

# Controlling Bodies in the Face of Extinction

Final Thesis for the Research Master Gender Studies

by

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## Abstract

This thesis will discuss how the fear of extinction is tied to the control of bodies in several ways within the novels *The Handmaid's Tale* by Margaret Atwood and *Dawn* by Octavia E. Butler. Firstly I discuss how the fear of extinction is used in *The Handmaid's Tale* to control the female reproductive body. I will focus on how the fear of extinction is used as an excuse to establish this control and how women's bodies are objectified in order to do so, and discuss how this is achieved by using Braidotti's theory on hypervisualisation and organs without bodies, and work from the field of critical animals studies. Then I discuss how the power to define what is seen as extinction is used in *Dawn* to control the reproductive body. I discuss the interspecies relationship between the humans and the alien species, how the alien species bases their superiority over the humans on the fact that they are more intelligent and how the relationship between the humans and the aliens resemble the way humans treat endangered species. And in the last chapter I examine how the parties in power in these novel try to control disabled people and create a future in which disabled people become completely erased. By dehumanizing disabled people they are not allowed a space to exist within these worlds. The erasure of disability in these novels stems from the fact that in ableist societies people with disabilities are seen as people who don't have a future. As a result their presence in these novels become tied to the idea of extinction, since their existence stands in the way of preventing extinction.

Keywords: Octavia E. Butler, Margaret Atwood, extinction, gender studies, critical animal studies, critical disability studies, fiction, speciesism

# Table of Contents

## Introduction

Era of Anthropocene	4
Controlling the Female Reproductive Body	7

## Chapter One: A Uterus Without a Body

Introduction	10
Modernity and Extinction	10
Objectifying the Body Through Hypervisualisation	15
Resisting Hypervisualisation and the Oppositional Gaze	18
Reducing Women to the Status of the Animal	23
Conclusion	29

## Chapter Two: The Power of Defining Extinction

Introduction	31
Extinction as an Unimaginable Endpoint	33
Not Future Without Children	34
Defining Extinction	36
Controlling the Reproductive Body Through the Definition of Extinction	39
Humans as an Endangered Species	46
Conclusion	48

## Chapter Three: Erasing Disabilities From the Imagined Future

Introduction	49
No Future with a Disability	49
Ableism in <i>The Handmaid's Tale</i>	53
Ableism in <i>Dawn</i>	57
Conclusion	64

<b>Conclusions</b>	65
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<b>References</b>	67
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## Introduction

Our way of life in the Western world is very oriented towards the future and the next generation, something politics very much plays into. In the article “The Future is Kid Stuff: Queer Theory, Disidentification and the Death Drive” Lee Edelman discusses how our society is unable to imagine a future without the figure of the child and how this idea is used in conservative politics; “the child has come to embody for us the telos of the social order and been enshrined as the figure for whom that order must be held in perpetual trust.” (21). The future must be protected for the imaginative unborn child, an argument that comes up in anti-abortionist and anti-gay propaganda. Connected to the idea of the future that needs to be protected for the imaginary child is then the idea that there still needs to be a future generation that will come into existence. This way of thinking makes us unable to imagine a future without the human species, and everything must be done to prevent extinction in order to protect the figure of the child. I want to examine how this fear of extinction results in controlling the female reproductive body in the two science fiction novels I will be discussing. In many science fiction and apocalyptic/post-apocalyptic novels the figure of the child plays an important role in the story. For example the rise of infertility in *The Handmaid’s Tale* and the complete infertility of people in *Children of men* is the reason society shuts down because the human story and purpose is presented as revolving around reproduction and the future generation. In *The Handmaid’s Tale* this results in women being forced to serve as handmaids and produce babies for the family they are serving. In *Children of Men* most citizens are forced to undergo fertility tests while the older generation lose all value in the eyes of society and are actively stimulated by the government to commit suicide so they are no longer a “burden”. Edelman’s theory connects to a theory by Berger that the human species isn’t able to imagine a future without human life, “we are no more able to conceive of a politics without a fantasy of the future than we are able to conceive of a future without the figure of the child.” (Edelman 21). In his article, Edelman also discusses the novel *Children of Men* and how the narrator of the novel voices the idea that without children, and within this idea without a future, there is no longer any reason for life and everything that once seemed valuable has lost its meaning. As a result of this fear of extinction and consequently the loss of the figure of the child, the control over the female reproductive body in these novels is increased.

*Dawn* doesn’t center on human infertility but the future of the world is also seen as depending on the survival of the human species; more precisely on keeping the human species in its current form. The idea that the human species would procreate with the alien race called Oankali,

and that these children would be a mix between the two species is seen by the protagonist of the novel as the finalisation of the human extinction that started with the nuclear war.

### **Era of Anthropocene**

In both novels the threat of human extinction is brought on by human actions, making them anthropogenic in nature. This is one of the reasons why both novels are so topical despite being written in the 1980's. Topics discussed within both novels are relevant to issues currently facing contemporary society. In relation to this thesis it is especially the connection to the effect of the Anthropocene on the environment and species extinction that is of interest to me here.

English literary scholar Ursula K. Heise, who is specialised in the way species extinction is discussed in contemporary culture, explains that David Raup and Jack Seposki were among the first evolutionary scientist that started to emphasize the difference between mass extinction and regular extinction in the 1970's and 1980's. They explain that periods of mass extinction function differently from regular evolution in that large numbers of species go extinct regardless of how adapt they are at surviving. (Heise, 20). The difference between previous periods of mass extinction and the extinction of large amount of species that is taking place now is the role that the human species plays in it. The period of modernisation and industrialisation has had a detrimental effect on the natural world and has brought on the extinction of species that goes beyond anything that would have happened without these human actions. Which is why some scholars call the time that we are currently living in the Anthropocene; since these changes are predominantly caused by human behaviour. By some people the era of the Anthropocene is therefore seen as the end of nature. In the article "Mourning and Melancholia in the Anthropocene," Margaret Ronda discusses what impact the loss of nature has on the human species, and how this loss triggers a process of mourning. When she discusses what is seen as the end of nature she mostly draws on the work by Bill McKibben and his book *The End of Nature* (1989). McKibben argues that nature, after a period of human industrialization, is lost because there is now no part of nature left that is not influenced by the behaviour of the human species. Ronda outlines his argument that the human influence on the weather is the ultimate sign of our ever persisting influence on nature:

Unlike the salmon tin in the English stream – a marker of environmental "damage" – the weather stands as the master-sign of anthropogenic effects that are daily and systemic, visible and non-localizable. By changing the weather, McKibben claims, we have already

produced a permanent break, not only in the material operations of atmospheric and geochemical systems, but in the cultural meaning of “nature.” (Ronda).

McKibben says that after the end of nature there is nothing left but us. In a similar vein Heise argues that in a lot of discussions around endangered species in popular science there is a focus on how the loss of different species “is also an irreversible loss in the breadth and depth of human experience.” (28). Within these popular scientific narratives the human species is still the center of attention. What is interesting about the way McKibben sees nature, and how without nature there will be nothing but us, is how the human species is presented as being separate and not as part of nature. This partly makes sense when the aim of the argument is to show what influence the human species has on nature and how this influence is dominating all life on earth. But this approach also perpetuates the idea of the human species as the master of the natural world instead of a species that is part of nature themselves.

Which is where Donna Haraway takes a different approach from McKibben. In her most recent work she focuses on the intra-action of species and how this intra-action is central in how nature functions. She argues that “No species, not even our own arrogant one pretending to be good individuals in so-called modern Western scripts, acts alone; assemblage of organic species and of abiotic actors make history, the evolutionary kind and the other kinds too.” (Haraway, *Staying with the trouble* 100). Haraway sees the Anthropocene as an era that we should try to make as short as possible. She bases this observation on Anna Tsing’s research in which Tsing argues that the difference between the Holocene and the Anthropocene is that in the Anthropocene there are no longer places of refuge for endangered species. Haraway pleads for moving on to a period in which there will be places of refuge again. She emphasizes that the human species never acts alone and that we should look at the assemblages and connection we make with other species. At the same time she also lays the focus on the responsibility that the human species carries within these assemblages. For Haraway the turning point is where human behaviour changes the lives of all other life on earth, which is where her work connects to McKibben’s example of the weather changing all life on earth. Haraway writes that the influence of the human species on earth is

more than climate change; it’s also extraordinary burdens of toxic chemistry, mining, nuclear pollution, depletion of lakes and rivers under and above ground, ecosystem simplification, vast genocides of people and other critters, et cetera, et cetera, in systemically linked

patterns that threaten major system collapse after major system collapse after major system collapse. Recursion can be a drag. (*Staying with the trouble* 100).

Haraway acknowledges the devastating effects the human species has on nature but doesn't see this as an end point, rather she proposes a way forward by making kin with other species and working towards a world where there are places of refuge again.

What is interesting to see is how, when the consequences of species extinction are discussed, there is often a focus on how the extinction of other species will influence human life. Either how human life would be impoverished by species extinction or how these changes threaten the survival of the human species. Heise discusses how certain animal species can be very connected to the national identity of a country. She says that species extinction has become a way to understand and criticize modernization and the loss that comes with it. "Many of the numerous books about the presumed "sixth mass extinction" rely on one or another variant of the narrative in which nature itself deteriorates or vanishes as a consequence of modernization or colonization." (Heise, 32-33). In both *The Handmaid's Tale* and *Dawn* the threatened extinction of the human species is partly blamed on modernization. In *The Handmaid's Tale* the use of toxins and the explosion of a nuclear plant are seen as leading causes for the dramatic rise of infertility. And in *Dawn* it is the use of nuclear weapons in the war that has led to the almost destruction of the planet and the human species.

Heise interprets the hope of saving or bringing back an endangered species that is expressed in different forms of culture as a way to save part of someone's cultural identity. One of the most interesting cases of how an extinct species becomes connected to a cultural identity is that of the thylacine or the Tasmanian tiger. The Tasmanian tiger went extinct because of the excessive hunting on the animal as it was believed that the tiger threatened the sheep that were reared on the island. The government even awarded one pound per Tasmanian tiger that was killed (Heise, 45). It was only later that the Tasmanian tiger became part of the Tasmanian identity, and when the extinction of the species was mourned. The mourning of this species is then no longer about the loss of the animals but about the loss of part of someone's identity, making this mourning anthropocentric in nature.

Except for the mourning that comes with the loss of a species and the guilt that can be experienced because of the part the human species plays in a species going extinct, I also believe that the fear of human extinction plays into why we try to prevent species extinction. In the article "Open-Ended Stories: Extinction Narrative in Genome Time" Stephanie S. Turner discusses how some scientists try to bring back animal species that have gone extinct and how fiction and popular culture

engage with these ideas. She analyses how bio-technology is used in order to prevent or reverse species extinction by looking at how these techniques are used in wilderness preservation projects and how it's used in stories that discuss the extinction of the Woolly Mammoth and the Thylacine. In her article she uses the theory of genome-time; this theory is built on the idea that through collecting DNA of all living animals and storing them in a data-bank there will always be the hope that in the future we will have developed a way to bring back a species that has gone extinct. She argues that because of this we are living in genome-time; an idea of time where the possession of DNA information makes time stand still in a certain way. Extinction never actually takes place because there is always the possibility that a species can be brought back to life. When discussing different stories that center on species extinction Turner argues that extinction narratives are now often

an apocalyptic mode of expression: extinction is an unimaginable endpoint in the drama of the threatened and endangered; it resists representation because, as narrative theorist James Berger observes [...] we cannot imagine an ending without also imagining what happens after it, that is, the recuperation of the loss." (Turner, 57-58).

Both *The Handmaid's Tale* and *Dawn* follow this narrative that is prevalent in post-apocalyptic fiction; the fear of human extinction is a driving force in both novels. In *The Handmaid's Tale* this fear is triggered by falling fertility rates and in *Dawn* the human species has almost gone extinct already, with the survivors fearing that mating with the Oankali will bring about the human extinction completely.

### **Controlling the Female Reproductive Body**

Within these novels it is mainly the female reproductive body that is the object of control. In *The Handmaid's Tale* most women are forced into submission; the handmaid's most of all since they are forced to produce a baby for the family they are serving. But all the other women in society fulfil a serving role as well, either as a wife of a commander, a servant or an econo-wife (someone who is married and doesn't have any servants or a handmaid).

In *Dawn* the reproductive rights of all humans is taken away, and they are presented with the choice of either having children with the Oankali or not at all. Even though the reproductive rights of all humans are controlled, within the novel it is mostly the reproductive rights of the main female



character Lilith that are taken away. At the end of the novel she is made pregnant by one of the Oankali without her consent, rendering her completely without a choice.

In research that focuses on the effects of the Anthropocene there is not just a focus on how the way of life we live in the western world effects the earth and life for human beings, there is also a focus on how this change effects other species. In *The Handmaid's Tale* there isn't a focus on how the breakdown of society has effected the life of animals. The only times animals are mentioned is when it is in relation to the protagonist. She wants a pet to take care of so she will feel less alone. She discusses the shortages on food and how this has meant people are not able to consume as much meat as before. She talks about the cat she used to own, and how her husband had to kill them before they tried to flee to make sure the cat wouldn't raise suspicion about their departure. However the way she is treated and how her body is objectified is very connected to how animals are treated within contemporary society.

In *Dawn* it becomes clear in the beginning that the nuclear war that has taken place not only brought the human race to the edge of extinction but also had a devastating effect on the rest of the world. The protagonist, Lilith, also explicitly draws many connections between the way the human species are treated by the Oankali and how the human species used to treat animals. When it comes to it the focus of the novel is predominantly anthropocentric; the earth is being restored not for the sake of it but in order to make it liveable again for the human species. The Oankali do treat living beings in a different way than the humans do; they don't eat living things. But at the same time they do use them to their own advantage and genetically modify them if it is convenient for them. Which is basically the same way they are using the human species; even though they say they see the humans as a companion species.

One of the reasons why I make the connections between the way we treat animals and the way women are treated is because with animals threatened with extinction we can see what actually happens; the fear is played out because the extinction is currently happening. Especially the anthropocentric aspect of it is interesting; animals who's extinction is predominantly caused by human behavior and how the humans respond to this reality. And when it's human behavior that causes it, the fear of our own species going extinct isn't far off. Which is why looking at science fiction and dystopian novels is interesting in regards to the fear of extinction. Fiction is a place where things that aren't happening in the real world can be played out.

The aim of this thesis is to investigate the way the fear of extinction influence the control over bodies in *Dawn* and *The Handmaid's Tale*.

In the first chapter I will discuss how the fear of extinction is used as an argument to control the female reproductive body in *The Handmaid's Tale*.

In chapter 2 I look at how the power to define extinction is used to control the human reproductive body in *Dawn*.

Finally I show how in both novels bodies are controlled in an effort by the groups in power to erase disabled people from the imagined future.

