act of repentance.

This risky trip, as a grand gesture of displaying repentance, has been preceded by other symbolic acts that exhibit the Magistrate's deep emotions of guilt. For instance, after the death of the fisherman and Joll's first departure, he orders the soldier to wash the physical space that witnesses the violation of subordinate bodies, "I want everything cleaned up! Soap and water! I want everything as it was before!" (26). In both incidents, the Magistrate tries to distance himself, avoiding getting contaminated with the curse of the tortured bodies through acts of cleansing and purification. He thinks that one can undo the past. With much naivety, he believes he can erase the memory of torture by cleaning the physical space. Using the same approach, when he first lets the Woman in, he, with a

limited verbal exchange, immediately indulges in the ritual of washing and oiling the body parts that show the damage and carry the sign of torture. Once she comes in, he makes her warm, brings her stew to eat, and starts the ritual of washing her broken legs. The ritual of cleaning and oiling the legs that Joll has crippled recalls the biblical incident of Jesus Christ washing the legs of the sinners. The Magistrate's body exhibits an intense response every time he busies himself with the washing and oiling ritual; "[he] lose[s] [him]self in the rhythm of what [he is] doing. [He] lose[s] awareness of the girl herself" (30). He experiences "a space of time which is blank to [him]," where he doubts if he "even present" (30). Every time he catches up with the washing rhythm, he loses control. He surrenders to a heavy wave of drowsiness and oblivious sleep, waking up later in the middle of the night disoriented and embarrassed (30, 33, 45).

In the presence of her half-blindness, he describes himself as "a grey form moving about unpredictably on the periphery of her vision. When she looks at [him, he is] a blur, a voice, a smell, a center of energy that one day falls asleep washing her feet and the next day feeds her bean stew and—she does not know" (31). When she looks at him, he questions if in her gaze he is also "a blank?" (33). In other words, the Woman's blindness, due to torture practiced by the Empire he represents, threatens to reduce his presence to scattered traces of smell, voice, and energy or even erases his presence altogether; in the same way, torture has eradicated her voice. Ironically, he fears this disintegration and reduction in the presence of her blindness, resulting from the barbaric torture the Woman has undergone. One can say that torture indirectly damages and silences the tortured body, voice, and soul and threatens the torturer with disintegration and reduction.

This can only happen when proximity between the torturer and the tortured is made possible away from the torture chamber arrangement.

Through the recurrent theme of blindness, we can understand how it feels to be in the presence of a blind person or of those who make us believe they are (as in Joll's wearing the sunglasses). From the narrative's opening, the Magistrate grapples with being in the presence of people whose blindness he questions. Unknown to him, he does not recognize Joll's sunglasses when he first meets him, saying, "I have never seen anything like it: two little discs of glass suspended in front of his eyes in loops of wire. Is he blind?" (1). The Magistrate's confusion about blindness extends to his encounter with Nomad Woman, where he is always confused by her impaired vision. Paradoxically, he thinks that both Woman and Joll are blind, but he never doubts that he might be metaphorically the blind one. He fails to recognize his positionality in the power structure leading him to assume that he is harmless, which obstructs his attempts to empathize with the Nomad Woman and critically examines Joll's actions and what they signify.

This exceptional contact zone suggests the possibility of dual eradication when there is a proximity between the tortured and the torturer. She brings her otherness and blindness across the borders, forcing the Magistrate to experience the precarity of being the invisible other through their almost non-verbal interaction. Susan Bordo speaks of the European discovery of otherness, saying that "[t]he recognition of cultural difference […] is nothing less than the discovery of the *Other* […] the consciousness of 'Otherness,' as Mead, Lacan, and Merleau-Ponty have emphasized, makes possible the consciousness of self" (45-46).

Bordo expounds upon the European encounter with the concept of alterity, asserting that the acknowledgment of different cultural identities constitutes nothing short of illumination regarding the existence of the Other. Throughout his life, the Magistrate has experienced life in the border town from the top of the hierarchy and is used to other native groups living in or outside the border. During his short interaction with the Woman, he re-discovers his otherness/self, and in concert, he gets close to another (barbarian), discovering the threat of being one.

4.4.1 Filling in The Blankness: The Other's Trauma and Narration

Inside the contact zone of the apartment, the Nomad Woman is silenced twice: through her crippled, blinded body by torture and being in constant subordination to the Magistrate by sharing his apartment. To understand the origins of the blank space between the Magistrate and the Nomad Woman, one should refer to the coerced silence of the latter. As the Magistrate is oblivious as he is, this silence causes him to view the Nomad Woman as a blank on various levels. As she cannot disclose her narrative for the reasons above, she remains captivated in her marked, silenced body. At the same time, the Magistrate frivolously tries to fill in this blankness while a feeling of resentment toward her is boiling. The waves of blankness that the Magistrate slips in urge him to fill them with questions.

First, the Magistrate wants to fill in the blankness on the factual level—searching for the truth. He is after the facts; he leads an interior interrogation to know what happens. He interviews the soldiers on duty during Joll's interrogation of her and her father, but they claim with much fear that they have never seen anything, only heard screams (39). Afterward, on this night, he dreams of a "face […] [that] is blank, featureless; it is the face of an embryo or a tiny whale" (40). For him, it is

not enough to perceive the damage of torture on the Woman. Instead, he keeps asking her until she factually narrates the details, i.e., about the tools (a fork) that caused her partial blindness. Through his recurrent questions to the Woman, the Magistrate copies Joll's interrogative style and never concerns himself with what is beyond the Woman's body. In a way, "[t]he Magistrate's search for truth, aligned with Joll's search for truth, is similar as they both take advantage of an attempt to invade the Other's body" (van Houtum and Wolfe 138). Accordingly, the Woman's body and its marks become another wood slips excavated from the desert, or, better, survived torture. Her torture marks are unreadable scripts for the Magistrate as he approaches them wrongly. Even after finally knowing the truth/ the facts, he impulsively continues the ritual of oiling her legs and eventually goes into "the slump into oblivion." However, the ritual of not knowing how torture is inflicted does not lessen his growing resentment toward her.

Neither investigating the soldier nor questioning the Nomad Woman eliminates the blank space between the Magistrate and the Woman. Furthermore, blankness becomes a threatening space that attacks him in his dreams or a hole he slips into whenever he is in her presence. This blankness intimidates the Magistrate further through his erotic impulse toward her. Every time he gets closer to her, either in the cleansing ritual or in bed, "[he] lose[s] [himself] in the rhythm of what [he is] doing. [He] lose[s] awareness of the Woman herself. There is a space of time which is blank to [him]" (30). Moreover, he still sees her damaged body as an "obstinate, phlegmatic body" (45). Approaching retirement, he confronts the drawbacks of aging that are heightened with the youthfulness of the Nomad Woman's body, yet its inability to seduce him.

Upon the recurrence of their encounter, the Magistrate grapples once again with doubts surrounding his masculinity. In an attempt to elude the escalating self-questioning, he surrenders to yet another corporeal escapade within the confines of a brothel. In this familiar setting, he seeks solace in the company of a sex worker whose flattery he has grown accustomed to. However, the enigmatic and erotically charged presence of the Nomad Woman, coupled with her inscrutability, continues to haunt him even amidst his intimate interlude with the sex worker. Drawing a stark comparison between the anticipated warmth and openness of a sex worker's demeanor and the Nomad Woman's distant and impenetrable aura, he designates the latter as "the body of the other," a manifestation that appears "closed, ponderous [...] and seems beyond comprehension" (45).

Unable to recollect her face, he declares “[s]he is incomplete,” just “[b]lank, like a fist beneath a black wig, the face grows out […] of the blank body beneath it […]” (45). These remembrances portray otherness as an embodiment of absolute void and detachment, a state that incessantly torments the Magistrate, whether the Nomad Woman is present or absent. Indeed, the tormented state of the woman's body leaves an indelible imprint upon the Magistrate's (sub)consciousness, persistently haunting him both in his waking moments and within the realm of dreams. Thus, it is through the transformative effects of torture that the body and soul of the Nomad Woman are irreparably shattered, rendering her an ethereal, soulless entity that now serves as a haunting apparition intertwined with the Magistrate's own psyche.

In embarking upon yet another round of interrogation, the Magistrate finds blankness is no longer restricted to the present but starts infecting the past. Fighting the growing blankness, he struggles to access the recesses of his memory to recollect the image of the Woman in the pre-torture phase when she has first come to town with her people. His ardent desire is to recollect her as a complete and whole being, untainted by the traumatic experiences inflicted upon her. Repeatedly, his endeavors prove futile. He believes that if he could construct a memory of the Woman before she was tortured, he could obliterate this blankness and might restore his soul. As the Woman remains a fleeting specter, he can surprisingly remember her father when they first came to the town, while her place in his memory is “a space, a blankness” (51). The effect of torture causes the difference in recollecting the father and his daughter. As the father is killed as an effect of torture, his face is retrievable for the Magistrate, while the Nomad Woman’s face is conjured up either before or after torture. This ambivalence of memory recollections sets apart the living tortured body from the dead tortured one. If the deceased’s face can be recollected to haunt the torturer, a living tortured body is always left “featureless” (50). The Nomad Woman’s face is in liminal space, persistently present yet eternally beyond retrieval. As she is transfigured into a spectral mode for the Magistrate, he gives in “to face the truth of […]: to obliterate the girl” (50).