## Chapter One: A Uterus Without a Body

### Introduction

*The Handmaid's Tale* is a dystopian novel set in the country Gilead, formerly known as The United States and renamed after a coup by an extreme Christian group. A rise in infertility is used by the government as a reason to force fertile women, whom they've deemed deviant, to become Handmaid's. Handmaid's have to live with a man with a high ranking position and their wife. They are expected to provide a baby for this family since the wives of the officers are often unable to have a child themselves. To achieve this the Handmaid's are raped every month in a "ceremony" where the Handmaid lies in between the wife's legs while she is raped. If the Handmaid gives birth to a healthy child the child is taken away after a few months of breastfeeding, and the Handmaid is placed with a new family to try and provide them with a baby as well. The government claim that they need to have Handmaids in order prevent further decline of the population and that the control of the female reproductive body is a necessary measure that needs to be taken in order to prevent extinction. In this chapter I will discuss how the fear of extinction is used as an argument to control the female reproductive body in *The Handmaid's Tale*.

First I will discuss how in *The Handmaid's Tale* the threat of extinction is blamed by the government on modernity and the past behaviour of women. I will discuss how this threat of extinction is then used as an excuse to control technological development and women.

I will then discuss how women are objectified through the use of hypervisualisation and the male gaze, and how this objectification is needed in order to control women.

Finally I will discuss how this objectification is used to reduce women to their uterus and the status of non-human animals.

### Modernity and Extinction

Of course, some women believed there would be no future, they thought the world would explode. That was the excuse they used, says Aunt Lydia. They said there was no sense in breeding. Aunt Lydia's nostrils narrow: such wickedness. They were lazy women, she says. They were sluts. (Atwood, 123).

Ursula K Heise writes in the book "Imagining Extinction: the cultural meanings of endangered species" that in the stories we tell about extinction the idea of modernity plays an important role:

With mass extinction as a backdrop, these stories trace the endangerment or extinction of a particular species as part of the cultural history of modernity. More specifically, narrating the endangerment of culturally significant species becomes a vehicle for expressing unease with modernization processes or for an explicit critique of modernity and the changes it has brought about in humans' relation to nature. (32).

The feeling that exists in the novels that Heise discusses is that, because of modernity, the human species has lost their "connection" to nature which has led to us depleting natural resources and contributing to the extinction of other species. Heise writes that many books that have been written "about the presumed "sixth mass extinction" rely on one or another variant of the narrative in which nature itself deteriorates or vanishes as a consequence of modernization of colonization" (32-33). One of these popular books about the influence of humans on the "destruction" of nature is "The End of Nature" written by Bill McKibben. In "Mourning and Melancholia in the Anthropocene" Margaret Ronda discusses the end of nature. She explains that the end of nature would be a future in which "Nature has been entirely vanquished, its cultural meanings depleted, its status as an "independent force" destroyed." (Ronda). She discusses McKibben's book in which he explains the Anthropocene as a time in which "The structural antagonism between nature and human culture central to modernization is finished, and a new epoch is upon us, in which human activities determine (but do not necessarily *control*) all dimensions of ecological life." (Ronda). She further explains the impact of the Anthropocene and how it's specifically related to the idea of "the end of nature" by paraphrasing McKibben when she states that:

Unlike the salmon tin in the English stream—a marker of environmental "damage"—the weather stands as the master-sign of anthropogenic effects that are daily and systemic, visible and non-localizable. By changing the weather, McKibben claims, we have already produced a permanent break, not only in the material operations of atmospheric and geochemical systems, but in the cultural "meaning" of nature. (Ronda).

This analogy is a powerful way of showing the difference between environmental damage and the negative effect the Anthropocene has on the environment, a change that will leave a permanent mark. The idea that the Anthropocene is a permanent change is also shared by Haraway, who sees the Anthropocene as a boundary event and not an age. She argues that “The Anthropocene marks severe dis-continuities; what comes after will not be like what came before. I think our job is to make the Anthropocene as short/thin as possible and to cultivate with each other in every way imaginable epochs to come that can replenish refuge.” (Haraway, *Staying with the trouble* 100). What stands out for me in Haraway’s approach to the Anthropocene is the focus she lays on how we can try to control the damage, whereas in McKibben’s focus on “the end of nature” it comes across as something that is inevitable. The Anthropocene is presented as something that is irreversible. His approach seems to reiterate the idea that humans aren’t part of nature, we are just the ones that destroy it. Haraway on the other hand emphasises that the human species are part of an assemblage, we live together with other species and not separately. Haraway’s theory on how we can approach the problems that are caused by human behaviour is a more productive one. She argues that the “No species, not even our own arrogant one pretending to be good individuals in so-called modern Western scripts, acts alone; assemblages of organic species and of abiotic actors make history, the evolutionary kind and the other kinds too.” (Haraway, *Staying with the trouble* 100). When we see the human species as part of an assemblage, we are part of nature and not separate from it. Haraway still holds the human species accountable for the damage that has been done to the planet but doesn’t create a binary opposition between the human species and nature. It’s not turned into a discussion of who is the victim and who is the perpetrator, but rather how the planet can once again be liveable for all species.

In *The Handmaid’s Tale* the suggestion is also made that the natural world has been depleted because of modernity. I would argue that the men who are in power see modernity as the cause of the rise in infertility, or rather they use this idea of modernity as the cause of infertility as a way to oppress women and stay in power in the country Gilead. The narrator of the novel, Offred, explains the reasons why she thinks so many people have become infertile and why many babies are born with a disability:

The air got too full, once, of chemicals, rays, radiation, the water swarmed with toxic molecules, all of that takes years to clean up, and meanwhile they creep into your body, camp out in your fatty cells. Who knows, your very flesh may be polluted, dirty as an oily beach, sure death to shore birds and un-born babies.” (Atwood, 122).

In this passage Offred explains that she believes that because the citizens of Gilead have come into contact with all these different toxins this might have caused their bodies to be poisoned. In her explanation she compares the body to the natural world. This creates the idea that both nature and the female body have been poisoned by modernity. Offred draws a connection between her body and the environment, comparing her body to an oily beach. This makes a lot of sense if you consider that women are to men as nature is to culture, and the body is to the mind. Just like the natural world women are seen as wild beings that need to be tamed and cultivated. In *The Handmaid's Tale* women have been reduced completely to the functionality of their body and if they are able to reproduce. Since Offred has been reduced by patriarchal society to solely her body she compares herself to nature in the nature/culture binary. The effect of modernity on women and nature, the two "lessers", are seen as the causes of infertility.

Part of what is seen as the reason for the rise of infertility is the toxic pollution and waste people in Gilead came into contact with, but the reason for infertility is predominantly seen as the responsibility of women. In the historical notes that function as an epilogue at the end of the novel, scholars discuss the reason for the rise of infertility in Gilead. They discuss that the reasons for this rise isn't completely clear, but their suspicions correlate with Offred's account. They think that the main reason for the infertility problems were caused by syphilis and AIDS, which they argue left many young people unable to reproduce. Their account also shows that

Still-births, miscarriages, and genetic deformities were widespread and on the increase, and this trend has been linked to the various nuclear-plant accidents, shutdowns, and incidents of sabotage that characterized the period, as well as to leakages from chemical and biological-warfare stockpiles and toxic-waste disposal sites, of which there were many thousands, both legal and illegal – in some instances these materials were simply dumped into the sewage system – and to the uncontrolled use of chemical insecticides, herbicides, and other sprays. (Atwood, 316-317).

However the first thing they give as a reason for the rise of infertility is not the different environmental disasters they list. Rather they start their account by claiming that the access to birth control and the legalisation of abortion is one of the reasons less babies were born. Through this statement they clearly see women as partly to blame, especially since they don't mention any contraception that is used by men to prevent pregnancy as a reason for the decline of the birth-rate. Ignoring the male role in reproduction fits in with the idea that women are responsible for reproduction and as such it's only female contraception that allows women to take control over their

reproductive body. Which makes contraception used primarily by men irrelevant to this discussion. By putting the responsibility of reproduction solely on women, the government of Gilead can claim that they are trying to prevent extinction by controlling the female reproductive body.

According to the regime women are allegedly responsible for the rise of infertility and are the only ones that can be infertile, men are never infertile or sterile and suggesting otherwise is a punishable offence. Through this framing it is always the woman's fault if she can't have a healthy baby and fulfil, what is seen in Gilead, her role in society. In The Red Center, the place where women are trained/indoctrinated to serve as handmaids, the aunts make very clear that it's the fault of women that there are so few babies being born: "Of course, some women believed there would be no future, they thought the world would explode. That was the excuse they used, says Aunt Lydia. They said there was no sense in breeding. Aunt Lydia's nostrils narrow: such wickedness. They were lazy women, she says. They were sluts." (Atwood, 123). This section of the novel further shows that the people of Gilead see women as the cause of infertility and threatened extinction, rather than the exposure to toxins. However these women seemingly decided not to have children because they believe it was in fact these environmental disasters that would potentially lead to an uninhabitable earth for their imagined offspring. The idea that only women can be infertile shows that it's not actually a fear of extinction that makes the men in power control the female reproductive body, but rather it is used as an excuse to do so.

In addition to women being reduced to their reproductive purpose, all technology surrounding childbirth is also removed. Doctors are no longer involved in the birth, only women that serve the regime are present when a handmaid is giving birth. Any sense of modernity related to reproduction is removed, because they see childbirth as a "pure" event that should not be tainted by modernity. This reversal of modernity is then further extended to women in general with them not being allowed to come into contact with technology in any sense. For example, most women are no longer allowed to read or write, and may not use money in stores but are restricted to coupons. Women are also no longer allowed to work apart from if they are providing domestic services to the people in power. All of these restrictions are put in place to control women, but aren't related to infertility in any way, further reinforcing the idea that the women in Gilead are reduced to stereotypical gender roles.

The bodies of women are being controlled by taking away their rights, and they are constantly surveilled to reinforce the rules they have to abide to. In the novel the power of vision is used as one of the main forms of control and to reduce a woman to her reproductive body. The

constant watching of women removes them as a subject and turns them into an object to be viewed, and used.

### **Objectifying the Body Through Hypervisualisation**

In *The Handmaid's Tale* the control that is exercised over the female reproductive body is justified by the government using the argument that they are trying to prevent human extinction. I've discussed how this justification is argued and will now continue to discuss how they exercise this control over the female reproductive body. The main way in which they control the bodies of the handmaid's, and make sure they don't revolt against the government, is through vision. In the way they are seen by society and the government the handmaids are both made visible at all time, and through this visibility their subjecthood becomes erased.

In *Nomadic Subjects* Rosi Braidotti discusses Foucault's theory on biopower and how "bodily material has been situated at the heart of the techniques of control and analysis aiming at conceptualizing the subject." (177). Braidotti writes that Foucault's theory on the body shows a shift in how the body is conceptualized. She writes that these new ideas around subjecthood and "about the facticity of the body emerges as a new epistemological field to replace the classical Cartesian dualism and its reductive reification of the body." (Braidotti, 177). This shift in what is seen as a subject from the Cartesian dualism to Foucault's biopower is what, according to Braidotti, has led to "organs without bodies." She writes that "the loss of unity of the "subject" results in the human being lending its organic components to many prostitudinal swap: the part for the whole." (Braidotti, 183). A person is no longer seen as a "whole", rather the body is made up of different useable parts, whereas with the theory of the Cartesian split, the body and the mind were seen as separate but the body itself was still a whole. In the Cartesian model the mind is seen as better than the body; the body is just there to serve the mind. Braidotti explains that "'organs without bodies" refers to the paradoxical overexposure and hypervisual representation of body parts and the loss of consensual unity of meaning and value about them" (193). The power that this overexposure and hypervisuality has is that the body becomes easier to control because it's no longer seen as a unity and as part of a subject.

In *The Handmaid's Tale* the overexposure and hypervisual representation of the body of the Handmaids is used as a way to control their body. The Handmaids are seen as organs without bodies and not as people. Through the use of hypervisualisation they are turned into a uterus without a body. The objectification of the body is done in different ways throughout the novel.



In the novel there is a complete regimen that a handmaid needs to follow in order to stay healthy and provide her with the greatest chance of conceiving a healthy baby. Every day she goes to the shops to buy food for dinner which ensures she gets enough exercise. Her diet is meticulously planned out in order to make sure she gets the right amount of nutrition and isn't lacking in any important vitamins. "It's good enough food, though bland. Healthy food. You have to get your vitamins and minerals, said Aunt Lydia coyly. You must be a worthy vessel. No coffee or tea though, no alcohol. Studies have been done." (Atwood, 75). The Handmaids are taken care of but not cared for. All the "privileges" they are provided with by the government, healthy food and health care, are only done to keep the handmaids in the best possible shape. And as Offred explains, she can't risk getting sick:

As for us, the Handmaids and even the Marthas, we avoid illness. The Marthas don't want to be forced to retire, because who knows where they go? You don't see many old women around any more. And as for us, any real illness, anything lingering, weakening, a loss of flesh or appetite, a fall of hair, a failure of the gland, would be terminal. (Atwood, 162-163).

If she gets ill her body will no longer be seen as useful and she will be disposed of. Women that are seen as devious and not fit for reproduction are sent to the colonies, where they have to clean up toxic waste. Offred was "chosen" and punished to serve as a handmaid because her husband divorced his first wife in order to be with her. When the coup was committed the new people in power declared all second marriages invalid, and all the women who were part of this union were either sent to the colonies or, if they were fertile, they could "choose" to become a handmaid. Since Offred and her husband had a child together they are hoping that she's still fertile and will be able to have another child.

Part of the health checks Offred is subjected to is that she needs to go to the doctor once a month, to check if she is ovulating. When she goes to the doctor he never sees her face:

When I'm naked I lie down on the examining table, on the sheet of chilly crackling disposable paper. I pull the second sheet, the cloth one, up over my body. At neck level there's another sheet, suspended from the ceiling. It intersects me so that the doctor will never see my face. He deals with a torso only. (Atwood, 70).

By making her face invisible it becomes easier for the doctor to just see her as an object. Her identity is no longer connected to her body, in fact her identity is erased completely. Especially since the reason she is there is because the doctor needs to see if she is still able to reproduce. The whole procedure only takes place because she has been reduced to a uterus. The fact that Offred no longer has her own name but is named after the man she is serving further ensures that she is seen as an object. She has become a commodity. The hypervisualisation is used in order to make it easier to separate the Handmaid from the baby she might have. When she is not seen as a subject her uterus is no longer a body-part that is attached to her. If the uterus is separate from the woman, the fetus is never a part of her. Then when the baby is born they aren't taking away a baby from their mother, because the Handmaid that carried the baby was never seen as such. Braidotti writes that one of the consequences of

“This new medical imagine – i.e., the fragmentation and visual overexposure of body parts for scientific purposes – resting as it does on the detachment of the fetus from the mother's body, on the dismemberment of bodily unity and the traffic of the part for the whole, has enormous social and political consequences.” (197).

In *The Handmaid's Tale* one of the consequences of what Braidotti describes are that the person carrying the fetus can be seen as completely separate from them, making it possible for the regime to use them as surrogate mothers who don't have any rights. Offred is very aware of the fact that she has been reduced to her body and is no longer seen as a real person but as a handmaid only.