Thus, to frame the complexity of the encounter between the tortured body of the subordinate (the Nomad Woman) and the body of authority (the Magistrate), it is essential to underscore how the woman's body is in intersectional subordination. Kimberlé Crenshaw's concept of intersectionality is a framework that recognizes and analyzes how different social categories, such as race, gender, class,

sexuality, and more, intersect and interact, shaping individuals' experiences and social dynamics. In her words, she explains the concept as follows:

> This apparent contradiction is but another manifestation of the conceptual limitations of the single-issue analyses that intersectionality challenges. The point is that black women can experience discrimination in any number of ways and that the contradiction arises from our assumptions that their claims of exclusion must be unidirectional. Consider an analogy to traffic in an intersection, coming and going in all four directions. Discrimination, like traffic through an intersection, may flow in one direction, and it may flow in another. If an accident happens in an intersection, it can be caused by cars traveling from any number of directions and, sometimes, from all of them. Similarly, if a black woman is harmed because she is in the intersection, her injury could result from sex discrimination or race discrimination. (149)

With the assistance of Crenshaw's elaboration on the positionality of women of color, it is useful to view the intersectional position of the Nomad Woman under the gaze of the Imperial man, the Magistrate. Applying an intersectional perspective unveils the interlocking nature of these multiple layers of marginalization, demonstrating how the intertwined dynamics of gender-based and colonial subordination shape the Nomad Woman's positioning. Such an approach enables a deeper comprehension of the intersecting systems of power and privilege that underpin the Magistrate's interactions with women, highlighting the complex array of obstacles and oppressions faced by those who occupy marginalized identities within the context of imperial structures.

As the Magistrate is still stuck in the construction of being a civil servant of the Empire, women who get involved with him are subjugated twofold: First, for their gender, and second, for being one of the colonized (barbarians) or of inferior jobs.

The Nomad Woman is subjugated on another third level due to the torture and deformities she has been exposed to. From the narrative, we learn that he is a man with an intense sexual drive toward women of servitude and prostitution. In one incident, he mentions that it is enviable among Empire's representatives to serve on a frontier because (as they exchange in their rhetoric) of "the easy morals of the oases, the long-scented summer evenings, the complaisant sloe-eyed women" (48). Native and colonized women are the exotic and immoral others under the imperial masculine gaze. Through this gaze, the Magistrate manages his sexual encounters during the thirty years of service. He is the magistrate of the settlement, the only representative of the imperial Empire, who brings servants or prostitutes who should be honored by his "kindness" to his bed. In a way, being primarily in relationships with females from the bottom of the power hierarchy constructs the dynamic of the expectations. His masculinity is constructed against the submissiveness and, probably, the unnoticed subversion of the women he chooses. From this imbalance in power in those relationships, the Magistrate falsely sees that such sexual encounters are built on mutual consent. He is oblivious of his active role in exerting imperial covert violence, which explains he pursues to distance himself from the publicity of the overt violence conducted by Joll. That being the case, he gradually starts to have genuine feelings of guilt and shame that grow from his realization that "[t]he distance between [himself] and her torturers […] is negligible" (29).

The Magistrate's dilemma with the Nomad Woman is his inability to approach the tortured body or to grasp the exposure the body undergoes in a torture session. He, in return, is obsessed with the facts in the story of the torture more than allowing space for narrating pain. From the interaction in the contact zone

between the Magistrate and the Nomad Woman, it becomes evident that empathy is almost impossible without narrativizing pain. In a brief incident during the unrest and after his arrest, because of the rumors that the barbarians are approaching the town, a little woman from the town is raped by who is thought to be a 'barbarian' because of "his ugliness" (134). However, the Magistrate narrates that "[n]othing would induce her to tell her story [… as] she lay in her parents' home staring at the ceiling" (134). After his own torture, he understands the centrality of narrating pain and can take this woman's position. Elaine Scarry explains further the impact of pain on language:

> "[…] A fifth dimension of physical pain is its ability to destroy language, the power of verbal objectification, a major source of our self-extension, a vehicle through which the pain could be lifted out into the world and eliminated. Before destroying language, it first monopolizes language, becomes its only subject: complaint, in many ways the nonpolitical equivalent of confession, becomes the exclusive mode of speech." (54)

As torture begets silence, it problematizes the process of empathy, if not interrupting the entire process. As long as the torture's pain is not transformed into a story that stirs emotions, not facts, she will remain imprisoned in her silence, rendering her invisible and featureless, dimming the bodily traces of pain.

4.5 Crossing the Empire's Borders: The Desert as a Third Contact Zone

Although winter is not over and the weather can be treacherous, the Magistrate embarks on a journey with the help of two men from the garrison, crossing the last borders of the Empire to bring back the Woman to her people. This trip is not only a border crossing to the unknown from the Magistrate's side; it is also breaking the rules of the Empire, especially under the current emergency laws.

His short interaction with the Nomad Woman and the inner confusion isolate him from seeing his position as a representative of the Empire, who must abide by its rules and restore the uncrossable distance between the Empire and its subalterns.

The journey beyond the borders of the Empire demonstrates another challenge to the Magistrate. As the winter is not over, he decides to take an unfamiliar route during this challenging time of the year. He experiences nature's cruelty while witnessing the Woman's easiness on his journey. He discovers the frailty of his body; he realizes that "[his] occasional hunting and hawking, [his] desultory womanizing, exercises of manhood, have concealed from [him] how soft [his] body has grown" (65). Conversely, "the girl does not complain. She eats well; she does not get sick; she sleeps all night soundly, clenched in a ball in weather so cold I would hug a dog for comfort. She rides all day without a murmur. Once, glancing up, [he] see[s] that she is riding asleep, her face as peaceful as a baby's" (65). Not only does the body of the Nomad Woman prove her total adaptation and familiarity with the nature of the place, but despite the Magistrate's thirty years of service on the frontier, it does not give him the seal of being a native. His body suffers the moment he gets outside the comfort zone of civilization. On the other side, the issue of age is raised in this situation. This parallelism between his aging body and the youthful, strong body of the Nomad Woman is—a symbolic equivalence between the aging Empire foreboding the defeat of its army later for its lack of expanding its knowledge and the ever-youthful natives for their rooted adaptability to the nature of the desert.

This journey shows the continuous willful blindness and naivety in how the Magistrate expects the two men from the garrison to behave. He chooses them because of their 'hardy,' 'honesty,' and 'willingness'; however, one doubts the Magistrate's judgment. As soon as they face the difficult weather in the desert, quiet tension starts to build between the men and the Magistrate. Apparently, for the two men, it sounds unusual that a high-rank representative of the Empire will make such a favor to a barbarian whom they think of her as "the Magistrate's slut" (80). Coetzee successfully communicates the dilemma of how a socially and politically constructed individual grows blind to recognizing his privilege over his subordinates. The Magistrate believes those men 'willingly' approved of setting off with him on this journey because of their loyalty. For a long time in power exercising and representing it, the Magistrate loses the ability to judge the extent of the spectrum of his power on the subordinates and the depth of its influence to which he is almost blind.

For the first time, outside the boundaries of the Empire, he sees the Woman with fresh eyes:

> The banter goes on in the pidgin of the frontier, and she is at no loss for words. I am surprised by her fluency, her quickness, and her self-possession. I even catch myself in a flush of pride: she is not just the old man's slut; she is a witty, attractive young woman! […] But like a fool, instead of giving her a good time I oppressed her with gloom. Truly, the world ought to belong to the singers and dancers! Futile bitterness, idle melancholy, empty regrets. (68)

The Magistrate only wants to believe that the source of his oppression of the Woman is his old age, which is a situation he cannot control much—accommodating himself in this blind spot. In contrast, the primary source of

oppression stems from being an investigator of the Empire. He rediscovers a side of her character that cannot be visible behind the door of his apartment and within the borders of the Empire. She is no more the silent, tortured, closed-off barbarian; she is more of an intelligent woman with language abilities who acts on her desires. In this context, the Woman is acting upon a free will that shows the significance of border crossing. The change of the setting culminates in the sexual intercourse finally taking place between the Magistrate and the Woman.

Soon they have reached the territory of the Nomads, which qualifies as a historical moment. For the first time, the Magistrate encounters and converses with real 'barbarians.' He finds himself unable to communicate directly with the Woman's relatives; he needs her as an interpreter. For the first time, he grasps that he never attempts to know her language while saving no energy in hopeless attempts to decipher the archaic language of the wood slips. This moment is noteworthy in emphasizing the built-in arrogance and willful blindness the Magistrate and, by extension, the Empire suffer. Although the Nomad Woman spends the entire winter season at his apartment, he realizes late that he has missed a chance to learn her tongue. It never occurs to his mind that there might be a relation between the Woman's tongue and the language used in the wood slips. Moreover, he insists that the Nomad Woman "tell them the truth," to which she replies with a smile: "You really want me to tell them the truth?" (77). The Magistrate fails to recognize that truth comes in different layers and sides and that her side of the story might harm him.

Furthermore, towards the end of the encounter, he asks her to return with him—naturally, the Nomad Woman refuses. At this point, he comprehends that the

Nomad Woman is and will remain a stranger, saying, “I see only too clearly what I see: a stocky girl with a broad mouth and hair cut in a fringe across her forehead staring over my shoulders into the sky; a stranger; a visitor from strange parts now on her way home after a less than happy visit” (79). She is a stranger body and stranger territory. Not at any point of their relationship together did he feel familiarity toward her. She stays with him in an unconquerable strange body, leaving him as a stranger in the strange land. His memory will not preserve a copy of her face. None of his sexual desires and encounters with her are enough to let her memory endure oblivion, even if their sexual intercourse occurs in the liminal space between the Empire and the Nomad’s territory. Rightly after days, “her face [is] hardening over in [his] memory, becoming opaque, impermeable, as though secreting a shell over itself” (82).

In this historical moment, the Magistrate feels shame. It is his first time to meet with northern Nomads: “[H]ere I am patching up relations between the men of the future and the men of the past, returning, with apologies, a body we have sucked dry—a go-between, a jackal of Empire in sheep’s clothing!” (79). In this situation, the Magistrate employs the inclusive pronoun "we" to align himself with the Empire, emphasizing his connection to its historical responsibilities toward the indigenous inhabitants. However, he distances himself from the Empire on earlier occasions, adopting a separate perspective. When discussing the recent acts of torture inflicted upon fellow representatives of the Empire, he uses the pronouns "I" and "them," deliberately excluding himself from the present atrocities. Simultaneously, he partially acknowledges his historical culpability. In his simplistic understanding, the Magistrate believes that being a representative of the Empire who harbors no personal animosity toward the natives or supports the

torment and invasion of their lands is sufficient for reconciliation between the colonized and the colonizer. He sees himself as a beacon of the Empire who can play a vital role in fostering peace.

The Magistrate's encounter with the Nomads prompts a profound sense of shame within him. He grapples with his dual identity as both an emissary of the Empire and an individual who seeks reconciliation and understanding. His inclusive pronouns highlight his complex relationship with the Empire, as he simultaneously distances himself from its current atrocities while acknowledging his historical responsibility. Through his unorthodox relationship with the Nomad Girl, he finds a way to transcend the limitations imposed by the Empire and convey the suppressed narratives of the subjugated indigenous people. The Magistrate's daring journey beyond the Empire's borders presents him with immense challenges and serves as a catalyst for introspection. Through his encounters with the Woman, he comes to terms with his own physical and perspective vulnerabilities

4.6 Becoming the Tortured Body: The Prison as a Fourth Contact Zone

> The black flower of civilized society, a prison
> Nathaniel Hawthorne

After the Magistrate crosses the borders of the Empire and back, his status goes into a free fall mode from the top of the hierarchy down to rock bottom—the prisoner of the Empire. His moral status is degraded from being a respectable magistrate to being an old madman. Through crossing forth and back, the Magistrate transforms the space of the town into a new contact zone in which the confrontation takes place between the Empire of the center against that of the margin. The new campaign from the capital comes to build new cells and extend

the barracks, something the Magistrate comments saying, “time for the black flower of civilization to bloom” (86). Upon the Magistrate’s arrival from the journey outside the borders, he is arrested under the accusation of “treasonously consorting with the enemy” (85). He started with a feeling of calmness, as “[he is] aware of the source of [his] elation: [his] alliance with the guardians of the Empire is over, [he has] set [himself] in opposition, the bond is broken, [he is] a free man…but what a dangerous joy! It should not be so easy to attain salvation” (85). Indeed, the Magistrate's initial sense of elation, stemming from his emancipation from the Empire's influence, is short-lived. He soon realizes that his path toward assuming responsibility and seeking redemption for his complicity in the Empire's actions will be arduous and painful. Because of his association with the Nomad Girl, he finds himself incarcerated within the very barracks that were once employed for the interrogation and torture of native individuals. In this cruel twist of fate, he becomes a newly subjected body, experiencing the torment inflicted by the Empire firsthand.

The Magistrate's unsettling relationship with the Nomad Girl disrupts and destabilizes the fixed meanings and preconceived notions that govern conventional concepts. The boundaries and assumptions surrounding power, authority, and identity become fluid and subject to transformation. His encounter with the Nomad Girl challenges the established order, prompting a reevaluation of his own role in perpetuating the oppressive mechanisms of the Empire. This destabilization of fixed meanings forces the Magistrate to confront the profound contradictions and moral dilemmas inherent within the structures of power and colonization.

4.6.1 The Empire with Thousands of Faces of Torture

The Magistrate's confinement within the prison exposes it as a space of both physical and spiritual torment. It becomes a significant contact zone where the Magistrate, as a notable prisoner and former representative of the Empire, finds himself grappling with the uncertainty of his confinement. He lacks any concrete knowledge of what awaits him, except for the clichéd expectation of excruciating bodily suffering. Throughout his encounters with other natives subjected to raids, such as the Old Man and the Nomad Woman, he witnesses the visible physical injuries they endure. Still, their ability to articulate and convey the depths of their pain remains limited. However, to the Magistrate's dismay and surprise, his own body remains untouched by physical harm. Despite his isolation within the prison cell, it becomes a contact zone where various forces converge. It serves as a site of confrontation between the technologies employed by the Empire to exert control over the imprisoned body and the process of emptying that body of its essence, its soul. Within this confined space, the Magistrate experiences the complicated interplay between the oppressive mechanisms of the Empire and the resilience of his own spirit. With its inherent power dynamics, the prison cell becomes a microcosm of the larger power structures at play within the Empire. It symbolizes the struggle between the Empire's attempts to subjugate and suppress individual autonomy and the enduring spirit that resists and defies such oppressive forces. The contact zone created within the prison cell serves as a crucible for the clash between these opposing forces, ultimately shaping the Magistrate's understanding of his own complicity and the path he must take toward redemption and reconciliation.

During his public torture scene and being so tired hanging from the tree, he discerns that Mandel (his torturer, and previously his colleague) “deals with [his] soul: every day he folds the aside and exposes my soul to the light; he has probably seen many souls in the course of his working life, but the care of souls seems to have left him no more mark on him than the care of hearts leaves on the surgeons” (129). This eloquent statement gives a deep sense of what tortures do. While torture is about exposing the soul naked from its flesh, the flesh endures after a torturous session, mostly not, or limitedly witnessed by others, the marks of the hideous action. After torture, the focus shifts; the marked body is in the center while the soul is eliminated.

The Magistrate's harrowing experience highlights the twisted nature of torture, which tends to downplay the interior damage inflicted by emphasizing external manifestations. This focus on the physical exterior creates a barrier that obstructs a comprehensive understanding of torture's broader impacts beyond the body's confines. Consequently, the distorted and disfigured body becomes an obstacle in comprehending the full narrative of the victim. Attention is often fixated on investigating visible wounds and disabilities, perpetuating the invisibility of those whose bodies bear no visible marks of torture. However, it is crucial to recognize that even individuals whose bodies bear the visible scars of torture are not necessarily afforded complete visibility or understanding. As Elaine Scarry underscores the profound damage inflicted upon the voice during acts of torture, the Magistrate's own experience of torture unfolds in three distinct phases: an initial state of sheer isolation and neglect, followed by public humiliation, and culminating in the infliction of bodily torture.

4.6.2 Imposing Loneliness: The Silent Face of Torture

At the start, the Magistrate expects to be badly tortured, as happened to the Nomad Girl and the others, but he finds himself ignored by everyone and is left with very little food and water. He is discarded to stink and is not allowed to communicate or see anyone except the little boy who delivers the food for him. In the first days, loneliness starts to creep on him: “Truly, man was not made to live alone!” (87). His awareness of time is structured around mealtimes, describing himself as “I guzzle my food like a dog. A bestial life is turning me into a beast.” This remark approaches the conditions imposed on a person, transforming them to act like a barbarian. Being a barbarian, as being a synonym for an uncivilized human being, is not a choice or related to race, but, more, violent conditions that dehumanize one’s life. Through the first confinement phase, the Magistrate goes through structures of thought that have been inaccessible to him due to the limitations of his position as a magistrate. He goes into a state of existential loneliness the walls of the cell impose on him like a “disaster has overtaken [his] life when the world continues to move such tranquility through its cycles” (102). The experience of confinement opens his eyes to the realization that his existence holds little significance within the larger framework of the Empire. He discovers that the Empire does not have a detailed, clear, systematic torture plan for insignificant individuals like him. He is left without food or water for two days to find that they have forgotten him. He finally realizes that “[his] torturers have their own lives to lead. I am not the center of their universe” (126), and the question is reduced to: “How long can I withstand. The randomness of their attacks?” (127). This confinement phase challenges the Magistrate's preconceived notions about the Empire's tactics and reveals their

disorganized and arbitrary actions. It underscores his diminished significance in the grand scheme of things and highlights the brutal reality that he is just one individual among countless others subjected to the Empire's brutality.