I used to think of my body as an instrument, of pleasure, or a means of transportation, or an implement for the accomplishment of my will. I could use it to run, push buttons, of one sort or another, make things happen. There were limits but my body was nevertheless lithe, single, solid one with me. Now the flesh arranges itself differently. (Atwood, 83-84).

Here she vocalises how she no longer has any control over her body; it no longer belongs to her.

It is not only at the doctor's office where a handmaid is seen as a body only. Every time she goes outside she is obligated to wear a costume and a hat that conceals her face. Her clothes communicate to the outside world what her role in society is and her anonymity is part of this identity. She is part of a group that is “needed” and this is the only worth she has. Therefore she doesn't matter as an individual; she's a handmaid, nothing more. The doctor deals with a torso only because that is the only thing she is made into. Her body is hypervisual at all times, but she is no

longer seen as a subject. The hypervisuality of her body is making her invisible, and this is exactly the purpose of it within the novel: “Modesty is invisibility, said Aunt Lydia. Never forget it. To be seen – to be *seen* – is to be – her voice trembled – penetrated. What you must be, girls, is impenetrable. She called us girls.” (Atwood, 38-39). Her costume prevents the outside world from “penetrating”.

The fact that being seen is interpreted as being penetrated is resembling the idea of the male gaze. The male gaze is a theory that was developed in critical film studies. It’s the idea that films are made to be enjoyed by men and that women in film are objectified by the male gaze. Women serve a very specific function in many film narratives. Laura Mulvey writes that

In a world ordered by sexual imbalance, pleasure in looking has been split between active/male and passive/female. The determining male gaze projects its fantasy onto the female figure, which is styled accordingly. In their traditional exhibitionist role women are simultaneously looked at and displayed, with their appearance coded for strong visual and erotic impact so that they can be said to connote *to-be-looked-at-ness*. (47-48).

Women in film are there to be looked at and fulfil the sexual desire and expectation of the male viewer. The look of men takes on a penetrative quality because within the binary opposition of viewer and viewed, the man does the seeing while the woman is there to be seen. Within this equation women don’t have the power to look back, they are made passive. Women who watch films have to view the film through the male gaze as well and participate in objectification of the women they watch. In *The Handmaid’s Tale* there is an extreme version of the male gaze that is used to control women and especially Handmaids. Handmaids are told that they need to wear their costumes outside because that way they can’t be seen and are “protected” against the male gaze. But they aren’t watched for their own safety but in order to keep them in line. The secret service are even called the eyes. The male gaze is directly established through the “eyes” of the secret service. The women in this society are made into objects that are moulded to satisfy the male gaze, just like female characters in the films Laura Mulvey discusses are created to satisfy the male gaze.

### **Resisting Hypervisualisation and the Oppositional Gaze**

Even though Offred is objectified through hypervisualisation and controlled by the male gaze she hasn’t lost all her agency completely and she is sometimes able to use her agency to revert the male gaze. In the chapter “The Oppositional Gaze: Black female spectators” bell hooks discusses the

power of the oppositional gaze. She recalls how as a child she came to understand the danger of looking; that if she looked at adults in an oppositional way she would be punished for this. Then when she was punished she was told by her parents to look at them when they spoke to her: "Only, the child is afraid to look, but fascinated by the gaze. There is power in looking." (hooks, 94). Hooks argues that "Even in the worse circumstance of domination, the ability to manipulate one's gaze in the face of structures of domination that would contain it, opens up the possibility of agency." (hooks, 94). This oppositional gaze can be used to change the way films are watched by spectators; especially by female black spectators. By watching a film with an oppositional gaze the spectator doesn't go along with the male gaze but rejects the image of objectified women they are presented with.

The main critique hooks has in regards to feminist interventions in film is that "many feminist film critics continue to structure their discourse as being about "women" when in actuality it speaks only about white women." (hooks, 99). She then continues to say that

It may very well be that they engage in a process of denial that eliminates the necessity of revisioning conventional ways of thinking about psychoanalysis as a paradigm of analysis and the need to rethink a body of feminist film theory that is firmly rooted in a denial of the reality that sex/sexuality may not be the primary and/or exclusive signifier of difference. (hooks, 100).

In *The Handmaid's Tale* people of colour are completely erased. It's the oppression of the white female body that is the central theme of the novel but this is never acknowledged within the novel, and it's not a point of discussion because whiteness is seen as the norm. The novel shows how the female body becomes objectified through the male gaze but does not show that it's the white female body and not all female bodies that are present in the novel. There is no representation of people of colour in the novel at all. White women are transformed into objects which then make it easier for the men in power to use their bodies for the purpose of reproduction. I just want to shortly draw attention to this because literature has a history of erasing black women. Sylvia Wynter discusses this in her article "Afterword: "Beyond Miranda's Meanings: Un/silencing the 'Demonic Ground' of Caliban's 'Woman'" ". In this article she discusses how white women have become the object of desire for both white and black men and she illustrates this point by discussing Shakespeare's play *The Tempest*. In the play the white men that get stranded on the island desire the white woman Miranda who lives there with her father and Caliban, who has lived there before Miranda and her father colonized the island, desires her as well. Wynter writes that nowhere in the play

does Caliban's mate appear as an alternative sexual-erotic model of desire; as an alternative source of an alternative system of meanings. Rather there, on the New World island, as the only woman, Miranda and her mode of physiognomic being, defined by the philogenically "idealized" features of straight hair and thin lips is canonized as the "rational" object of desire; as the potential genitrix of a superior mode of human "life," that of "good natures" as contrasted with the ontologically absent potential genitrix – Caliban's mate – of another population of human, i.e., of a "vile race" "capable of all ill," which "any print of goodness will not take," a "race" then extra-humanly condemned by a particular mode of Original Sin which "deservedly" confines them to a "rock," thereby empowering the "race" of Miranda to expropriate the island, and to reduce Caliban to a labor-machine as the new "massa damnata" of purely sensory nature – "He does make our fire,/fetch our wood, and serve in offices/that profit us". (360)

Any woman that is not the idealized white woman from a western cultured is completely erased from the narrative of the novel and only white women can be seen as an object of desire. Wynter writes that because of this absence Caliban's desire can only be attached to the figure of the white civilized woman. This erasure is part of the effects of colonialism, Wynter argues that

"To put it in more directly political terms, the absence of Caliban's woman, is an absence which is functional to the new secularizing schema by which the peoples of Western Europe legitimated their global expansion as well as their expropriation and/their marginalization of all the other population-groups of the globe, including, partially, some of their own national groupings such as, for example the Irish." (361-362).

Because of the systematic erasure of any woman who doesn't fit into the idealized woman as an object of desire, it's important to point out that in *The Handmaid's Tale* the characters aren't racially diverse and the fact that they're not is never mentioned.

Where black women are completely erased white women still have a small amount of agency and there are moments in the novel where Offred uses an oppositional gaze. For example when she goes out for groceries and her identification is checked by a young man who works for the government there is a moment where Offred uses the power of looking:

In returning my pass, the one with the peach-coloured moustache bends his head to try to get a look at my face. I raise my head a little, to help him, and he sees my eyes and I see his,

and he blushes. [...] He is the one who turns away. It's an event, a 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." (Atwood, 31)

She looks back at the man who is there to control her. By looking back and making him blush in this encounter the power of the interaction between them shifts towards Offred. She holds his gaze until he turns away, surrendering in that moment to her power. Offred enjoys this encounter because it is, as she says, "a small defiance of rule." (Atwood, 31). In this moment she subverts the power of the male gaze that she is subjected to by using her power to look back.

Throughout the novel there are multiple moments in which Offred subverts the power that she is put under through hypervisualisation and the male gaze. The commander that she is serving asks her to meet him regularly in his study. He seeks her company because within the oppressive patriarchal society of Gilead men aren't making real intimate connections with the people around them either. Offred isn't really in the position to say that she doesn't want to meet him, but these meetings are also an opportunity for her to revolt against the regime. She is breaking the rules of society by meeting him in private and having conversations with him. "My presence here is illegal. It's forbidden for us to be alone with the Commanders. We are for breeding purposes: we aren't concubines, geisha girls, courtesans. [...] We are two-legged wombs, that's all: sacred vessels, ambulatory chalices." (Atwood, 146). The fact that what she's doing is forbidden is why it's more appealing for her to go, even though her actions might have dire consequences. If she gets caught she would be reprimanded and could be reclassified as an Unwoman and sent to the Colonies to clean up toxic waste. But she goes to his office anyway because she is curious about what it is he wants from her. "To want is to have a weakness. It's this weakness, whatever it is, that entices me. It's like a small crack in a wall, before now impenetrable. If I press my eye to it, this weakness of his, I may be able to see my way clear." (Atwood, 146). By wanting something from Offred, the Commander is making himself visible to her and showing her his weakness. Similar to the situation I discussed before, where Offred looked back at the officer, she uses the metaphor of seeing as a way to show that this will give her power.

The highlight of these meetings for Offred, and the moments of greatest revolt, is when she plays scrabble with him. In Gilead most women aren't allowed to read and by playing scrabble she is writing her own words, breaking the rules she was put under. She thinks back, remembering that scrabble used to be a game that old people played, a game that didn't hold any value for her. But now, in a society where she is no longer allowed to read and write, the meaning of this game has

completely shifted. "I'd like you to play a game of Scrabble with me," he says. [...] Now of course it's something different. Now it's forbidden, for us. Now it's dangerous. Now it's indecent. Now it's something he can't do with his Wife. Now it's desirable. Now he's compromised himself. It's as if he's offered me drugs." (Atwood, 148-149). She desires to play the game because it's forbidden and breaking and diverting these rules gives her a sense of power.

The biggest "transgression" Offred commits is when she sleeps with Nick, who is the driver of the family Offred is serving. Since the Commander is probably infertile and the Commander's wife Serena really wants to have a child she suggests to Offred that she has sex with Nick in order to become pregnant. The decision to do this is not just in Serena's favour but also in Offred's. If she isn't able to have a child she will most likely be categorised as an Unwoman and sent to the Colonies to clean up toxic waste. So even though it's probably the Commander's "fault" that she can't get pregnant, it's Offred who will get punished for it. Therefore Offred agrees to sleep with Nick in order to prevent this.

But she doesn't just sleep with Nick in order to save her skin or to please Serena. She wants to sleep with him because this enables her to, in a small way, reclaim her body through experiencing pleasure. The objectification of the government that reduces her to her body has an effect on her mind and self-image. Offred is shamed by the government for the way she used to live her life. She was the second wife to her husband, starting the relationship before the first marriage was over. It was for this reason that she was forced to become a Handmaid. The practice of shaming done by the regime is a way for them to force women into submission because they are made to feel worthless. Sara Ahmed writes about the power of the affect of shame, saying:

When shamed, one's body seems to burn up with the negation that is perceived (self-negation); and shame impresses upon the skin, as an intense feeling of the subject 'being against itself'. Such a feeling of negation, which is taken on by the subject as a sign of its own failure, is usually experienced before another. (103).

It doesn't matter if the shame that is felt is justified or not, it still has the same effect. Offred and the other Handmaids are shamed for how they used to go out in public. When Offred takes a bath she says that "My nakedness is strange to me already. My body seems outdated. Did I really wear bathing suits, at the beach? I did, without thought, among men, without caring that my legs, my arms, my thighs and back were on display, could be seen. *Shameful, immodest.*" (Atwood, 72-72). Even though Offred tries to resist the effect the objectification of her body has on her she isn't

completely immune to its effects. The shame she is made to feel in front of others impresses upon her even when she is alone. Offred turns against herself as well through the shaming she experienced. Where in the past she didn't care about wearing a bathing suit to the beach and didn't even think about it. Now she is made to feel as if what she did in the past was shameful. From this passage it doesn't become clear if she actually feels that what she did or wore in the past was actually shameful, but she does experience the feeling of being ashamed whether she thinks this is justified or not. "In other words, shame feels like an exposure – another sees what I have done that is bad and hence shameful – but it also involves an attempt to hide, a hiding that requires the subject turn away from the other and towards itself." (Ahmed 103).

The hypervisuality that the government uses in order to oppress the Handmaids becomes internalised by the protagonist. "I avoid looking down at my body, not so much because it's shameful or immodest but because I don't want to see it. I don't want to look at something that determines me so completely. (Atwood, 72-73)." By sleeping with Nick she reconnects with her body and reclaims it through experiencing pleasure. By acting on her sexual desire she revolts against the regime. Her body is no longer just owned and objectified by the vision of the government, she is deciding to use her body to experience pleasure for herself. Going against all the laws that were set up by the government in order to expel sexual pleasure and make sex into something that is solely for reproduction. Her body is no longer an object that is controlled by the government through the way she is seen and the role that is projected onto her; her body becomes a body that experiences touch and isn't just seen. Offred expresses this when she recounts the experience of sleeping with Nick for the reader: "His mouth is on me, his hands, I can't wait and he's moving, already, love, it's been so long, I'm alive in my skin, again, arms around him, falling and water softly everywhere, never-ending. I knew it might only be once." (Atwood, 273).

### **Reducing Women to the Status of the Animal**

Throughout the novel Offred often compares herself and other oppressed people to animals. This comparison functions as a way to show how women, especially Handmaid's, are objectified. The reduction to the position of the animal is in addition to the objectification that women are objected to through the hypervisualisation I've discussed before.

The hypervisualisation that is used to reduce women to their uterus is a technique that is also used to reduce animals to body parts suitable for consumption. A pig is no longer a pig, rather



they are split up into different body parts, which are given a different name than the actual body part, for example bacon and ham. Both these names no longer conjure the image of a living animal. Another tool of objectification of the animal body is achieved through drawing the outlines of a cow or pig without a recognizable face, whose body is divided into different sections of consumption. This hypervisualisation objectifies the animal and erases them. They become what Carol Adams call “the absent referent.” In chapter 2 *The Rape of Animals, the Butchering of Women*, Carol Adams discusses that through the act of butchering animals become what she calls the absent referent. In order to eat meat the animal needs to be transformed into meat through butchering. “Animals in name and body are made absent *as animals* for meat to exist. Animals’ lives precede and enable the existence of meat. If animals are alive they cannot be meat. Thus a dead body replaces the live animal.” (Adams, 66). In order for meat to exist, the animal needs to disappear. This practice has a similar effect to what hypervisualisation does to the women that are made into handmaid’s in *The Handmaid’s Tale*. The woman becomes the absent referent because a handmaid can’t exist if the woman still exists as well. What remains is a womb on legs. “There is supposed to be nothing entertaining about us, no room is to be permitted for the flowering of secret lusts; no special favours are to be wheedled, by them or us, there are to be no footholds for love. We are two-legged wombs, that’s all: sacred vessels, ambulatory chalices.” (Atwood, 146). As I’ve discussed before, Offred is very aware of the fact that her existence has been erased in order for the regime to make her into a handmaid. She reflects on how she has become completely objectified and reduced to her body, erasing her as a person completely. Which is what I’ve discussed in the previous section where I go into how handmaid’s become erased through hypervisualisation and they become completely determined by the functioning of their body.