After enduring two months of confinement, the Magistrate finds himself contemplating the nature of freedom, echoing the sentiments expressed by Offred in Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*. He reflects on freedom, saying, “I begin to comprehend how rudimentary freedom is. What freedom has left to me? The freedom to eat or go hungry; to keep my silence or gabble to myself or beat on the door or scream” (93). He suffers the freedom of limited choices that change nothing of his dystopian reality. The Magistrate is confronted with the stark truth that his perceived freedom is merely an illusion, as his choices are constrained and ineffectual within the confines of oppression. Even when he gets the chance to unlock himself from the cell, he realizes that his choices stay limited: “I am running away from pain and death. I have no plan to escape. Hiding away in the reeds, I would starve within a week or be smoked. I am simply seeking ease, if the truth be told, fleeing to the only soft bed and friendly arms […]” (105). Before crossing the borders, he was used to exercising liberty for his desires, and now, crossing back, freedom takes the shape of ‘liberation’ from the shackles of the Empire. This liberation, therefore, means suffering. This shift between the different liberties leads him to reflect on the consequences of each. He questions his former exercised freedom with the Woman, saying, “my freedom to make of the girl whatever I felt like wife or concubine or daughter or slave or all at once or none, at whim, because I had no duty to her save what it occurred to me to feel from moment to moment: from the oppression of such freedom which would not welcome the liberation of confinement?” (86). He concludes, “[i]n my opposition,

there is nothing heroic—let me not for an instant forget that" (86). Eventually, he gradually awakens, attaining a more profound comprehension of his lack of genuine freedom. This realization is precipitated by his reflection upon the implications of freedom within the confines of imperial colonization, compounded by his previous role as a representative who had opposed the Empire. Following the loss of his prestigious position as a magistrate, he finds himself stripped of societal standing, reduced to the confines of his aging body and the ensuing entrapment that accompanies it. His physical fragility and the subsequent limitation of choices at his disposal serve as poignant reflections of the precarity characterizing his existence as a suddenly afflicted within a dystopian landscape.

4.6.2.1 Blossoms of the Prison: Empathy and Restoring the Voice

In the cell, he starts to reflect on torture cases that might have taken place in the same place. The Magistrate recognizes the significance of the voice and its power, aligning with Elaine Scarry's argument regarding the restoration of the voice in the context of torture. Scarry posits that torture magnifies the destructive impact of pain on a person's entire existence, including their world, sense of self, and voice (50). In parallel, the Magistrate acknowledges that acts aimed at restoring and reclaiming the voice not only serve as a denouncement of the pain endured but also act as a form of mitigating the pain itself. He reflects:

> I stare all day at the empty walls, unable to believe that the imprint of all the pain and degradation they have enclosed will not materialize under an intent enough gaze, or shut my eyes, trying to attune my hearing to that infinitely faint level at which the cries of all who suffered here must still beat from wall to wall. I pray for the day when these walls will be leveled, and the unquiet echoes can finally take wings […]. (87)

Now the Magistrate has the wishes and the dreams of an oppressed subaltern to become speakable[24] and hence, listened to. Scarry elaborates that "[a]s torture consists of acts that magnify the way in which pain destroys a person's world, self, and voice, so these other acts that restore the voice become not only a denunciation of the pain but almost a diminution of the pain, a partial reversal of the process of torture itself" (50). They represent a partial reversal of the torturous process, allowing the individual to regain some agency and autonomy over their own narrative. By emphasizing the importance of restoring the voice, both the Magistrate and Scarry highlight the transformative potential of reclaiming one's ability to express oneself, countering the dehumanizing effects of torture and affirming the inherent value of individual agency and communication.

During his function as an Empire representative, the Magistrate remains oblivious to the cries and voices of the suffering individuals in his town, such as the screaming older man and the woman while being destroyed. His role within the Empire does not involve dismantling the walls of torture or empowering the tortured; instead, he merely pressures them to comply with and submit to the Empire's investigations. He advises the boy after the death of the Old Man, saying, "[y]ou must answer every question […] truthfully. If there is pain, do not lose heart" (7). From the beginning, he knows he "cannot pretend to be better than a mother comforting a child between his father's spells of wrath. It has not escaped [him] that interrogator can wear two masks, speak with two voices, one harsh, one seductive" (8). Establishing himself as an interrogator to the Nomad Woman, his experience of the tortured is unattainable; only through his journey

[24] This, of course, is a direct reference to Spivak's canonical article "Can the Subaltern Speak?"

across borders and his subsequent return does the Magistrate gain a glimpse into the experiences of the oppressed and tortured. Prior to this journey, his understanding of truth is one-dimensional and non-negotiable. However, upon his return and subsequent confinement, his perception of knowledge and truth becomes multifaceted, transforming from a mere intellectual pursuit to a deeply personal and empathetic experience. This transformative process is elucidated by Scarry, who explains that

> [a]n act of human contact and concern, whether occurring here or in private contexts of sympathy, provides the hurt person with worldly self-extension: in acknowledging and expressing another person's pain, or in articulating one of his nonbodily concerns while he is unable to, one human being who is well and free willingly turns himself into an image of the other's psychic or sentient claims, an image existing in the space outside the sufferer's body, projected out into the world and held there intact by that person's powers until the sufferer himself regains his own powers of self-extension. (50)

In this way, the Magistrate's evolving understanding of empathy and the power of human connection resonates with Scarry's notion of projecting and preserving the voices and claims of the afflicted, providing them with a temporary extension of self until they are able to reclaim their own agency and power of self-expression.

Amid his experiences of imprisonment and shades of torture, the Magistrate undergoes a profound transformation in his narrative approach, shifting towards a more empathetic and emotionally charged perspective on the victims of torture. This shift highlights the importance of understanding and exploring the emotional landscape of both the victims and the perpetrators rather than solely focusing on

factual investigations and physical harm. The Magistrate recognizes that interrogating the torturer should involve delving into the realm of emotions, seeking answers to questions such as "what happened" and "how it felt."

By adopting this empathetic stance, the Magistrate re-examines the story of the Nomad Woman and her damaged relationship with her father, moving away from an objective and distant approach. The Woman's father is subjected to brutal torture in her presence, while she, in turn, is also subjected to torment before him. Alone in his cell, the Magistrate begins to empathize with the father's helplessness in protecting his daughter, acknowledging that he will never be forgiven for his perceived failure (80). He contemplates the father's decision to attack his torturers as a final act of defiance in the face of humiliation, recognizing the depth of despair and the absence of any meaningful existence. Through this introspection, the Magistrate reconstructs the narrative from the perspective of the tortured, reevaluating his own role in the fractured father-daughter relationship.

In retrospect, the Magistrate sees himself as having offered the Nomad Girl his protection and attempting to fill the role of a father figure in his own ambiguous manner. However, he attributes his failure in this mission to the timing of his intervention, lamenting that he has “[come] too late after she had ceased to believe in fathers” (88). This realization underscores the Magistrate's growing awareness of the complexities of interpersonal relationships, the consequences of torture, and the limitations of his own actions and timing in attempting to mend the shattered bond between the father and the Woman.

In the solitude of his prison cell, the Magistrate contemplates his relationships with women who occupy positions of lesser power within the social hierarchy. Within this introspective space, he experiences a newfound realization, acknowledging for the first time the potential harm he may have caused these young women by engaging in intimate relationships with them. He describes them metaphorically as delicate flowers, implying their vulnerability and innocence (106). Although such patronizing language may be problematic, it illustrates the Magistrate's growing awareness of the power dynamics at play. The Magistrate acknowledges that his position of authority and privilege within the ruling class enabled these relationships to take place in the first place. He recognizes that had it not been for his social status, these young women would not have found themselves in his bed. This awareness highlights the inherent imbalances of power and the exploitative nature of these relationships. It can be argued that the Magistrate's realization and reflection on his own seniority and the consequences it has had on his body and his experience of imprisonment are crucial in prompting him to question and reassess his relationship with the Nomad Girl. Without this consciousness, he may not have needed to examine their connection's ethics or critically evaluate his treatment of her. This self-reflection underscores the complexities of gender, power, and privilege within the context of the Magistrate's experiences and relationships. It signals a growing understanding of the implications of his actions and a willingness to confront the unequal dynamics at play, ultimately reassessing his own behavior and the potential harm inflicted upon those he has been involved with.

4.6.3 Public Torture and Humiliation: Sharing the Responsibility and Exposing the Soul

In this section, I present two additional instances of public torture and humiliation, carefully examining their potential to transcend the physical and psychological boundaries of the Magistrate's aging body. The first scene involves the Magistrate openly defying the public torture of a newly arrived group of Nomads, orchestrated by Joll. This deliberate act aims to elicit the engagement of the townspeople as spectators, actively involving them in the experience of public disgrace and humiliation. By referencing Catherine Edwards' research on the Roman Empire's fascination with witnessing the deaths of gladiators in her chapter "Death as Spectacle: Looking at Death in the Arena," I delve into the parallel between this historical phenomenon and the townspeople's enthusiasm to participate in the public humiliation and torture of the Nomads. Edwards proposes that the Romans' captivation with the violent and bloody deaths of gladiators can be attributed to their cultural attitudes towards dying and their conceptualizations of death during Roman antiquity. (46-7). The act of witnessing the graphic and dramatic end of a gladiator's life served as a conduit for the Romans to reaffirm their own sense of identity and belonging within the context of a mighty empire.

Similarly, the townspeople in the narrative of the Magistrate's experiences demonstrate an equal enthusiasm for participating in the public humiliation and torture of the Nomads. This echoes Marina Belozerskaya's analysis of the connection between the Roman Empire's expansion and the popularity of spectacles such as wild beast displays and gladiatorial shows. Belozerskaya

argues that “[f]ed by Rome’s subjugation of foreign lands and their resources, exotic animal combats grew in size and splendor with each territorial conquest. They began as a way to entertain and control the populace and to give it a symbolic share in the glory of the state” (71). Correspondingly, the townspeople become spectators who actively engage with the events, relishing the opportunity to assert their power and dominance over the marginalized and oppressed group. This collective participation in the Nomads' suffering echoes the Roman Empire's spectacle-driven culture, where the public's desire to witness and partake in acts of violence and degradation was intertwined with broader societal attitudes toward power, control, and the subjugation of others. In other words, the arena in this scene stands as another threshold for the Magistrate. By examining the Magistrate's acts of public disobedience and its consequences, and the parallels with Roman spectacles, we gain insight into the potential for public torture and humiliation to transcend personal and societal boundaries, engaging the collective consciousness and invoking shared experiences of accountability and power dynamics toward the other.

On the opposite spectrum, the Magistrate becomes a witness to the escalating situation when Colonel Joll reappears with a group of twelve captives, subjecting them to a harrowing public display of torture. In a manner that is both humiliating and agonizing, the naked captives are held “[…] at the end of the rope, tied neck to neck […] holding their hands up to their faces in an odd way as though one and all are suffering from toothache. […] A simple loop of wire runs through the flesh of each man’s hands and holes pierced in his cheeks” (113). This posture is meant to make them “meek as lambs” so “they think of nothing but how to keep very still” (113). As the scene progresses, Colonel Joll, with a stick of charcoal,

writes on the back of the naked captives, “ENEMY… ENEMY… ENEMY…ENEMY.” Joll and the Magistrate “contemplate each other” (115), where the prisoners’ naked (exposed to pain) bodies with their inscribed backs become a locus of conflict and competition between the two practices of the Empire. Subsequently, the merciless beating commences with cane staves, causing the black charcoal and ochre dust to blend with the sweat and blood streaming down the prisoners' backs. This gruesome game aims to relentlessly strike them until their backs are cleansed of all markings (115). As the soldiers start to get tired from the beating, the public scene evolves to insert a humiliation factor by asking the spectators to take part in this scene. They begin to urge a giggling shy girl to beat the prisoners herself saying, “Go on, don’t be afraid!’, backed by “[s]houts, jokes, obscene advice.” After she beats one of them on the buttock, she is rewarded by “a roar of applause” (116).

The climactic moment arrives when the Magistrate can no longer bear the sight before him, as Colonel Joll brandishes a hammer, poised to strike the prisoners' bodies. Breaking his silence, the Magistrate's voice erupts in a desperate plea, shouting, "No! No!" (116). He attempts to deliver a passionate speech, but his words are abruptly cut short by the relentless blows raining down upon him. Despite the pain and the violence, he musters the strength to implore Colonel Joll for mercy, declaring, "You are depraving these people!" (117). However, his efforts are met with another forceful strike to his own back. Struggling through the agony, he utters a powerful statement: "We are the great miracle of creation! But from some blows, this miraculous body cannot repair itself! How--!" Yet, his words fade away, failing him in this dire moment (117). The public spectacle of torture unfolds, revealing its immediate impact on the Magistrate's ability to articulate his

thoughts and emotions. Against this publicly witnessed torture, we observe the breaking of the Magistrate's speech ability. This shows that the voice is broken not only by direct torture of the body but also through witnessing it helplessly, bringing about the same effect. The scene ends with the Magistrate being struck on his head to avoid any stir-up of empathy, and, at once, he loses consciousness. He does not only witness the humiliation of the Empire to its constructed enemy but also the complacency of the townspeople to brutality—an act they pay for later.

The Magistrate becomes aware of the dilemma of his position. For the first time, he experiences the physical pain he suffers from for days on end until he reaches a point of sobbing. His public rejection of the brutal acts neither restored justice nor made him a martyr or a hero. On the contrary, he is left with shame and helplessness. In the absence of Joll, drunk Mandel, a young, handsome Warrant Officer, takes the Magistrate out of his cell and forces him to put on a women's smock or go undressed. With this initial humiliation, the Magistrate is taken out, and a gathering of townspeople watch another scene of public torture and humiliation. A soldier ties a rope around the Magistrate's neck and his hands behind his back, ordering him to climb a ladder against a tree carrying a salt bag. The Magistrate knows that if he slips, he will die. Now the Magistrate's demands are reduced; he "want[s] to live. As every man wants to live. […] No matter what" (130). Observing the assembly reveling in his humiliation, the Magistrate comprehends that as the Empire's dignity erodes, there is little purpose in assigning blame to the crowd: "[…] A scapegoat is named, a festival is declared, the laws are suspended: who would not flock to see the entertainment?" (131). As anticipated, he slips from the ladder. His body in the smock floats free. In this

painful moment, he encounters a sort of out-of-body experience, which he describes as: “I bellow again and again, there is nothing I can do to stop it, the noise comes out of the body that knows itself damaged perhaps beyond repair and roars its fright” (133). In this scene, the body has not only been broken, but it also becomes a separate entity. At this instant, the Magistrate surpasses public humiliation and is consumed by agony.

4.6.4 The Investigation: Re-Writing the Enemy and Speaking Madness at the Empire

After encountering death in a humiliating fashion, the Magistrate accepts the position of the madman. For him, as Michel Foucault elaborates on the relationship between death and madness,

> [f]ear in the face of the absolute limit of death turns inward in a continuous irony; man disarms it in advance, making it an object of derision by giving it an everyday, tamed form, by constantly renewing it in the spectacle of life, by scattering it throughout the vices, the difficulties, and the absurdities of all men. Death’s annihilation is no longer anything because it was already everything because life itself was only futility, vain words, a squabble of cap and bells. The head that will become a skull is already empty. Madness is the déjà-là of death. (*Madness* 16)

Subsequently, the Magistrate is brought before Colonel Joll and Warrant Officer Mandel for an interrogation session regarding the wooden slips he has unearthed from the ruins and found in his office before his arrest. During his service, the Magistrate fails to decipher the language on these slips, even during the nights of relentless effort before enforcing emergency laws. The investigation assumes that the slips contain correspondence between the Magistrate and the Nomads,

often referred to as barbarians. Imposing his interpretations and translations upon the silent slips, the Magistrate deems it necessary to engage in a better endeavor to unravel an inaccessible history. Over the silent hieroglyphs of the slips, he challenges the Empire's investigations and, instead, constructs his own narrative about the nomads, driven by a desire to defend them against the logic of the Empire. In this manner, he employs their slips to address the injustices perpetrated by the Empire. Through his voice, he reimagines the stories of the silenced and deceased victims, such as the Nomad Woman's late father and the tortured boy introduced at the beginning of the narrative. Essentially, he becomes their representative, expressing their suffering under the Empire. However, both Joll and Mandel know that the Magistrate is fabricating these stories as a form of critique. To undermine his moral stance, Joll attacks him, saying, “[…] you are not the One Just Man; you are simply a clown, a madman. You are dirty, you stink […]” (124). By invoking notions of authority and power, Joll strips the Magistrate of his self-proclaimed role as the sole judge of justice and reminds him of the consequences of his confinement, branding him as an outcast who should be shunned. In the Magistrate's interpretation trial, he embodies "the madman who reminds each man of his truth" (Foucault, *Madness*, 14). In a world where individuals deceive one another and deceive themselves, the madman represents comedy at its most heightened level; “the madman is comedy to the second degree: the deception of deception” (Foucault, *Madness*, 14).