Throughout the novel, Offred doesn’t just reflect on how she has become objectified through hypervisualisation but also by comparing herself to the position of animals. It is mainly Offred herself that compares herself to different kinds of animals. For example Offred compares herself to a pig, saying: “I wait, washed, brushed, fed, like a prize pig.” (Atwood, 79). The handmaid’s are compared to domestic cats by the aunts to show the way in which they are “spoiled” and “taken care of”: “They were giving us a chance to get used to blank time. A catnap, Aunt Lydia called it, in her coy way.” (Atwood, 80). Aunt Lydia tells the Handmaids to

“Think as yourself as pearls. We, sitting in our rows, eyes down, we make her salivate morally. We are hers to define, we must suffer her adjectives. I think about pearls. Pearls are congealed oyster spit. This is what I will tell Moira, later; if I can. All of us here will lick you into shape, says Aunt Lydia, with satisfied good cheer.” (Atwood, 124).

All the animals handmaid's are compared to, or Offred compares herself and others with, are either farm animals, domesticated animals or an animal that provides something beneficial for humans (like pearls). This makes sense since Offred now fulfils a similar role to humans as for example farm animals. She also compares herself to other animals when they fit the specific circumstances better, for example when she compares herself to an ant: "It's up to me to repay the team, justify my food and keep, like a queen ant with eggs." (Atwood, 145). Offred thinks this after talking to one of the Martha's, who is excited about the prospect of having a baby in the house. In establishing hierarchies between and within species, as seen here with domesticated nonhumans and ants, the idea of hierarchy and use of others is made universal. The lowest rungs of the human hierarchies and the highest of the nonhuman become blurred allowing for handmaids to be reduced to the position of the animal.

In some instances within the novel the hypervisualisation of the female reproductive body and the dehumanization of women to animals are used together in order to objectify and control the handmaids:

"Why expect one woman to carry out all the functions necessary to the serene running of a household? It isn't reasonable or humane. Your daughters will have greater freedom. We are working towards the goal of a little garden for each one, each one of you – the clasped hands again, the breathy voice – and that's just one for instance. The raised finger, wagging at us. But we can't be greedy pigs and demand too much before it's ready, now can we?" (Atwood, 171-172).

In this quote we can see the connection between Braidotti's work on the effect of hypervisualisation of the female reproductive body and the reduction of the handmaid to the position of the animal in one section together. Braidotti discusses how hypervisualisation in the form of echograms has the effect of separating the foetus from the person carrying them. This separation would make it easier to separate having children in different sections. Braidotti gives the example here of surrogacy, and how the person who carries the baby is no longer seen as the person who will necessarily raise the child once they're born.

The process of freezing out time is very clear in artificial procreation; the reproductive process is broken down into a series of discontinuous steps: freezing the sperm, the ovum, or the embryo suspends the process ad infinitum. On the other hand, in vitro fertilization

introduces a new kind of break: hormonal pretreatment/farming the eggs/cellular division/transferral of the embryo into the uterus/(possible) conception. At the same time, practices that are more social than technological, such as surrogate motherhood, blow the creative continuum into a differed range of mothering: the ovular mother, the uterine mother, the social mother, the legal mother. Swapping the totality for the parts that compose it, the era of biopower, meant as that of organs without bodies, is concentrated on the dismemberment of the iconic figure of the mother. The echography screen finally reveals the secret we have all been wondering about; the site/sight of origins is unveiled; with CNN-like speed and efficiency you can plunge to the bottom of your oedipal remote control buttons, alone at last with the abject, the unmentionable. That what you are actually looking at, embryo or foetus, is actually part of a woman's body no longer matters. (Braidotti, 260).

The split between these two "functions" of reproduction is more easily made when the foetus is seen as a separate entity through visualisation. This idea of separating the different stages of child rearing is taken to an extreme point in the dystopian world of *The Handmaid's Tale*. In this novel the different stages are actually split, using handmaid's as surrogates who are completely detached from the foetus they are carrying and who's biological mother they are. This sentiment is also vocalised in the novel by one of the aunts: "Women united for a common end! Helping one another in their daily chores as they walk the path of life together, each performing her appointed task. Why expect one woman to carry out all the functions necessary to the serene running of a household? It isn't reasonable or human." (Atwood, 171-172). The handmaid's task is seen as providing children while the wife raises them and the Martha's take care of the household. This division of tasks is a fictional illustration of the fears that Braidotti expresses when she discusses the dangers of the separation of a mother and child through visualisation.

This passage of the book then continues to compare handmaid's to free range pigs: "Your daughters will have greater freedom. We are working towards the goal of a little garden for each one, each one of you – the clasped hands again, the breathy voice – and that's just for instance. The raised finger, wagging at us. But we can't be greedy pigs and demand too much before it's ready, now can we?" (Atwood, 172). When the Aunt refers to "your daughters" she doesn't mean the biological daughters the handmaid's might have. After all, these daughters won't be their daughters, they will be the daughters of the Commander and of the Wife they are serving. The baby will never be seen as theirs. Rather when she refers to daughters she is talking about the next generation of handmaids. How this works exactly is not discussed in the novel, since it's not relevant to the progression of the story. But the idea of a next generation of handmaids for whom life will be better builds on the idea/trope that the future will be better for oppressed people. The Aunts base this assumption on the idea that everyone will just get used to the new situation and that the wives

won't have a problem with the handmaids existence/presence but instead will be happy with it. They'll be "united for a common end!" (Atwood, 171) and they promise that the life of the handmaid's will be improved. This "improvement" contains of giving the Handmaids a small garden for themselves. This creates the idea that currently the handmaids are enclosed farm animals and in the future their situation will be improved and they will become "free-range." This idea of handmaid's being treated as farm animals is made explicit in the next sentence when Aunt Lydia says: "But we can't be greedy pigs and demand too much before it's ready, now can we?" (Atwood, 172).

Aunt Lydia compares the handmaids to an animal species whom carry a negative connotation, and through this comparison these negative traits are transferred from the animal to the handmaid's. "Every negative image of another species helps keep that species oppressed. Most such images are gross distortions. Nonhuman animals rarely possess the character traits that pejoratives assign to them. In reality the imputed traits are negative *human* traits." (Dunayer, 17). There isn't actually anything greedy about pigs. These are just negative traits that have been projected upon the species to make it easier to oppress, slaughter and eat them. In turn this negative connotation is then used to oppress the people they are compared to, in this case the handmaid's. This is not the only occasion in which people are compared to pigs specifically: "I wait, washed, brushed, fed, like a prize pig." (Atwood, 79). It makes sense for Offred to compare herself to a pig considering the situation she's in and the amount of oppression and objectification she experiences.

"With contemptuous words, humans establish and maintain emotional distance from other animals. This distance permits abuse without commensurate guilt. Humans blame their nonhuman victims." [...] Pigs, as Leach (1964) remarks, bear an especially heavy "load of abuse" (50): "we rear pigs for the sole purpose of killing and eating them, and this is rather a shameful thing, a shame which quickly attaches to the pig itself" (51). [...] Naturally inquisitive and sociable, with a great capacity for affection and joy, pigs suffer intensely from imprisonment. Using *pig* as a pejorative lends acceptability to their massive abuse." (Dunayer, 18).

The suffering in isolation is something the character Offred relates to. She feels trapped, similarly to how pigs are trapped. She remembers reading about pig balls, how farmers would give them to pigs to improve their muscle tone, "the pigs were curious, they liked to have something to think about. [...] I wish I had a pig ball." (Atwood, 79-80). Offred feels the same boredom as the pig in the pen. The comparison seems fitting if we look at pigs and handmaid's being one of the most oppressed groups

in their respective circumstances. Except that pigs are bred and fed to be killed, while handmaid's have a chance to survive.

By drawing this comparison between animals and women in the novel the focus of the novel isn't on the treatment of animals and the comparison that is made by Offred between handmaid's and animals is mostly made to reflect on the oppressed status of the handmaids. Carol Adams explains that this is something that happens quite often, that the oppression experienced specifically by animals is used as a metaphor for the suffering of other oppressed groups. "Animals become metaphors for describing people's experiences. In this metaphorical sense, the meaning of the absent referent derives from its application or reference to something else." (Adams, 67). In *The Handmaid's Tale* this has the effect that through Offred's comparison to different animals she draws attention to the way handmaid's are treated as animals, and through this comparison the animal that is used in the metaphor becomes erased.

The animals have become absent referents, whose fate is transmuted into a metaphor for someone else's existence or fate. Metaphorically, the absent referent can be anything whose original meaning is undercut as it is absorbed into a different hierarchy of meaning; in this case the original meaning of animals' fates is absorbed into a human-centered hierarchy. Specifically in regard to rape victims and battered women, the death experience of animals acts to illustrate the lived experience of women. (Adams, 67).

However, there is a section in the novel where Offred does reflect on how animals are objectified and are made into the absent referent through the use of language. Before Offred was captured by the regime she had planned to flee to Canada with her husband and daughter. They got fake passports and were going to pretend that they were just going for a daytrip in order to not raise suspicion. The only problem with this plan is that they wouldn't be able to take their cat with them or leave them at home since this would raise suspicion.

"The cat, is what he said. Cat? I said, against the wool of his sweater. We can't just leave her here. I hadn't thought about the cat. Neither of us had. Our decision had been sudden, and then there had been the planning to do. I must have thought she was coming with us. But she couldn't, you don't take a cat on a day trip across the border. Why not outside? I said. We could just leave her. She'd hang around and mew at the door. Someone would notice we were gone. We could give her away, I said. One of the neighbours. Even as I said this, I saw how foolish that would be. I'll take care of it, Luke said. And because he said *it* instead of *her*, I knew he meant *kill*. That is what you have to do before you kill, I thought. You have to

create an it, where none was before. You do that first, in your head, and then you make it real. So that's how they do it, I thought. I seemed never to have known that before.”  
(Atwood, 202).

In this passage Offred reflects on how language is used in order to dehumanize an animal in order for them to be killed. But ultimately the use of animals to demonstrate the amount of oppression Offred and others face, only serves Offred and not the oppression of animals.

## **Conclusion**

In this chapter I've discussed how the fear of extinction is used as an argument in the handmaid's tale to control the female reproductive body. The totalitarian government achieves this through forcing women they see as “deviant” to become handmaids, with the job of having children for highly ranked officers and their wives. They claim the reason for this is as a measure to prevent extinction due to the rise in infertility. However I have argued that rather, the fear of extinction is simply used as a way to control women within society. This is shown in the novel by claiming only women can be infertile and are fully responsible for the threat of extinction through their behaviour while also ignoring the environments effect on infertile. By blaming women completely for this threat of extinction, they are able to justify the control of the female reproductive body, but it becomes clear that avoiding extinction is not the main priority.

The way they control the female reproductive body is through objectifying the women they want to use as handmaids. This is done through the use of hypervisualisation, which separates the subject from their body. When the handmaid no longer has any agency over their body she is no longer seen as a women but rather a “womb with legs”.

Women are further objectified by reducing them to the position of an animal. The handmaids are constantly compared to other animals which functions as a way to objectify them and to demonstrate their place in society as something to be used. Further comparisons within the novel blur the lines between the hierarchies of human and non-human animals, not only placing handmaid's on the level of farm animals but also justifying the use of the handmaids as they take on the characteristics of the animals they are compared to.

Therefore by placing the blame for the rise of infertility on women, and comparing them to animals, the dehumanisation and objectification of women made it possible for their bodies to be

controlled. This shows that the fear of extinction was simply used as an excuse to control the female reproductive body rather than control being used to avoid extinction.

## Chapter Two: The Power of Defining Extinction

### Introduction

*Dawn* is the first novel in the xenogenesis series written by Octavia E. Butler, published in 1987. The novel starts with the main character, called Lilith Iyapo, waking up from suspended animation in a spaceship controlled by the alien species the Oankali. The Oankali have saved her and a number of other humans from earth after a nuclear war that almost completely wiped out the human species and many other animal and plant species. The Oankali describe themselves as traders; they travel through the universe looking for different forms of life that are unknown to them and with whom they want to make a connection and trade information.

““We are Oankali.” “Oankali. Sounds like a word in some Earth language.” “It may be, but with different meaning.” “What does it mean in your language?” “Several things. Traders for one.” “You are traders?” “Yes.” “What do you trade?” “Ourselves.” “You mean . . . each other? Slaves?” “No. we’ve never done that.” “What then?” “Ourselves.” “I don’t understand.”” (Butler, *Dawn* 22).

This conversation takes place at the start of the novel between Lilith and an Oankali. Originally she doesn’t understand what they mean by being traders because the way the Oankali trade themselves is something that is completely new to her. The Oankali believe that the only way for their species to survive is through constant genetic and cultural development.

The Oankali are a species that have three genders, male, female and a third gender called ooloi, whose pronoun is it. In their culture relationships consist of one ooloi, one male and one female and the ooloi is in control of reproduction within every couple. They have a special organ in which they collect and store the DNA of every species they come into contact with. And with this organ they select the DNA from their partners for their new child that is then carried by the female Oankali within the couple.

The Oankali travel the universe in search of new species to trade DNA with, and when they come across the human species they decided that the humans would be a very desirable species to “trade” DNA with. In this case the trade would involve starting a new species with the humans, the new species would be a combination of humans and Oankali. The ooloi would take the most



desirable traits from both species and create a new generation that they call constructs. The Oankali believe that if they don't reproduce with other species, which they call genetic engineering, something they have done since the beginning of their existence, they will go extinct. "“We do what you would call genetic engineering. We know you had begun to do it yourselves a little, but it's foreign to you. We do it naturally. We *must* do it. It renews us, enables us to survive as an evolving species instead of specializing ourselves into extinction or stagnation.”” (Butler, *Dawn* 39). In order for them to survive they need to reproduce with the human species, they make clear in the novel that they were already long overdue for making a trade which is why they decided to save the human species. Usually they don't interfere with a species that is as self-destructive as they believed the human species were. The human species however believe that if they reproduce with the Oankali this will mean that the extinction that has started with the nuclear war will be finalised. Lilith expresses this by saying: “No! You'll finish what the war began. In a few generations –” “One generation.” “No!” (Butler, *Dawn* 41). It is the difference in what both species experience as extinction that I will focus on in this chapter. Specifically I will discuss how the difference in what is seen as extinction influences the way that both species think it needs to be prevented. And I will argue that the way the Oankali ultimately get to control human reproduction is based on the logic that they are a more intelligent species, a logic that is used by humans to justify the control over the bodies of animals. By using literature from both the field of gender studies and critical animal studies I hope to shine a light on connections that exist within the novel and aren't often discussed in academic literature. By doing this I hope to add a different analyses of the novel in addition to already existing literature about the trilogy.

Because the novel is about the interaction between two different species, and the way they experience extinction is so different, it is interesting to explore the connections that are present in the novel between the way the Oankali treat humans and how humans treat non-human animals. *Dawn* is a very rich and complex novel from which many different themes and ideas can be pulled. Therefore the analysis I give of the novel here, and the strands I choose to pull on by no means give a definitive analysis of the novel, rather it gives an additional interpretation in an existing field of research.