In a didactic mad approach, the Magistrate rewrites the slips. In his attempt to present the Nomads (referred to as barbarians) in a sympathetic and humanizing light, exposing their suffering to elicit empathy from the Empire, the Magistrate inadvertently reinforces stereotypes of their perceived cunning nature. This

inadvertently provides Colonel Joll with an opportunity to justify his own cruel actions against them. He says: “Now let us see what the next one says. See, there is only a single character. It is the barbarian character *war*, but it has other senses too. It can stand for *vengeance*, and if you turn it upside down like this, it can be made to read *justice*. There is no knowing which sense is intended. That is part of barbarian cunning” (122). However, in his portrayal of the barbarian, whose language he does not know or bother to learn during the Girl’s stay with him, the Magistrate draws a radical conceptualization of how the barbarians would be seen. He constructs two intricate connotations around the enigmatic word that potentially signifies war, vengeance, and justice. In a radical departure, the Magistrate establishes a strong connection between justice and violence, challenging idealistic notions that justice can be achieved through peaceful means alone. By doing so, he affirms that once a cycle of violence is initiated, peaceful efforts alone cannot break it. In a context where war and occupation prevail, vengeance becomes the natural response of the barbarians (or any colonized group), and accordingly, the Empire must defend itself. According to the Magistrate, violence becomes a means to restore justice. Conversely, Colonel Joll interprets those slips as “[t]hey are very likely gambling sticks. I know that other tribes on the border gamble with stick” (123). With all such interpretations, the ancient wood slips remain silent. The Magistrate’s attempts are all in vain since he insists on constructing a discourse of emotion on the portrayal of the Nomads.

4.7 Conclusion: Unwriting the Self

Upon the campaign's failure and the army breakdown, the Magistrate has a brief last confrontation with Joll. In shock and exhaustion, Joll sobs, saying, "[w]e froze in the mountains! We starved in the desert! Why did no one tell us it would be like that? We were not beaten—they led us into the desert, and then they vanished!" (161). In this traumatic response, Joll ends his mission, leaving the town facing the harsh winter and the wreckage of the chaos created by the defeated army. Overnight, peace resorts to the town as the dystopian wave the Third Bureau brought to the frontier town by the emergency laws' power has receded. The Magistrate is back to his apartment. Entering back the space of his apartment, he is a different man. He does not see himself as the man of the Empire but as the man of the town. Ultimately, the Magistrate realizes he "was the lie that Empire tells itself when times are easy, he the truth that Empire tells when harsh winds blow" (156). For the first time, he addresses the town's people as his "fellow-citizens," urging them to "cultivate their kitchen gardens, to plant root vegetables that will withstand the winter frosts" (158). This quotation directly references Voltaire's famous statement, "Let us cultivate our garden." This statement sums up the Magistrate's new philosophy; he replaced his colonial arrogance with humility, applying the Empire's second-best laws with societal responsibility.

Fiddling with the undecipherable slips he has found in the ruins, the Magistrate finds himself obligated to write his testimony on the eventful year the frontier has gone through. He faces difficulty finding a perspective from which he can narrate what has happened. He starts writing a romantic portrait of the topology of the town, and then he pauses. He notices that his historical context of being a

representative of the Empire for most of his life prevents him from possessing the authentic right to recount the history of the town and its border. One central idea interrupts his act of writing; “[he] want[s] to live outside history. [He] want[s] to live outside the history that Empire imposes on its subjects” (169). The second idea is his hope that one day the Nomads “will find that they cannot live without the skills of men who know how to rear the pacific grains, without the arts of women who know how to use the benign fruits” (169). Those two ideas encapsulate the Magistrate’s reflections following his ordeal: the shame of the brutality of the Empire and the possible integration between the nomads’ way of living and that of the agricultural nature of the town brought by the Empire. Those two conclusions signify a conciliatory approach, reflecting the Magistrate’s new position. However, acknowledging that those two conclusions are out of his influence, the Magistrate holds back from writing history, confirming that he has been on the criminal side of history.

What remains remarkable is the transformation the Magistrate exhibits in the very last scene of the novel—passing by children building a snowman without arms. He steers clear of pointing out the missing components; he does not play the role of the wise man anymore. On the contrary, he thinks to himself that “[i]t is not a bad snowman” and he [l]ike much else nowadays [he] leave[s] it feeling stupid, like a man who lost his way long ago but presses on along a road that may lead nowhere” (170). This final statement signifies the Magistrate's journey's completion, encapsulating his bewilderment and disorientation that permeated the narrative from its inception, as he initially proclaimed, "I have never seen anything like it..." (1).

The narrative does not provide many details on the capital's insiders; we learn from the Magistrate, our native informant, that this is the Empire's resolution every decade to underscore its domination over the confiscated territories. In other words, the Empire creates in the imagination of its defenders and subalterns that there is a potential attack from the outside enemy, the barbarians. Over decades, the Empire has established itself over vast geographical areas, considering the border towns unimportant for an extended period. Therefore, an invisible border is created, producing two versions of the Empire due to the geographical vastness and extended lifespan of the Empire's governance over such geographies. The two versions of the Empire are formed with relatively different practices of dominance. The capital is more modernized, powerfully stable, and apparently with a dominant exclusive culture (the Empire of the center). At the same time, the one on the border from which the Magistrate narrates his story is isolated, less modernized, and culturally diverse (the Empire of the margin). These geographies (the center and the margin) grow apart over time and know little about each other but are still firmly bonded by the power of law.

The bodily presence of Joll and later Mandel by their sudden arrival at the town has transformed it into a significant contact zone. This contact zone is formed basically by Joll's crossing of a structural border between the power practices of the center and the margin. Driven by ignorance, arrogance, and a surplus of power, Joll and Mandel turn this contact zone into a collision between the two practices and a severe identity crisis for the Magistrate. In other words, the stability of the political border of the Empire is tightly linked with the strength of the invisible inner border in the structure of the top hierarchy. As much as there is no disputation among them on referring to those outside the town's gates being

called ‘barbarians,’ the conflict arises on whether to see them as enemies and how to treat them when they are under suspicion.

The encounter between the Magistrate and the Nomad Girl ignites his moral crisis. It pushes him to question the epistemological border between civilization and barbarianism and eventually causes his rebellion and unresolved confusion. As a consequence of the significant contact zone created by Joll’s arrival within the hierarchy of the power elite, this conflictive contact zone generates another smaller yet new contact zone that sheds light on the recent encounters between the hegemonic and subaltern bodies. Although the emergency powers and those multi-level crossings are concerned with the Empire’s subalterns, they hardly speak in the narrative or talk through a distorted voice due to a tortured body. The Magistrate has undergone a significant identity transformation; he goes from being the man of law who knows it all and knows the mysterious workings of justice to being the old madman to a mere older man who acknowledges his ignorance. With his journey over the borders of the Empire and back and his ordeal in imprisonment, his circle of influence is more limited than he first believes. The novel starts with him being sure of everything around him—confident that the truth is one layer and can easily be perceived. The narrative ends after one year of turmoil with the Magistrate, satisfied that his perception of reality is as limited as his knowledge and as fragile as his aging body.

Waiting for the Barbarian tackles the impact of the physical and political border and its close relation with structure and epistemological borders. Through the tension in a remote border town, individuals are not only products and prisoners of the political border. Their world views and relations to the self and the others

are contingent on structural and epistemological borders as byproducts of the political border. So, as for the invisible borders, e.g., structural and epistemological, to gain visibility, crossing the physical political is essential, a crossing that qualifies for a painful labyrinthine journey that denies conclusions. At the same time, *Waiting for the Barbarian* stresses the diversity and the ambivalence bred in the persons belonging to the power elite depending on their proximity to the source of power geographically and structurally. In this chapter, I have scrutinized the docility of the hegemonic bodies despite the banality of their practiced evil to show that even dystopian hegemonic bodies deny stagnation and being homogenously labeled.

Chapter 5:

Navigating through Chaos and Crossings without Conclusions

5.1 Introduction

Building on the narrative analyses in the previous chapters—where the intricate dynamics between bodies, borders, and contact zones were closely examined—it becomes clear that dystopian settings serve as a potent metaphor for the deep-seated tensions and challenges within contemporary societies. This reading extends beyond the specific geographical and cultural contexts of the texts discussed, pointing instead to the broader, universal concerns embedded in dystopian fiction. As this study moves toward its conclusion, the final section serves a dual purpose. First, it identifies key thematic patterns that recur across the narratives. Second, it offers reflections on their open-ended structures, drawing on the conceptual lens of chaos theory to frame the unresolved, often unpredictable trajectories these stories follow.

5.2 Navigating the Dystopian Labyrinth: Deciphering the System's Building Blocks

The presence of borders stands out as a defining and essential feature across the three dystopian worlds explored in this study, functioning both as a central point of reference and a key analytical lens. These borders appear in various forms: the shifting political boundaries of the Republic of Gilead, paired with its rigid societal and structural divisions; the tightly controlled gates enclosing the elite settlement of Utopia, contrasted with the lack of visible structural divisions between the Utopians and al-Aghyar; and the vast imperial borders that frame the Empire, along with the less visible yet deeply entrenched internal divisions

between its center and periphery. In the preceding chapters, I have aimed to unpack the complex architecture of these dystopian systems, where physical borders are closely tied to the rise of internal sub-borders—subtle, often invisible lines that enable the exercise of dystopian discipline within closed, controlled spaces.

The pervasive presence of borders—particularly in their structural forms—shapes not only the spatial configurations of dystopian systems but also the relationships formed around them. These borders regulate power dynamics by reinforcing a strict hierarchy that relies on shared belief in the existence of abstract, impenetrable divisions. Those at the top of this hierarchy—such as the Commanders and their Wives, Alaa, or the Magistrate—view themselves as custodians of order, responsible for enforcing discipline as the only viable strategy for maintaining control in a grim and unforgiving world. For those lower in the hierarchy—such as Offred or the al-Aghyar—survival is tied to submission. Their belief in the authority of these invisible borders becomes a coping mechanism, a way to justify obedience and endure their reality.