In this chapter it is not a case of prioritising one form of suffering and control (that of the female reproductive body) over that of another (animal bodies). Rather it's to show that they are always already intertwined which is why I can't discuss one form of control without discussing the other, especially not when *Dawn* in many ways makes these connections explicit in the text through Lilith's narrative. Aph Ko puts this point across very clearly when she argues that

It is possible to discuss more than one oppression at a time and it's OK to re-examine how these "isms" relate to one another. Conceptual violence creates the conditions for physical violence. The conceptual chains that oppress animals have been forged by race and gender constructs, which is why it's important to create theoretical tools to help break these chains. Setting animals free *physically* requires us to *conceptually* reevaluate all systems that have sustained and normalized their oppression. (19).

What makes *Dawn* such an interesting novel to analyse within the framework of critical animal studies is the many layers that are present in the book. Octavia Butler doesn't just show one side of how animals are treated but shines many lights on them. She shows how the Oankali treat different species in different ways. Perceiving the human species as an endangered animal and justifying their control of the human reproductive body on the basis of intelligence. But at the same time they have a completely plant based diet, in contrast to the humans within the novel, which shows a level of care and respect to other species that the humans in the novel don't display.

### **Extinction as an Unimaginable Endpoint**

The human extinction is something that is hard to imagine, if not impossible. In many apocalyptic films there is always something left after the apocalyptic event. Stephanie S. Turner discusses how extinction is an end-point that in popular culture seems to be unimaginable, something that resists representation. She writes how the threat of extinction changes the stories we tell about extinction, arguing that this is heavily influenced by the anthropogenic nature of the sixth mass extinction, which we are currently going through. She argues that because of the anthropogenic nature of the sixth mass extinction

"it is necessary to view the dialectic of peril and recovery by which extinction narratives are undergoing revision in literary terms, as an apocalyptic mode of expression: extinction is an unimaginable endpoint in the drama of the threatened and endangered; it resists representation because, as narrative theorist James Berger observes in his study of the literature of the Holocaust and other historical crises, we cannot imagine an ending without also imagining what happens after it, that is, the recuperation of the loss." (Turner, 57-58).

The idea of a post-apocalyptic world is essentially an oxymoron, because the meaning of apocalypse is the complete destruction of the world, there is nothing that comes after a complete destruction. But the idea that there would be nothing is exactly something that we can't imagine, as Turner says it resist representation. In the book *Crime and the Imaginary of Disaster: Post-Apocalyptic Fictions and the Crisis of Social Order*, Majid Yard describes that our current understanding of the apocalypse "refers to an event, act or occurrence (accidental or otherwise) that brings about the end of the world." (2). But in popular culture the genre of apocalyptic films and books have taken on a different meaning. James Berger writes that in many post-apocalyptic narratives the important part of the story comes after the apocalyptic event. In the case of *Dawn* and *The Handmaid's Tale* the world doesn't literally end but the way the world was before the apocalypse took place does no longer exist. Both stories start after the apocalypse has already taken place, focusing completely on the post-apocalyptic world. Berger writes that "Apocalyptic and post-apocalyptic representations serve varied psychological and political purposes. Most prevalently, they put forward a total critique of any existing social order." (Berger, 7). In *Dawn* societal structures and communities are completely destroyed because of the nuclear war, which can be seen as the apocalyptic event that has taken place before the novel starts. What takes place in *Dawn* is the recuperation of the loss. Now that some of the human population of earth have survived the nuclear war they need to make sense of the new reality they have woken up to. Within the novel there are multiple aspects that can be interpreted as criticizing the existing social order, the aspect I will focus on is how the fear of extinction is used as an argument to control the female reproductive body. And how the way extinction is defined plays an essential part in achieving this.

### **No Future Without Children**

The inability to imagine a future without the human species seems to be connected with the way meaning is given to life in our society. Our society is very future oriented and focused on how society needs to be in order for it to be suitable for children and the next generation to exist in. The inability to imagine a future without the human species can also be seen in *Dawn*. For both the Oankali and the humans that have survived the nuclear war, the existence of the future is dependent on having children. Neither the humans nor the Oankali can imagine a future without children which is where the main conflict between the two species exists. The idea of having children or not having children is entangled with the fear of extinction and how this needs to be prevented. In the article "The Future Is Kid Stuff: Queer Theory, Disidentification, and the Death Drive" Lee Edelman discusses how in

contemporary politics and society we seem to be unable to imagine the future without the figure of the child. He discusses the image of the child and how this image is used in conservative politics to prevent change. Edelman argues that

[...] the child has come to embody for us the telos of the social order and been enshrined as the figure for whom that order must be held in perpetual trust. The image itself, however, in its coercive universalization, works to discipline political discourse by consigning it always to accede in advance to the reality of a collective futurity whose figurative status we are never permitted to acknowledge or address.[...] we are no more able to conceive of a politics without a fantasy of the future than we are able to conceive of a future without the figure of the child. (20-21).

The figure of the child is used in politics as a way to keep everything the same; arguing that the future needs to be protected for the “children”. Which is how this idea is used to discipline political discourse, because there will always be a future generation of children for which the future needs to be “protected”, therefore this way of thinking prohibits positive change from taking place. Edelman discusses how this kind of argumentation is for example used in campaigns that try to prevent abortion and are used as an argument to oppose gay marriage. People who are against gay marriage use as one of their arguments that if gay marriage would be allowed this would mean that it would be possible for gay couples to have children as well, arguing that this would “endanger” children.

Edelman further argues that we can't conceive of a future at all without the image of the child. To illustrate his point he discusses the novel *The Children of Men* by P.D. James. In this novel people are no longer able to have children and because of this the human species is slowly dying out. The narrator of the novel feels that his life no longer has meaning because he's unable to have children. It illustrates the societal idea that our future is the thing that gives meaning to our current life and that without children there will be no future and therefore life becomes meaningless.

In *Dawn* it is therefore not surprising that the idea of the future is based on the ability to have children. For the human population it is never a question if they want children but rather if they want them enough to have them with the Oankali. The human species doesn't have the choice in *Dawn* to have fully human children because the Oankali are in control of their reproductive abilities. The Oankali have changed something in the way the human body works that prohibits them from having children. However, neither species considers the option of creating a world that is not designed around the figure of the child as described by Edelman. In the novel that follows *Dawn* called *Adulthood Rites*, we see how the humans who have chosen to live separately from the Oankali

on earth are coping with the fact that they can't have children without the Oankali. Part of the human population that was saved has chosen to reproduce with the Oankali and create a new species together. The rest left the Oankali when they returned to earth and have created their own settlements. At the beginning of the novel one of Lilith's children that looks very human but is a mix between her, her human partner and her Oankali partners, is kidnapped and ends up in a resister settlement. Because of this abduction we see how the humans who can't have children experience their life as pointless because they aren't able to have children. The life that they lead is very similar to the way the narrator of *Children Of Men* experiences his life, it has become devoid of meaning because there is no future generation their life and society is oriented towards.

In *Dawn* both the humans and the Oankali are trying to prevent the extinction of their respective species, and see the answer to preventing this in having children. What causes conflict in the novel however is what both species think must be prevented to avoid extinction. In the novel it comes down to how extinction is defined and who has the power to impose their definition of extinction.

### **Defining Extinction**

If we look at the official definition of extinction it generally understood that a species has gone extinct when the last of its kind has died. But by following this definition of extinction this would mean that an entire species gets reduced to the existence of an individual animal. This way of seeing a species doesn't take into account the connections species have with other species, connections that are already lost when there are only a few of its kind alive.

A way to approach the idea of extinction differently is done by Thom van Dooren in his book *Flight ways*. Van Dooren discusses how when a species goes extinct it's not just the species that is lost but also its way of life. He argues that extinction doesn't just take place when the last specimen of a species dies, but that it is usually a slow process that wipes out a species way of life and therefore also the connections the species has with other life around them. This is something Haraway focuses on as well when she discusses the importance of interspecies connections in preventing the extinction of species. She writes that "No species, not even our own arrogant one pretending to be good individuals in so-called modern Western scripts, acts alone; assemblages of organic species and of abiotic actors make history, the evolutionary kind and the other kinds too." (Haraway, *Staying with the trouble* 100). The human species isn't a species that stands alone and has

control over all, we live in an assemblage with all the life around us. We don't just influence the lives of other species but our lives are influenced by many forms of life as well.

Van Dooren writes that the conventional understanding of extinction “center[s] on the death of the last individual of a kind. We may not very often be sure if any given individual really is the last, but we are usually confident that if we did (or could) know for certain, then we would be able to pinpoint the precise moment of an extinction.” (10-11). Which reduces a species to the last individual animal. This view on extinction is also shown in the fixation of how many animals of a certain species are left. When a certain type of fish is almost extinct people are advised to not eat them anymore, until there are enough of them again for them to be killed and consumed, setting off the same cycle once again. This idea of extinction then doesn't change how, as a species, we interact with other species. He argues that if we reduce extinction, or prevention of extinction to the survival of a single animal of its kind this “reduces species to specimens – reified representatives of a “type” in a museum of life – in a way that fails to acknowledge their entangled complexity.” (Van Dooren, 11). He makes clear that he's not arguing that the life of a single animal is of no importance, rather that the issue shouldn't be reduced to a single life, and in doing so no longer look at the greater entanglements of different species. The way of life of a species can already be lost long before the last specimen has died. As an example of this he discusses the passenger pigeon, of which the last specimen died in the Cincinnati Zoo in 1914. Van Dooren shows that the way of life of the passenger pigeon had already gone extinct long before this last pigeon died.

The nomadic form of life of Passenger Pigeons, moving through the sky in flocks of hundreds of millions of birds that blocked out the sun, had long since come to an end when Martha passed away in 1914. As Passenger Pigeon numbers dwindled, the social and behavioural diversity of this unique way of life – of what it was to *be* a Passenger Pigeon in some fundamental sense – would also have broken down. (11).

The influence a species has on their environment and their way of life is already lost before a species is completely gone. At that point it no longer matters if there is still a specimen of the species alive in the zoo; because they are no longer part of the assemblages they used to be part of, the way their species used to exist is already extinct.

A different way of defining extinction is a theory that is used by Stephanie S. Turner. With advances in science it might be possible in the future to bring back a species that has already gone extinct. In relation to this she discusses the program of scientists that are trying to bring back the

Woolly Mammoth, in a project called the Mammoth Creation Project, by using DNA they “extracted from woolly mammoth carcasses excavated from the Siberian tundra.” (Turner, 55) The idea that we would be able to bring back a species that has gone extinct so long ago carries the promise that we will in the future be able to reverse all extinction, as long as we have enough DNA material. Turner writes that “In narrative terms, the bodiless, multi-medial viability of DNA can be understood as a function of “genome time.” (58). The idea of genome time entails that it changes the timeline of a species. Rather than the end of a species being definitive the idea of genome time leads the extinction of a species being frozen in time. “In genome time, evolutionary histories, including extinction narratives, are revised, forestalling or even reversing absolute endpoints in the endless reproducibility of the DNA code.” Turner argues that “the endless reproducibility of DNA renders all extinction open-ended.” (59). I’m discussing the theory of genome time in relation to *Dawn* and Van Dooren because it goes against the idea of a species being more than an individual animal on its own. The idea of genome time not just reduces a species to a single specimen but reduces them even further, that is to their DNA. When a species is reduced to their DNA this no longer has anything to do with how they used to live their life.

If we would follow this definition of extinction, and be able to store DNA of all life forms, extinction would technically no longer be possible. Which is not true if we follow Van Dooren’s theory on extinction where a species already have gone extinct when the way of life of the species is gone. In *Dawn* the ooloi are able to store all DNA they come into contact with. They even have a special organ that is placed in between their two hearts, that stores genetic information and allows them to share it with other ooloi, so they don’t have to come into contact with the DNA themselves and can pass this information on to the next generation.

However for the Oankali preventing extinction is not just about genetic material being passed on to the next generation and being able to create and clone a species with this genetic material. If this was the case they could just clone a human with the collected DNA or use this knowledge to create a new species, but this is not how they define extinction. In order for them to have a real trade with the human species they also want to know about the humans history and their way of life. They want this to be carried on in the next species. In this regard their ideas around extinction are closer to Van Dooren’s definition on extinction than the idea that as long as there is genetic material a species is still alive. Whereas the humans believe that if they reproduce with the Oankali, and change the genetic make-up of their future children this will mean the human species will go extinct. Lilith expresses this view when she has a conversation with the Oankali who tells her their plans starting a new species: “What will you make of us? What will our children be?” “Different, as I said. Not quite like you. A little like us.” She thought of her son – how like her he had been, how

like his father. Then she thought of grotesque, Medusa children. “No!” she said. [...] “No! You’ll finish what the war began.” (Butler, *Dawn* 40-41). Lilith feels that changing the genetic material of her children and starting a new hybrid species, would be the same as the genes of the human species not being passed on at all and going extinct altogether. In addition to this it becomes clear in this passage that it’s not just about survival but also about the way her children will look, she can’t imagine having a child that looks anything like an Oankali. She remembers how much her first child used to look like her and her husband and she wants to protect this image that she has of how children are suppose to be and look. This reasoning is very connected to Edelman’s theory on the figure of the child, and how this figure needs to be protected no matter what; influencing and controlling how we imagine the future.

### **Controlling the Reproductive Body Through the Definition of Extinction**

It is important to look at what we define as extinction because this influences the way we try and prevent it from happening. But ultimately it’s the party that is in power that gets to decide what extinction is, and gets to use this power to control the reproductive body of others. Often the controlling of any reproductive body is based upon the idea that the one in control is more intelligent than the one they try to control. We can see this in the relationship between humans and endangered animal species, and the relationship between the Oankali and the humans is very similar to this.

The superiority humans claim over animals is mainly based on the idea that we are a more intelligent and a more developed species. Much of our claimed intelligence is based on our linguistic abilities. With this I’m not trying to argue that we are not a more intelligent species, rather that the idea that we have the right to control and have power over the bodies of other species because we are more intelligent is not a valid argument. When we discuss what counts as intelligence it is the party in power that gets to define what counts as intelligence and are therefore able to favour their own strengths. It depends on what you find valuable when it comes to how you define intelligence.

Mel Y Chen writes

Language is arguably a major criterion (or even the defining attribute) that separates humans from animals, even among theorists who decry the fact of the segregation.” [...] “Of course, this is to the advantage of humans: the linguistic criteria are established prominently and



immutably in humans' terms, establishing human pre-eminence before the debates about the linguistic placement of humans' animal subordinates even begin." (91).

As with many ways of achieving dominance over others the idea that the human species should have more power than other species based on their linguistic abilities is very arbitrary and the argument is only made to justify behaviour. Syl Ko uses Cora Diamond's work based in animal studies to come to the conclusion that:

"In other words, *the difference* between humans and animals, the crucial factor that fuels the phenomenon of speciesism, was not born from the observation that animals are irredeemably foreign or dissimilar to us. In fact, Diamond points to the contrary ("*the difference*"] is a concept we create knowing full well the obvious similarities between us")." (41).

Humans justify the control of the reproductive body of endangered animals by saying that they know what is the best way to save them. The Oankali claim power over the human species based on a very similar argument; namely by claiming that they are more intelligent than the human species and therefore know what is best. Their argument is very related to the idea that through their linguistic ability they are more intelligent and can better assess what is the best way to prevent extinction of the human species. Their linguistic ability in this case is the fact that they can "read" genetic information.

"How do ooloi study?" She imagined dying humans caged and every grown and contortion closely observed. She imagined dissections of living subjects as well as dead ones. She imagined treatable diseases being allowed to run their grisly courses in order for ooloi to learn. "They observe. They have special organs for their kind of observation."(Butler, *Dawn* 20).

Through this ability to observe the genes of other species, they have established that the human species has two conflicting genes. The conflict these genes cause will, according to the Oankali, always eventually lead to the extinction of the human species.

The images that come to Lilith when she imagines how the Oankali study are the ways in which humans use the bodies of animals in scientific research. The fact that this is the first thing that

comes to mind makes explicit the comparison between how the Oankali treat humans and how humans treat animals. While the methods of study might not be the same the power dynamic is the same. By perceiving the human genes and how the body works, the Oankali turn the human species into an object of study. They are the one seeing or “perceiving” the human genes, putting themselves into the subject position of the objective scientist that Donna Haraway discusses in “Situated Knowledges”:

I would like to insist on the embodied nature of all vision and so reclaim the sensory system that has been used to signify a leap out of the marked body and into a conquering gaze from nowhere. This is the gaze that mythically inscribes all the marked bodies, that makes the unmarked category claim the power to see and not be seen, to represent while escaping representation. (581).

The ooloi study the genes of their object of study through the power of something that is comparable with vision. Even though they describe the process and say that the ooloi have a special organ to analyse genes, the process of study still enacts the same sort of power that is enacted by that of disembodied vision. By making the human species their object of study they have the power make judgements on other species without being studied themselves. They claim that through this form of study they know the human species completely, they even know them better than they know themselves.

“How can you teach us to survive on our own world? How can you know enough about it or about us?” “How can we not? We’ve helped your world restore itself. We’ve studied your bodies, your thinking, your literature, your historical records, your many cultures.... We know more of what you’re capable of than you do.” Or they thought they did. If they really had had two hundred and fifty years to study, maybe they were right. (Butler, *Dawn* 31).

Through making this distinction between the Oankali as the scientist and the human species as the object of studies it deepens the distinction of the human species as embodied matter that can be controlled and the Oankali as an all-knowing entity that has the power and responsibility to control the embodied matter.

The Oankali treat the human species in a similar way that the human species treat certain endangered animal species. They use their ability of genetic engineering and the knowledge they gain from this ability as an argument to oppress the human species and control the human reproductive body. By “reading” the human genetic information the Oankali established that because the human species have two conflicting genetic characteristics the human species will eventually go extinct if they don’t reproduce with the Oankali. They say that the human species is both intelligent and hierarchical and that intelligence was used to support their hierarchical tendencies which ultimately led to the nuclear war taking place. Because of these conflicting characteristics the Oankali believe that the human species will always end up destroying themselves and therefore need to be saved from this imminent extinction by reproducing with the Oankali. This example shows how they believe that they have the right to control the human reproductive body based on the fact that they see themselves as a more intelligent species.

In the book *Bodily Natures* Stacey Alaimo discusses in what way dominant conceptions of genetics can be problematic for how we interact with the environment and non-human life forms. She writes that “understanding genes as mechanisms that can be turned on and off encourages humans to assume techno-scientific mastery of all life forms.” (Alaimo, 150). Alaimo argues that this line of thinking will enable humans to think that we can solve all environmental issues by genetic engineering instead of reflecting on how human behaviour is causing for example species extinction. She also argues that the idea that the human species can control all matter ignores the agency of matter and it prohibits us to acknowledge “the unpredictable transformations that these living forces will effect.” (Alaimo, 150). Many of these transformations are not something that we can even comprehend. But by putting the human species in the master position this ignores all the possibilities of the intra-action between different materialities. Finally she argues that this subject position ignores the influence of the environment on things that we will analyse as genetic, even though it can have many different causes. As an example of this she says that

the popular and scientific obsession with finding genetic causes for disease, which blinds us not only to environmental causes, such as the thousands of toxicants that reside in our bodies and interact with each other in often unpredictable ways, but to the manner in which even the “genetic” causes are inextricably interwoven with and sparked by environmental factors.” (Alaimo, 150).

In *Dawn* the Oankali do take up the position of this techno-scientific mastery of all life forms. Through genetic engineering they have been able to restore the earth and make it a liveable place

again for themselves and the human species. They can cure all human diseases, doing exactly what Alaimo argues against, that is the idea that the origin of all disease can be found in genetics.

At the same time the relationship that the Oankali have with different species are defined in different ways. They are able to manipulate the genetic aspect of other species but they don't necessarily see themselves having to control other species completely. When it comes to the relationship they have with the human species they like to believe that this relationship isn't hierarchical, especially since they describe themselves and the relationship they have to each other as being completely equal. Even though they see their relationship to other species as non-hierarchical in practice this isn't the case. The humans no longer have reproductive freedom; they either have children with the Oankali or they don't have children at all.

However, the Oankali do give Lilith a chance to escape the oppression she's faced as an African American woman. The Oankali, in a way, treat her better than many of the humans that have survived the nuclear war. Most of the humans that are awoken by Lilith from suspended animation just want to carry on in the same way they did on earth. Lilith awakens the different humans with an idea in mind of who will couple off together. One of the women she awakens doesn't want to be with anyone from the group and some of the men are against her staying on her own. They try to force her to pair up with a man that has newly been awoken and when she resists two men try to take her to a separate room with the intent to rape her.

"What the hell is she saving herself for?" Jean was demanding. "It's her duty to get together with someone. There aren't that many of us left." "It's my duty to find out where I am and how to get free," Allison shouted. "Maybe you want to give whoever's holding us prisoner a human baby to fool around with, but I don't!" "We pair off!" Curt bellowed, drowning her out. "One man, one woman. Nobody has the right to hold out. It just causes trouble." "Trouble for who!" someone demanded. (Butler, *Dawn* 176-177).

As this passage shows the kind of sexual violence that women experience before is not erased by their current situation and experience. All the oppressive structures that were present on earth before the nuclear war are enduring. The Oankali treat Lilith better in many ways than she is being treated by the people who are also awakened. Although this relationship is definitely not an equal one. As I've discussed before, the Oankali base their right to control human reproduction on the idea that they are more intelligent and know what is best. However the relationship they have, or want to have, with the human species is not one of total domination. The way they interact and approach the human species is very similar to the way Haraway explains the way she thinks we could live together

with other species as companion species. In *The Companion Species Manifesto* Haraway proposes the idea of a companion species by focusing on human-dog relationship. She explains the idea of a companions species as:

“There cannot be just one companion species; there have to be at least two to make one. It is in the syntax; it is in the flesh. Dogs are about the inescapable, contradictory story of relationships – co-constitutive relationships in which none of the partners pre-exists the relating, and the relating is never done once and for all. Historical specificity and contingent mutability rule all the way down, into nature and culture, into naturecultures. There is no foundation; there are only elephants supporting elephants all the way down.” (Haraway, *Companion Species Manifesto* 103-104).

This idea of a companion species is very related to the way the Oankali approach their relationship to other species. They don't just want to use the humans to ensure their own survival, they want to make a trade with the human species, and within this trade they want to ensure a better future for both of them. In the novel the relationship between the human species and the Oankali is one that is still being negotiated. In the two novels that follow we can see how this relationship evolves. It isn't static, as Haraway describes “the relating is never done once and for all.” It's therefore interesting to look at another relationship the Oankali have with another species that is also based on the idea of a companion species. The ship that they travel through space with is a living being whom the Oankali see as a companion species. They describe their ship to Lilith as being both plant and animal and more. When she asks if the ship is an intelligent they say that:

“It can be. That part of it is dormant now. But even so, the ship can be chemically induced to perform more functions than you would have the patience to listen to. It does a great deal on its own without monitoring. And it ...” He fell silent for a moment, his tentacles smooth against his body. Then he continued, “The human doctor used to say it loved us. There is an affinity, but it's biological – a strong, symbiotic relationship. We serve the ship's needs and it serves ours. It would die without us and we would be planetbound without it. For us, that would eventually mean death.” (Butler, *Dawn* 33)

The Oankali wouldn't be able to survive without the ship and vice versa. They both come into existence through the connection they have with each other. Their relationship is not hierarchical but symbiotic instead. Both agents within the assemblage profit from each other and need the other in order to survive. But even though they depend on each other it is still evident from the way the

Oankali speak about the ship that they are the one in charge. Making clear that the ship can only act intelligent if they chemically activate this aspect of the ship, giving them the agency to control it. Another way in which the novel shows that the Oankali relate to other species in a different way than the humans do is through the fact that they follow a completely plant based diet and only provide plant based food for the humans as well. It makes sense for the Oankali to be a species that don't consume any animal products because their culture is based on the idea that they trade with other species. When you kill another animal in order to eat them you don't make a trade; instead you are taking the life from another living being. Within their assemblage way of living the idea of taking an animals life and not giving anything back doesn't fit. In addition to this they are very focused on life and all living beings, therefore if they don't need to eat animals to survive than why would they. Because the Oankali believe that they are not hierarchical they also aren't able to justify the consumption on the speciests believe that they are above animals and are therefore allowed to kill them and treat them in any way they see fit. The Oankali are so averse of the killing of animals that when later on in the novel the humans catch some fish they stay far away from the humans while they are preparing and consuming animals:

Tate gave her a baked yam and, to her surprise, baked fish. She looked at Wray. Wray shrugged. "I caught it with my hands. Crazy thing to do. It was half as big as I am. But it swam right up to me just begging to be caught. The Oankali claimed I could have been caught myself by some of the things swimming in the river – electric eels, piranha, caiman . . . they brought all the worst things from Earth. nothing bothered me, though." "Victor found a couple of turtles," Allison said. "Nobody knew how to cook them so they cut the meat up and roasted it." "How was it?" Lilith asked. "They ate it." Allison smiled. "And while they were cooking it and eating it, the Oankali kept away from them." Wray grinned broadly. "You don't see any of them around this fire either, do you?" (Butler, *Dawn* 238).

The man who caught the fish takes pleasure in the idea that it keeps the Oankali at a distance. In this passage we can see how the killing of animals is used as a way to take back power over the Oankali. It gives them a feeling of superiority that they can harm the other by killing and eating animals.

However even though the Oankali see the human species as a companion species this is not the way the relationship is experienced from their point of view, especially not in the beginning of the novel when they are all held in strict captivity. The intention of the Oankali might be to start a new chapter of life together by creating a new species but the humans don't have a choice. Their only options are to either have children with the Oankali or no children at all. The control that is put on their reproductive freedom is very similar to the way that we treat endangered species that we

want to survive. Except that in *Dawn* the humans have become the endangered species that “needs to be saved” from extinction.

### **Humans as an Endangered Species**

In the article “Managing Love and Death at the Zoo: The Biopolitics of Endangered Species Preservation” Matthew Churlew discusses the biopolitics that is involved in the keeping of animals in zoos and how zoos have developed into institutions that control the reproductive body of some endangered species. Since the establishing of zoos the function of them has significantly changed. Churlew writes that under the influence of Swiss professor and zoo director Heini Hediger zoos were able to reinvent themselves and make the environment animals were kept in more natural and through these changes they were able to make animals behave more natural and stimulate reproduction in captivity. Churlew writes that

Since that time, as the exchange of wild animals became increasingly regulated, zoos have reinvented themselves as wildlife parks devoted to the preservation of endangered species. Amid the crisis of widespread and relentless habitat loss and species extinction – processes in which they were historically implicated – zoos became defined as salvific arks, bearing life’s remnant and our hopes for redemption. Building on techniques such as Hediger’s, the goal of conserving threatened wildlife populations could be pursued by a benevolent regime of scientific management within their curiously well-ordered microcosms of nature. (138).

In *Dawn* the Oankali are the zookeeper and the humans have become the endangered animal species that needs to be saved. The Oankali enact their own regime of scientific controls, similar to those done in zoos, under the guise of intellectual superiority. Because they believe that the human species will go extinct if left to their own devices they feel that they have the right to control their reproduction since they wouldn’t survive without them.

With the moral criteria thus delimited, the priesthood of wildlife stewards could expand their meticulous pastoral power, caring (in species-specific terms) for every need of the animal— dietary, territorial, social, behavioural and sexual— exercising total management of their lives, from birth and prior to death and beyond. (Churlew, 145)

Even the sex life of the humans are controlled by the Oankali. Humans can no longer have sex with each other without their ooloi partner. And when they are not with their ooloi they can't touch each other without feeling uncomfortable in doing so. All human behaviour becomes controlled under the premise that the Oankali are saving them from extinction. They justify their own behaviour by claiming they are a more intelligent species and therefore know what is best for the humans; which is exactly what humans do when they control the bodies of endangered animals.

Chrulew writes that zoos don't just try to imitate nature but also improve it. "Zoos do not simply imitate nature, attempting a perfect simulacrum, but rather improve it, offering their wards a blessed life free of the harsh realities of the wild." (Chrulwew, 145). The Oankali offer the human species the same thing when they offer them a long healthy life cured of all diseases, genetic or otherwise. They have restored the earth for the human species and made it suitable to live there but it's not exactly the same as it was before. Because the Oankali believe that the life they can offer to the humans is better than the life they had before. Which is also why they have destroyed all the ruins that were left after the nuclear war, something Lilith is very angry about. They did this because the Oankali were worried that if there were still ruins of their old life they would try to recreate the life they lived on earth before instead of start a new life of coexistence with the Oankali. Zoos essentially justify the captivity of animals by saying that the animals have a better life than they would outside of the zoo in the wild. It is used as a justification of taking their freedom and reproductive right over their own body away. Chrulew argues that "Sexual reproduction—as the meeting point of the population and the body— was the central element for intervention[...]" (147) , similar to how the Oankali engage with the human species. They want to create a new species and leave the humans very little choice; being that they either agree to having children with the Oankali or no children at all. And this idea of not having any children would essentially mean the humans would lose their reason to live. Since, going back to Edelman's theory of the idea that there is no future without the idea of children, this would mean the humans will go extinct either way they choose. Because if they don't have children they'll go extinct, but they also believe that if they have children with the Oankali they will also go extinct because their genetic makeup and the way they look and behave won't be the same. The control the Oankali exercise over the human reproductive body goes so far that they impregnate Lilith at the end of the novel without her consent. When she finds out she is completely mortified and rejects the fact that she was made pregnant, and that she is carrying a child that's not fully human. The ooloi who has done this to her responds by saying "Nothing about you but your words reject this child." (Butler, *Dawn* 246). Once again justifying the control of the human body by claiming they are more intelligent and know what is best for the human species.