Some, like Gaber, internalize the notion that their suffering is deserved, accepting their position within the dystopian structure without resistance. Over time, this internalization shapes their sense of self. They incorporate dystopian logic into their identities, developing what Foucault might call “technologies of the self”—personal practices and behaviors that align with the norms and expectations of their oppressive environment. This manifests in self-discipline as a form of survival, often accompanied by self-blame for even minor transgressions.

What emerges is a form of citizenship rooted in dystopian subalternity, where identity is constructed through the internalization of control. Physical and structural borders, along with their supporting technologies, become deeply embedded within the bodies and lives of the inhabitants. Each major border is not only spatial but psychological, generating a cascade of behaviors and emotional responses that reinforce division and submission. Some of these internal boundaries are affective in nature, shaped by feelings such as fear, shame, and resignation.

Implicit utopian endeavors are embedded within the fabric of these dystopian systems, which serve as the ideological linchpin of these dystopias. At their core, these incomplete or failed utopian projects exhibit a recurring pattern of elimination and exclusion. For example, within the dystopian realm of Canadian Gilead, the utopian vision hinges on the systematic removal of individuals who diverge from Christian fundamentalism or endorse liberal ideals, notably feminists advocating for gender equality. Similarly, Utopia, the gated community, is contingent upon excluding Egyptians who fail to attain privileged elite status. Likewise, the South African Empire predicates its utopian aspirations on expelling individuals not aligned with the Empire's self-definition of civilization, e.g., the nomads, even if they possess historical and cultural entitlements to the land under the Empire's sovereignty.

Within the framework of this elimination-based system, the dystopian elites, the architects of these dystopian systems, diligently labor to exert control over the inhabitants—the dystopian subordinates ensnared within. Notably, the narratives under examination deliberately avoid revealing the identities or roles of sole

leaders responsible for shaping the depicted dystopian worlds. In this context, the notion of a singular, covert figure clandestinely manipulating the dystopian realm loses its significance. Instead, the narratives prioritize exploring the power dynamics exchanged within the dystopian society, emphasizing the distinctions between those who wield authority and those who are subjected to it. This control takes shape through meticulously structured physical and structural borders, which partition and regulate the dystopian citizens, as well as a complex apparatus of rigid rules that make sure these borders are well-governed.

The intersection of borders and rules is central to understanding the relationship between dominant dystopian citizens at the top of the hierarchy and their subjugated counterparts at the bottom. This hierarchical division operates as a mechanism for distributing varying degrees of power, shaping not only how control is exercised but also how it is perceived. The earlier chapters of this study have closely examined how those in positions of authority maintain power by reinforcing separation—both between themselves and their subordinates, and among the subordinates themselves. The dystopian system unfolds as a labyrinth, constructed through the intersection of these artificial borders and imposed regulations.

Within this labyrinth, the dystopian body is continuously produced and reproduced—a product of a society caught between what Michel Foucault describes as “an art of unbearable sensations punishment” and “an economy of suspended rights” (*Discipline and Punish* 11). It is within this tension that the dystopian body is shaped: disciplined, molded, made docile, and rendered efficient and productive. Yet, a closer reading of the dystopian worlds explored in

this study reveals a recurring irony. Those who orchestrate and enforce these systems—the figures at the top—believe they possess full control over the social order. They assume that by enforcing strict borders and rigid rules, they can simplify the complexity of society and govern effectively. What they fail to recognize is that they, too, are caught within the same labyrinth. Despite the systems they put in place, the behavior of the subjugated remains unpredictable, slipping through the cracks of their supposedly closed structure.

In this sense, dystopian society mirrors the logic of complex systems engineering, a field concerned with designing and managing multifaceted systems—whether physical, organizational, or informational—to achieve specific outcomes. As Straussfogel and von Schilling explain, systems engineering focuses on optimizing the relationships between different components, whether animate (like bodies or communities) or inanimate (like communication infrastructures or flows of information) (153). The foundational structure of dystopian society, then, emerges at the point where rigid rules and heavily fortified borders enclose not just the ruled but also the rulers—binding both ends of the hierarchy within a single, interdependent system.

Importantly, this hierarchical separation does not negate the interdependence between the dominant and the dominated, nor does it diminish the profound suffering experienced by all citizens—top and bottom. In the preceding chapters, I have diligently sought to provide a comprehensive overview of the power dynamics operating within borders and the confines of the established rules. My objective has been to shed light on how dystopian worlds can be viewed as parallel manifestations of (neo)colonial relationships. Through this analysis, I

have aimed to address the central inquiry concerning the mechanisms that presumably sustain temporary power equilibrium within dystopian systems as a metaphor for authoritarian and colonial regimes over extended durations. This discussion serves as an extended preamble, laying the groundwork for my second pursuit in which I have explored the instances and circumstances surrounding the transgression of these borders, the break of established rules, and the destabilization of the fragile order.

5.3 The Body Between Entrapment in the Dystopian Maze and Resistance in the Contact Zones

In the context of these three narratives, the concept of borders, as part of the system engineering inside dystopias, plays a significant role, leaving its mark on the dystopian bodies that inhabit these worlds while simultaneously, these bodies serve as reflections of the borders that confine them. This dynamic is particularly evident in the example of Alaa and Gaber in *Utopia*, where their bodies symbolize the stark division between the affluent and the impoverished. This contrast manifests in their physical appearance, with cleanliness and health standing in stark opposition to dirtiness and sickness. Within the confines of the gated community of Utopia, Alaa's countenance bears the scars of artificial wounds, reflecting a prevailing aesthetic trend among his privileged peers. In contrast, Gaber and others like him display real wounds resulting from gang fights due to their marginalized existence. For Alaa, his choices regarding the severity of his forehead wound are not merely aesthetic but also emblematic of the superhuman status they claim through which they maintain healthy, godly bodies, defying mortality. In contrast, Gaber and his community grapple with a lack of basic hygiene and medical care, leading to a pervasive presence of chronic diseases,

framing them as subhumans who do not deserve empathy or the basics of human life. Both body marks and appearances, and its behaviors within the relevant conditions, reflect the stark disparity between the two worlds delineated by the well-secured gates.

Consequently, Alaa's attempt to mimic the appearance of a suffering body from *al-Aghyar* when he crosses the gates to Shubra is quickly exposed by Gaber. Gaber understands that the performance of suffering, poverty, and illness cannot be convincingly acted out if one has never genuinely endured or witnessed them. Alaa and Germinal attempt to convey poverty solely through surface-level bodily performances, an approach insufficient to encapsulate the profound essence of suffering and, in a way, a contempt for *al-Aghyar*'s everyday ordeal. The brief attempt by Alaa and Germinal to simulate suffering, which is devoid of genuine hardship, failed to mold their bodies authentically. In other words, the Gates of Utopia does not only work as a barrier that separates two distinct worlds, but more, they function as a tattoo imprint on the skins and souls of both those who live inside and outside, rendering each party visible to the other.

The intricate relationship between bodies and borders within dystopian narratives highlights a dynamic interplay that shapes the course of events. This dynamic is connected to the engagement of dystopian bodies with the boundaries that govern their existence. One crucial aspect to consider is how subordinate bodies navigate within the confines of a dystopian society. However, when the subordinate or elite dystopian body decides to rebel, break the established rules, erase borders, or at the very least, destabilize them, it signals a desperate attempt to reclaim individuality. The attempts made by these subordinates to challenge the established order would not have been possible without the

dominant bodies overstepping their allocated spaces. For instance, in *The Handmaid's Tale*, the Commander initially allows Offred to cross the border of his office, violating the rule that restricts their interactions to the master bedroom during the Ceremony. However, his further transgressions, such as taking her to Jezebel's, create an entirely new contact zone, disrupt their established power dynamic, and give Offred access to restricted knowledge. Despite the Commander's belief that he is in control, the incidents at Jezebel's reveal the contrary after a while.

Jezebel becomes a pivotal space for Offred, where she discovers the possibility of resistance and the existence of a network of individuals who defy the regime. Here, she reunites with her best friend, Moira, and encounters women who have made choices beyond becoming handmaids. In a parallel manner, Serena Joy, driven by her own discontent, disrupts the established order by breaking a rule and allowing Offred to cross a significant border to have a single night of intimacy with Nick in the hope that she gets pregnant. Offred seizes the opportunity to initiate a sexual relationship that centers around her own pleasure, a significant departure from the established norms. Such a major violation of the law, involving frequent visits to Nick's room, would not have been feasible if Serena and Fred had not paved the way for Offred, revealing the flaws in the system and its apparently inflexible borders. This concept extends beyond *The Handmaid's Tale* to Utopia. Gaber embarks on a counter-adventure in contrast to Alaa and Germinal’s aim to bring them to their home. In this daring endeavor, Gaber jeopardizes his own life, striving to construct meaning amidst the grim realities of the Utopians and *al-Aghyar*. Gaber's pursuit of meaning in a nihilistic existence, willing to trade his life for it, would not be conceivable if Alaa and Germinal had

not made the decision to cross beyond the gates of Utopia to Shubra. This choice leads to a confrontation that destabilizes their preconceived notions of one another. The same applies to the Magistrate, who decides to act outside the formalities of the Empire, embarking on a risky journey in unexpected weather deep into the desert to reunite the Nomad Woman with her people despite lacking maps for the routes. The Magistrate undertakes this journey to venture beyond the Empire's borders in an attempt to restore the balance disrupted by the Officers of the center, striving for reconciliation. Offred's, Gaber's, and the Magistrate's attempts to break the rules and reclaim their individuality are contingent upon those at the top of the hierarchy, permitting them to be part of a new contact zone. As observed from the narratives in this study, allowing individuals from subordinate positions to enter these new contact zones is indispensable for the emergence of rebellious actions within dystopian societies.