In their attempt to keep the human species from going extinct the Oankali put the humans under an extreme level of control. With this threat of extinction seeming so close the need to keep them alive seems even greater. “The closer a species to extinction—when a wild population is most endangered, or a captive one most fragmented, when the category of ‘species’ holds the most importance and thus the visibility of living organisms within the whole ensemble is most obscured—the stronger then is the grip in which the bodies of the last remaining individual animals are held.” (148-149). It is then through this threat of extinction that the reproductive body is controlled.

## **Conclusion**

In this chapter I’ve discussed how the definition of extinction influences the way the different species in dawn believe extinction can be prevented. The oankali view extinction as stagnation. They believe that in order for their species to survive they need to constantly evolve, by producing offspring with another species that they believe have beneficial characteristics. In this way, their species is constantly changing, but this constant change is what defines their species. In contrast to this, the humans fear that reproducing with the oankali will finalise the extinction process that started with the nuclear war. By incorporating Oankali DNA, they see this as no longer fully human, and as such the species has not continued. The differences in these definitions of extinction lead to different methods of preventing extinction. While the Oankali seek out change, the humans avoid it. Despite these differing definitions, it is the party in power that is able to implement their vision of future generations. The Oankali use their self designated position of superior intelligence to claim control over the human reproductive body. Similar arguments are used by humans to justify the control over the bodies of endangered animals. The control over the reproductive bodies of animals is justified by claiming that humans are the more intelligent species, and as such know what’s best for animals, however humans are the ones defining what is seen as more intelligent, and therefore have the power to preference themselves. In this way the fear of extinction, and ones ability to define it allows for the control of the reproductive body.

## Chapter Three: Erasing Disabilities From the Imagined Future

### Introduction

In the previous two chapters I've discussed how the fear of extinction is used to control the female reproductive body in *Dawn* and *The Handmaid's Tale*. In this chapter I will discuss how it's not just the female reproductive body that is controlled in order to prevent extinction, but also the bodies of the children that will form the future generation. Specifically the way in which the future generation is imagined and how disability is actively excluded from the imagined future. In this chapter I will discuss how disability is presented as contributing to the threat of extinction in *Dawn* and *The Handmaid's Tale*.

First I will discuss how within ableist societies, disabled people are seen as people who don't have a future.

Then I will discuss how *The Handmaid's Tale* and *Dawn* see disabled people as undesirable to be part of the imagined future.

### No Future with a Disability

In the introduction to her book *Feminist, Queer, Crip*, Alison Kafer discusses how by being disabled, the ableist society we live in now sees her as someone who doesn't have a future. After she became disabled, people that she would meet had the tendency to predict her future: "Of fortune cookies and tarot cards they have no need: my wheelchair, burn scars, and gnarled hand apparently tell them all they need to know. My future is written on my body." (Kafer, 1). She was advised by her doctor that she wasn't ready to go to graduate school but instead should stay at home and rehabilitate for the next few years. Her rehabilitation therapist and her recreation therapist predicted that she would need long-term therapy. Saying that "My friends were likely to abandon me, alcoholism and drug addiction loomed on my horizon, and I needed to prepare myself for the futures of pain and isolation brought on by disability." (Kafer, 1). Many people she encountered didn't see how her life had any future because she is disabled. In the rehabilitation centre there was even another patient who suggested suicide "explaining that life in a wheelchair was not a life worth living (his son, he noted offhandedly, knew to "let him go" if he was eventually unable to walk.)" (Kafer, 1). Not everyone in

her life was negative on her future of course “My friends, family, and colleagues have consistently conjured other futures for me, refusing to accept ableist suggestions that disability is a fate worse than death or that disability prohibits a full life.” (Kafer, 2). Kafer writes that these two visions are complete opposites of each other but that they share the fact that they are strongly “linked to the present. How one understands disability in the present determines how one imagines disability in the future; one’s assumptions about the experience of disability create one’s conception of a better future.” (2). From this idea follows that if disability is seen as something horrible then of course disability would need to be excluded from every vision for the future.

The way we conceptualize disability now will influence what place it takes up in the way we imagine the future. Kafer argues that if we see disability “as a terrible unending tragedy” (2), then naturally disability is something we will want to expel from the imagined future. She writes that “a better future, in other words, is one that excludes disability and disabled bodies, indeed it is the very *absence* of disability that signals this better future.” (Kafer, 2). She continues by arguing that the idea of a better future without disabilities becomes especially attached to the body of the unborn child, “the figure of the disabled person, especially the disabled fetus or child, becomes the symbol of this undesired future.” (Kafer, 2-3). When disabled people are seen as having no future within this ableist framework, it makes sense that in many science fiction novels disabled people are erased from the imagined future.

In chapter 3 of Kafer’s book she discusses the science fiction novel *Woman on the Edge of Time* by Marge Piercy. She discusses how many feminist scholars have analysed the book for its positive way of showing diversity in the imagined future in this science fiction novel, but that these analyses lack to discuss the way disabled people are erased in this imagined future. . There are three different times in which the novel takes place, and in the one that is presented as a utopia, children are created through technology and are carried in a brooder, which is a machine that functions as a womb. The idea is that by not having a woman carry the baby a more equal society is created and children with many different ethnicities are born. But when it comes to the representation of disability Kafer writes:

What has gone unnoticed in these praises of Piercy’s novel, however, is the place of disability, and specifically disabled bodies, in her imagined utopia. In a world very carefully constructed to contain people of every skin tone and sexual orientation, where people of all genders and ages are equally valued, disabled people are absent. (72)

When the genes for a baby are selected “negative” traits are filtered out. Kafer argues that the erasure of disability in Piercy’s utopia is not because she forgot to include it. She discusses that at some point in the novel there is a discussion between the people who are in charge of reproduction whether they should start selecting for “positive” genes. The machine is already filtering out “negative” genes. Everyone living in this utopian society already “agree on the necessity of screening the gene pool for “defective genes” and “predispositions” for illness and “suffering.” (Kafer, 73). It is never discussed what exactly counts as defective genes because it is implicitly understood that everyone already knows which genes are undesirable to be passed on to the next generation. “Thus, disabled people are not accidentally missing from Piercy’s utopia; they have intentionally and explicitly been written out of it.” (Kafer, 73). She argues that when there is no discussion in culture on the place disability takes up, and if in novels disability is expelled from the narrative, this also becomes part of “how contemporary American envision the future.”

She writes that “Utopian visions are founded on the elimination of disability, while dystopic, negative vision of the future are based on its proliferation; as we will see below, both depictions are deeply tied to cultural understandings and anxieties about the proper use of technology.” (Kafer, 74) Disability is present in many science fiction, utopian and dystopian novels, but it functions as a way to show either a positive or a negative aspect of the future that is imagined in these novels. Kafer’s analysis holds up for both *The Handmaid’s Tale* and *Dawn*. In *The Handmaid’s Tale* the proliferation of disability is an integral part of the novel. A lot of people in the novel are infertile, and many of the babies that are born are disabled. They say that there is only a 25 percent chance that the handmaid’s will have a nondisabled child if they manage to become pregnant. The inability to have children in this dystopian future is one of the main plot points that drives the novel forward. Because of this, the idea that most children will be disabled is used as a way to make the infertility crisis even more disastrous. None of the disabled children that are born survive, for reasons that the novel doesn’t go into. Disability becomes a part of why this world is dystopian.

*Dawn* on the other hand follows the utopian narrative that Kafer describes, where all disabilities that the humans have can be healed by the Oankali. And all the children that will be created by the Oankali will be free of any disabilities. The selection of specific genes makes the novel very similar to *On The Edge of Time* in this regard. Even though *Dawn* is utopian and *The Handmaid’s Tale* is dystopian, both novels present a desire for the future in which disabilities don’t exist.

Kafer’s argument that disabled people are seen, because of ableist ideas in society, as having no future is very connected to the way Lee Edelman argues we imagine the future in politics through

the image of the child. Edelman argues that politics are disciplined by the image of the child, and the future that needs to be ensured for it:

The image itself, however, in its coercive universalization, works to discipline political discourse by consigning it always to accede in advance to the reality of a collective futurity whose figurative status we are never permitted to acknowledge or address. [...] we are no more able to conceive of a politics without a fantasy of the future than we are able to conceive of a future without the figure of the child." (21).

The figure of the child ensures in politics that nothing will ever change. It's the idea that the everything needs to stay the same in order to ensure the safety of future children. Edelman argues that this image excludes the existence of queer people in this imagined future. He writes that fighting "for the right to marry, to serve in the military, to adopt and raise children of their own, the right simply opens its closet and asks us to kneel at the shrine of the child" (Edelman, 25). Which makes the point that fighting to be included in the existing oppressive society will not enact real change, it doesn't break the idea of heteronormativity, it will only include certain minorities in it while still oppressing many others (for example disabled people).

Disabled people are seen in ableist society as being undesirable to reproduce, which aides to the fact that they are seen as having no future, since the future is dictated by the figure of the child. Tobin Siebers discusses what it is about sex that the ability to have it makes humans seen as humans. He paraphrases the work of Barbara Wasman-Fiduccia and writes that she "argues that disability assumes the characteristic of a sexual perversion because disabled people are thought unable to produce "quality offspring" ("Current"168-169). It is reproduction, then, that marks sexuality as a privileged index of human ability." (Siebers, 41). He continues by saying that there are different reasons why it might be harder for a disabled person to have sex, on of them being that "successful reproduction is thought to pass our essential abilities and qualities to our children. The predominant assumption is that what we are will be visited upon our children." (Siebers, 41). And since, as I've discussed before, everyone in society seems to all agree that it is undesirable to have a disabled child, this has as a consequence that disabled people are seen as unfit to have children since they might pass on their disability. Allison Kafer discusses a view expressed by James Watson who is a geneticist who is involved with the Human Genome Project, who argues that as a society we are acceptant of the fact that many couples don't want a child with down syndrome. He claims that someone would have to be crazy to want a child who does since they won't have a future. Kafer writes that

Although Watson is infamous for making claims about who should and shouldn't inhabit the world, he's not alone in expressing this kind of sentiment. Watson's version simply makes clear some of the assumptions underlying this discourse, and they are assumptions that cut to the heart of this project. The first is that disability is seen as the sign of no future, or at least of no good future. The second, and related, assumption is that we all agree; not only do we accept couples don't want a child with Down syndrome, we know that anyone who feels otherwise is "crazy." To want a disabled child, to desire or even to accept disability in this way, is to be disordered, unbalanced, sick. "We" all know this, and there is no room for "you" to think differently." (3).

As Kafer shows there is a consensus that everyone agrees disabilities are undesirable and a future without disabilities is presented as a good one. Because of disability being so connected to the idea that disabilities don't have a place in the future I want to discuss how ableism influences the way in which the bodies of the future generation in *The Handmaid's Tale* and *Dawn* are controlled in order to exclude disabled people from the imagined future in these novels and how this is linked to the fear of extinction.

### **Ableism in *The Handmaid's Tale***

There are many aspects that make *The Handmaid's Tale* fit into the genre of a dystopian novels. One of them is an issue that Kafer raises in her work when she discusses the science fiction novel *Woman on the Edge of Time* and the genre of science fiction in general: "Utopian visions are founded on the elimination of disability, while dystopic, negative vision of the future are based on its proliferation; as we will see below, both depictions are deeply tied to cultural understandings and anxieties about the proper use of technology." (74). As I've discussed before Kafer's argument holds up for both *The Handmaid's Tale* and *Dawn*. One of the things that make *The Handmaid's Tale* into a dystopian novel is the proliferation of disability, and this proliferation is something that takes up a significant role within the novel.

In *The Handmaid's Tale* there are a lot of people who are dealing with infertility issues, which makes it impossible or hard for them to have children. These issues are used by the government to control the reproductive body of certain women, which I have discussed in chapter 1. In addition to the fact that many people are infertile, there is also a high chance that the children that are born will be disabled. "You can't have them taken out; whatever it is must be carried to term. The chances are

one in four, we learned that at the Centre.” (Atwood, 122). Offred explains that the chances are so high because of chemicals being released in the air and water by accident and that this is probably the reason why so many people are infertile as well.

In the description Offred gives of the disabled baby she already dehumanizes them by calling them *it*. Disabled babies aren't cared for; they are disposed of. In order to do this the baby needs to be dehumanized to make the act of disposing of them not a crime. Which is why Offred calls a disabled baby *it* and not *them*, just like the cat became an *it* when her husband went to kill them. They are also no longer called babies; they are called Unbabies instead. This is also done in order to dehumanize them, just like they do to women that are made into handmaid's. When Offred goes to the birth of a baby that one of the other handmaid's is carrying she vocalizes the feelings of the other woman who are present. She also goes into what an unbaby is: “What will Offwarren give birth to? A baby, as we all hope? Or something else, an Unbaby, 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?” (Atwood, 122).

Disabled people are not part of the future in *The Handmaid's Tale*; they are dehumanized and don't survive. Another word that is used to describe a disabled baby is shredder, which most likely refers to the way that they get rid of the babies. “To go through all that and give birth to a shredder: it wasn't a fine thought. We didn't know exactly what would happen to the babies that didn't get passed, that were declared Unbabies. But we knew they were put somewhere, quickly, away.” (Atwood, 123). It is the regime that decides what babies make the cut, they are the ones who make the decision on who gets dehumanized. They decide who gets to be part of the future. By deciding what babies are able-bodied enough to be allowed to live the regime doesn't just control the female reproductive body, they also control the bodies of all the babies that are born.

The proliferation of disability and the way disabled people are treated by the totalitarian government in the novel is seen as part of why this future is dystopian. However even though disabilities still exist they are not allowed to be part of the future the oppressive regime has imagined for their country. It is not just disabled babies that are not allowed to exist, women that are old and no longer seen as “functional” are declared Unwomen and have to work in the colonies with other people that are dehumanized for various reasons. Moira, Offred's best friend, tells Offred that she found out that her mother has been sent to the colonies together with other older women: “It's old women, I bet you've been wondering why you haven't seen too many of those around any more, and Handmaids who've screwed up their three chances, and incorrigibles like me.” (Atwood, 260-261). Since age increases the chances of becoming disabled they don't fit into the image that the

government has of the future of the country. This is also why the Handmaids and the Marthas are afraid of becoming ill:

“As for us, the Handmaids and even the Marthas, we avoid illness. The Marthas don’t want to be forced to retire, because who knows where they go? You don’t see many old women around any more. And as for us, any real illness, anything lingering, weakening, a loss of flesh or appetite, a fall of hair, a failure of the gland, would be terminal.” (Atwood, 162-163).

The fear of becoming ill or disabled is very understandable in this scenario, since neither are accepted by the people that are in power.