Bodies as borders are a prominent manifestation of the construction and simultaneously transform into a deconstruction energy of structural and physical borders within dystopian narratives. These instances of bodies as borders integrate gender, sexuality, and violence as manifestations of the act of crossing borders. This process of deconstruction becomes evident through various acts portrayed in these narratives. For instance, it is exemplified in the transgressive sexual relationship between the Magistrate and the Nomad Woman, as depicted in *Waiting for the Barbarian*. Within the Empire's official borders, the Magistrate repeatedly attempts to engage in sexual intercourse, but each endeavor results in him entering prolonged periods of deep slumber, self-doubting his masculinity and instigating anger toward the Woman. The marks on the tortured body of the Nomad woman work as an unyielding border delineating the separation between

the colonizer and the tortured colonized. Merely when they cross outside the space of oppression, they are able to engage in sexual intercourse as a sign of a possibility of redemption.

Similarly, transcendent romanticism is depicted through the relationship between Offred and Nick in *The Handmaid's Tale*. Offred's body acts involuntarily as an impermeable border in the presence of the Commander at the Jezebel, while, in the presence of Nick, Offred enjoys her body. Additionally, instances of violence, such as the rape of Germinal and Safiya by Gaber and Alaa, respectively, as depicted in *Utopia*, are also illustrative of bodies as borders. Like the Magistrate's dilemma with the Nomad Woman, Gaber's body fails him in his attempt to rape Germinal, despite this violation taking place in his shack. Gaber's body, in this incident, internalizes the interiority that the gates of Utopia impose on *al-Aghyar* living in Shubra. As for Safiya, she exerts serious effort to defend her virginity as an uncrossable border—an unanticipated act for Gaber.

These contact zones allowed by the elites provide a fertile environment for subordinates to gain the understanding that it is possible to challenge the established rules and boundaries. The delicate interplay between bodies and borders, encompassing both physical and metaphorical boundaries, is a finely tuned dynamic within these hierarchies. Any unexpected behavior from any party within the hierarchy can have unpredictable consequences. This sensitivity to disruption underscores the fragility of the established order in dystopian societies. When individuals, whether at the top or the base of the hierarchy, deviate from their expected roles or behaviors, the equilibrium is disrupted, and the outcome becomes uncertain. This intricate dance between bodies and borders remains a central theme in dystopian narratives, illustrating how the power dynamics within

these societies are constantly shifting and vulnerable to change even if, at the surface, one cannot take notice of these subtle changes. Within these moments of disruption, the potential for transformation and resistance arises as the balance of power is temporarily unsettled. In the realm of the sudden emergence of the contact zones, the conventional binary of heroes and villains is deconstructed, giving rise to a space where anti-heroes flourish. These figures often defy easy classification, with their actions oscillating between moments of perceived cowardice and instances where we, as observers/ readers, find ourselves empathizing with or understanding their choices. The dystopian setting challenges us to refrain from hastily applying our normative ethical judgments to the protagonists within these narratives, prompting a more nuanced exploration of their character and motivations.

As noted earlier in this section, the subtle yet powerful forms of resistance in these dystopian societies often emerge within newly formed contact zones—spaces where the dominant and the subordinate intersect. However, it is equally important to recognize that small acts of resistance also occur within fixed positions in the power hierarchy, without the need for such zones to be created. Whether these acts are carried out consciously or unconsciously, they serve as essential tools for navigating daily life—not only for the subjugated but also, at times, for those in power. Paradoxically, while these gestures may appear to outside observers as signs of compliance, they are, in fact, what hold the dystopian system together. They represent a quiet, ongoing negotiation, allowing for a fragile sense of survival, and at times, even a sliver of satisfaction, within oppressive conditions.

In this way, these minor acts of resistance—emerging from various levels of the hierarchy—function as the very mechanisms that sustain the dystopian equilibrium. They do not overturn the system, but rather, they stabilize it by maintaining a precarious balance of power. The dystopian citizen thus appears not as a hero in the traditional sense, but as an anti-hero—someone navigating a world defined by fluctuating power dynamics. Their actions challenge simplistic notions of resistance and conformity, compelling us to confront the complex, often contradictory nature of human behavior within systems of control.

5.4 Open-Ending Narratives: Breaking the Order and Instigating Chaos

This dynamic relation in dystopian fiction across different cultures is manifested in the shared feature of being open-ended narratives. The three narratives share open endings that are equally ambivalent and open for interpretation and instill negotiations over the significance and the outcome of the crossing. *The Handmaid's Tale* ends in two finales: one takes place in Gilead time in the 1980s, and one in the future after the collapse of Gilead towards the end of the twenty-second century, precisely 2195. In the 1980s, the narration is interrupted, and Offred's voice is silenced when the Eyes break into the household of the Commander to take her under the accusation of violating state secrets. While Nick whispers her real name, assuring her that "[i]t's all right. It's mayday. Go with them" (305). Ending Offred's narration on this intense note highlights the ambiguous finale's double-sided nature—the state's punishment and resistance to the system. In the second finale, where the setting implies a liberal victory over the erasure of fundamentalism, there is a major challenge and ambiguity in interpreting the voice of a subaltern woman from the past. Despite the obvious restoration of freedoms and gender equality, those interpreting history in the

future are men who doubt the authenticity of Offred's recordings and her likes, suggesting a new cycle of dissonance between genders framed through institutional knowledge.

This is echoed in the finale of *Utopia*, the scene of the angry masses marching toward Utopia Gates confronting the Utopians who defend their fragile existence. It carries a crossroad point that implies a double-sided interpretation—a revolution scene or riots. In other words, how can *al-Aghyar,* who suffer from historical and cultural amnesia, is uneducated, and with chronic diseases, establish a new state founded on justice and equality, not falling into a state of civil war? The scene, on the simplistic level, points out the long-awaited rise of the poor marginals, but it simultaneously opens the unanswered question echoing Egypt after 2011: how can the disorganized masses, despite and because of their suffering, restore the state? Lastly, this scene raises the question of whether this march is about revenge only, eradicating another social class for the sake of another, or the possibility of a negotiation and societal reconciliation. Also, in the finale of *Waiting for the Barbarians,* as the Magistrate forgoes his urge to chronicle the eventful year, he introduces a manifesto as a wishful thought on how the town can integrate its colonial past and post-colonial future. In this concise statement, he

> I think: 'But when the barbarians taste bread, new bread, and mulberry jam, bread and gooseberry jam, they will be won over to our ways. They will find that they are unable to live without the skills of men who know how to rear the pacific grains, without the arts of women who know how to use the benign.' (169)

The Magistate's manifesto refers to a roadmap for the nations that experienced colonialism and are at the threshold of independence. This manifesto, in a way, resonates with Chinua Achebe, as an example of African anti-colonists, calling

for a “creative engagement with the colonial legacy so that its virtues can be reclaimed and its vices eschewed […]. Traditional ruling systems can be used but they must also be modernized” (Grilly 662). The final scene carries the symbolic juxtaposition of two generations—the Magistrate walks by the children fiddling with building a snowman with no arms—in the border town at the threshold of the long winter season. The Magistrate, stranded in a liminal space between the colonizer and the colonized, refrains from pointing out the missing arms to the children. He decides not to interfere with the local children's self-learning process in building the town in a post-Empire state. This scene is open to future possibilities of how the town can reconcile with its colonial past and recreate itself in a post-colonial future.

The three finales are momentums that reflect a major border crossing after a chain of new contact zones. These momentums are major ruptures and chaos that challenge direct interpretation and problematize predictions of these crossings' fate, destabilizing and irreversibly altering the dystopian order. These endings defy a simple interpretation of a clear, decisive victory of the revolutions of the weak, poor, and colonized but point out the ongoing dynamism of their relationship with their power superiors. These finales speak back at power in deconstructing their illusion of control and prediction of the actions of their subordinates. In other words, these open endings resonate with Martin Heidegger’s elaboration of the function of borders. He aptly put it that “[a] boundary is not that at which something stops but, as the Greeks recognized, the boundary is that from which something *begins its essential unfolding*. That is why the concept is that of *horismos*, that is, the horizon, the boundary.” (Heidegger 72)

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