Because disabled people are seen as having no future; they can’t take part in it. In *The Handmaid’s Tale* their physical presence becomes erased; disabled children are no longer able to exist and older women are expelled from society. This is done in order to achieve what the government perceives as an “ideal” future and society. An example of how disability can be seen as a negative aspect of an imagined society is written about by Jasbir K. Puar in her book *The Right to Maim*. Puar writes how disability is seen as something that can’t be part of the future of the Israeli state. She shows that this is rooted in the way Jewish people were seen in the past and how some people who were behind the Zionist movement wanted to change the way Jewish people were perceived. She writes that

As early as 1830, the terms “civil disabilities” and “Jewish disabilities” were employed to describe the political disenfranchisement of the Jewish population in England. Well before it’s advent, the mandate for the new Israeli state was one of an uncompromising “it has to get better” from the fate of the “sickly Jew” existing in the stateless diaspora. (Puar, 101-102).

The “sickly Jew” was the image that Zionism wanted to move away from; therefore disabilities naturally didn’t fit into the imagined future that they wanted to create in Palestine. In addition to establishing an identity in opposition to disability they also wanted to move away from the association between Judaism and femininity. “This new Jewish body and the new state were also gendered masculine and became “the necessary site for healthy, heterosexual transformation,” as the degenerate diaspora was understood as feminine and effeminate: a rehabilitation, then, from



homosexuality.” (Puar, 102). It’s not surprising that the able body is associated with masculinity since these are both seen as the norm and disability and femininity are created in opposition to these. This association between the feminine body and the disabled body is something that is present in *The Handmaid’s Tale*. The focus is always on how the female body is not working properly, either by being infertile, having disabled children or being “too old” to be part of society.

The idea that disabled people, and therefore disabled children, don’t have a future in the state of Israel has consequences for the way they approach the future generation.

Puar writes that the Israeli government is very pronatalist, and it is seen as “the most developed assisted reproductive technology (ART) industry in the world.” (112). This pronatalist drive is described by Puar as stemming from population anxieties. She writes that if there will be a one-state solution this will mean that the Jewish Israelis will be a minority in this new state. And on top of this they are worried “that Palestinians are reproducing at a higher rate than Israeli Jews, a phenomenon usually attributed to demographic resistance on the part of Palestinians.” (Puar, 112). The motivation of the Israeli government is not the same as in the fictional government of *The Handmaid’s Tale*, but it does stem from a fear that their survival is threatened. This is because they are afraid to be the minority population and because Palestinians are having more children. To promote Jewish Israelis to have children the government pays for up to 7 rounds of IVF for couples who experience fertility problems. In addition to this the national insurance also covers artificial insemination and ovum donation. Because of these policies Israel has the highest rate of IVF in the world and they were “the first country in the world to legalize surrogate mother agreements.” (Puar, 112). The Israeli government of course doesn’t go as far as the government of Gilead in *The Handmaid’s Tale*. Women aren’t forced to have children in the way they are in *The Handmaid’s Tale*, but life in Israel is very centred on having a large family. Puar quotes work by Doron Mamet who states that if you don’t have a family in Israel you are not part of society. Puar also quotes Krieger who interviewed “legal advocate Fredrick Hertz, who reports: “In my conversations, I hear having children described as the queer contribution to building the Jewish state.” (117). The focus on increasing reproduction has led to the acceptance of same-sex couples having children as well and not being excluded from fertility treatments. Puar writes that “the rehabilitation project of the Israeli state now embraces the potential for the new muscular Judaism to be the muscular homosexual Jew.” (125). The fact that they are now included within society doesn’t mean that structural change has taken place, rather same-sex Jewish couples are now included in the dominant group because it’s convenient for the pronatalist goals that they start families as well.

On top of the pronatalist agenda that mirrors the focus on reproduction in *The Handmaid's Tale*, Israel also promotes people to have an abortion if genetic testing shows that the fetus might be disabled:

The excelling of ART in Israel has a biopolitics of population racism intrinsic to its logic. Starting with an unapologetically eugenic approach to imperfect foetuses, selective abortions (which includes the legality of later-term, postdiagnostic abortions) are advocated through loose legal strictures and genetic counselling for the screening and aborting of foetuses with any kind of "malfunction." (Puar, 113-114).

By motivating people to have an abortion when there is, as Puar says, any kind of "malfunction", this spreads the idea that disabled people don't have a place in the future. Of course the situation in *The Handmaid's Tale* isn't exactly the same. Women aren't allowed to have abortions and they are disabled babies that are disposed of, not the abortion of a fetus and I don't want to suggest in any way that people shouldn't have the right to choose themselves what they do with their own body. So even though the situation in *The Handmaid's Tale* differs significantly from the situation in Israel the sentiment behind them are very similar, being that disability is seen as undesirable and not something that should be part of the future of the nation. And in both instances a government (fictional or real) tries to control the bodies of their citizens to control and shape the future in the way they imagine it.

### **Ableism in *Dawn***

When we look at *Dawn* we can see the trope of the utopian novel that Kafer describes, being that part of what makes *Dawn* a utopian novel is the fact that most disabilities can be healed by genetic engineering. The idea that Kafer puts forward, that "Utopian visions are founded on the elimination of disability", holds up in the case of *Dawn*. Disabilities in general are seen as individual problems that can be fixed. In this regard the presentation of disability fits in with the medical model of disability, where disability is seen as something that is wrong with a specific individual. "The medical model of disability frames atypical bodies and minds as deviant, pathological, and defective, best understood and addressed in medical terms." (Kafer, 5). Kafer describes that within this medical framework they see the disabled body as the part that needs to be "fixed", rather than ableist society that needs to change. She writes that

Although this framing of disability is called the “medical” model, it’s important to note that its use isn’t limited to doctors and other service providers; what characterizes the medical model isn’t the position of the person (or institution) using it, but the positioning of disability as an exclusively medical problem and, especially, the conceptualization of such positioning as both objective fact and common sense. (Kafer, 5).

The idea that disability is an exclusively medical problem is reiterated by the way disabilities are approached by the Oankali in *Dawn*. They see all disabilities as something that can always be fixed through genetic engineering. The most prominent example of this is when they cure Lilith of cancer and change her genetic make-up. In her family cancer is genetic, many women before her have gotten cancer. When the nuclear war took place and she was captured her body had already started to develop cancer cells. One of the first passages is when Lilith wakes up and she can see that she has a scar on her abdomen. The Oankali later explain that they had “operated” on her so that they could more closely inspect the way the cancer cells behave.

“Opening and closing her jacket, her hand touched the long scar across her abdomen. She had acquired it somehow between her second and third Awakenings, had examined it fearfully, wondering what had been done to her. What had she lost or gained, and why? And what else might be done? She did not own herself any longer. Even her flesh could be cut and stitched without her consent or knowledge.” (Butler, *Dawn* 4-5).

They had operated on her without her consent and without letting her know why and what they were doing. Only later when she asked the first Oankali she meets, do they tell her what they’ve done. While Lilith was in suspended animation the Oankali discovered that she had cancer. In order to learn specifically how cancer cells work they had cut her open, the ooloi who did this was then able to “learn” everything about her from her genetic information. “It knows everything that can be learned about you from your genes. And by now, it knows your medical history and a great deal about the way you think. It has taken part in testing you.” (Butler, *Dawn* 20). The approach they have to Lilith’s cancer and disabilities in general is that they see it as an individual problem that needs to be fixed. They think it’s such a straight forward issue that they don’t even think they need to ask Lilith for consent before they operate on her.

The Oankali don’t just want to fix the disabilities that the humans already have, they also want to make sure that the future generation will be born without any disabilities. They have children through genetic engineering that is done by an ooloi and because of this they have complete control on how they want to shape the future generation. This situation is quite similar to the one

Kafer describes from the novel *Woman on the Edge of Time*, where in the future specific genes are filtered out by technology. Except that in *Dawn* they go one step further and not just exclude “negative” genes but actively choose the most advantageous ones. Which is why they want to reproduce with the human species in the first place, because they want to keep developing their species and make it as strong as it possibly can be in order to survive.

In the article “Octavia Butler’s Disabled Futures”, Megan Obourn gives a very interesting analyses concerning the way Butler’s Xenogenesis series approaches able-bodiedness and xenophobia. She argues that in the trilogy both able-bodiedness and xenophobia are presented as conditions of illness which the humans have to face when they are saved from extinction by the Oankali:

As Lilith is made to experience lack of independent access to physical spaces, clothing, and food, she becomes more aware of the limitations of her able-bodied ideology. Ultimately, she must learn to live within an interdependent public culture. Her race and gender figure as aspects of her identity that reinforce a reliance on ideals of able-bodiedness and independence, as well as making her more adaptable. (Obourn, 112).

By having to rely on others she no longer sees herself as autonomous and independent as she used to before. Obourn also argues that the Oankali see the complete species of humans as disabled, regardless of the fact that the humans might see themselves as able-bodied. They see the human condition, where humans have the conflicting genes which I’ve discussed more in depth in the previous chapter, as a disability in itself. One that can, according to them, easily be fixed by filtering out those genes in the next generation where the Oankali want to start a new species with the humans. Even though the Oankali society is very built on the idea that interdependency is an important part of their life. Everyone in society has their own role to fulfil, and they always do this in cooperation with others within their society. But they have a very rigid stance towards disabilities humans, and they themselves, might have. They see it as their jobs to heal the physical disabilities the humans have (mental illness is not really discussed in the first novel, only briefly when Lilith discusses with the first Oankali she meets that the isolation they had put her in made her think about committing suicide), and they think they can fix the human condition by taking the hierarchical genes out when they start their new species together.

When Lilith learns how to live with the Oankali, she is not able to move around the ship freely in the beginning. The Oankali use their sensory abilities to navigate around the ship; they can

open doors and open cabinets to access food. Lilith isn't able to do this in the beginning and is completely reliant on the Oankali around her. Obourn argues that we need to take into consideration that this inability of Lilith to move as she pleases puts her into "a position in which she must learn to live as an institutionalized, diagnosed subject, with a dependent body, who lacks the ability to affect her environment and achieve the same access to physical spaces and necessities as those with contextually normative bodies." (116). This is something Puar also discusses in her book, the idea that Israel completely debilitates Palestine by controlling their access and movement. It is only later in the novel that Lilith's genes are altered for her to be able to open doors and cabinets, and make walls appear and disappear. The human body is placed in a position of complete dependency when they are just awoken, and their bodies are no longer normative within the new circumstances they find themselves in.

Obourn writes that "The Oankali believe that they are helping the humans whose "own bodies handicap [!] them" (38) and hope that after their rehabilitation, humans will voluntarily mate with the Oankali, thus breeding out the "hand-icap." (117). She writes that Lilith doesn't agree with this approach and hopes that the other humans will learn as much as they can and escape the Oankali once they've returned to earth. Obourn compares Lilith's tactic to those who were enslaved or colonized, she tries to build a community between the people that are awakened to resist the oppressive power structures that the Oankali put upon the humans.

"Yet the disability rhetoric involved in that oppression is never addressed. While the humans don't want to have "alien" babies, they never discuss the Oankali representation of humanity as illness but rather continue to treat their human bodies as individual agential entities over which control and ownership should be maintained." (Obourn, 117).

It also seems that the curing of disabilities is one of the only perks when approached from the perspective of humans. In the second novel of the series, when the Oankali agree to letting humans start a civilization on Mars, all the humans who want to go are obligated to be healed from all disabilities in order for them to survive living on this planet. All the humans agree to this without hesitation, and the idea that disabled people wouldn't be able to live a valuable life on Mars is accepted without it even being a discussion. Implicitly the idea that no one wants to live with a disability, and that a future without disabled people is desirable, is reinstated through this passage. The ableist rhetoric is not challenged by the humans. By "fixing" all disabilities before the humans leave for Mars the Oankali also think that this way they can prevent any disabilities being carried on in the next generation of humans. Except of course the disability of the conflicting genes, this is

something the Oankali believe will always eventually lead to the human extinction, which is why many of the Oankali believe that the humans going to Mars will eventually go extinct.

The need that the Oankali feel to completely erase disabilities goes so far that they offer all the people who live their lives separately from the Oankali on Earth are still able to be healed from any ailments. They can visit the Oankali settlements any time, and they will be healed without having to join the Oankali and reproduce with them. Obourn writes that even though the construct children (the new generation of children that are a mix between humans and Oankali), change appearance significantly when they go through their metamorphoses, they are not accepting of humans being anything but normative, “they maintain fixed understandings of what is a healthy body is and refuse to entertain the idea that disability can have value, believing that anyone who does not seek the medical attention of the ooloi is suffering from self-destructive mental illness.” (118-119). This reinforces the idea that disabled people don’t have a unique experience that can offer something to society. What is interesting about the novel is that this ableist view isn’t something that is just held by the Oankali; the humans feel very similar to this as well. Obourn gives the example of renouncers who have kidnapped two construct children, and want to remove their sensory tentacles in order to make them look more like humans. “The humans use the same quality of life argument as the Oankali – that it would be “criminal” to allow Shkaht and Amma to live a life in which they would experience psychological and social pain.” (Obourn, 122). She writes that both the humans and the Oankali believe that bodies can be “fixed” through medical alterations, which demonstrates again that both the Oankali and the humans see disability within the medical model.

In *Dawn* being able-bodied on earth is presented as something that is necessary to survive. When the humans return to earth they will be living in the jungle and they’ll have to get used to living in an environment they are not used to. The Oankali seem to have the idea that because of the environment being difficult to live in this means that disabled people will be particularly unsuitable to live there. Robert McRuer writes that

[...] being able-bodied means being capable of the normal physical exertions required in a particular system of labor. It is here, in fact, that both able-bodied identity and the *Oxford English Dictionary* betray their origins in the nineteenth century and the rise of industrial capitalism. It is here as well that we can begin to understand the compulsory nature of able-bodiedness: in the emergent industrial capitalist system, free to sell one’s labor but not free to do anything else effectively meant free to have an able body but not particularly free to have anything else.” (91-92).

The Oankali see able-bodiedness as a requirement for survival and as the only way that they can build a new life with the humans on earth.

Towards the end of the novel it becomes clear that disabilities aren't just seen as undesirable but that disabled people are seen as being unable to part of the future. There is no space for being disabled in the Oankali culture. At the end of the novel a fight takes place where some of the humans fight the Oankali and Nikanj, the ooloi that is Lilith's partner, is injured in the fight and almost loses its sensory arm. Lilith is able to help and support it while they repair their arm with the knowledge they have from the growing of human cancer cells. It becomes clear after Lilith has saved them that if they had lost their sensory arm they wouldn't have been able to go to earth. After the fight Lilith asks Nikanj if they would have died if Lilith wouldn't have been there to help it:

"Would you have died?" Silence. After a while, Ahajas said, "It would have left us. It would have become Toah or Akjai and left Earth." "Why?" Lilith asked. "Without your gift, it could not have regained full use of the sensory arm. It could not have conceived children." Ahajas hesitated. "When we heard what had happened, we thought we had lost it. It had been with us for so little time. We felt ... Perhaps we felt what you did when your mate died. There seemed to be nothing at all ahead for us until Ooan Nikanj told us that you were helping it, and that it would recover completely." (Butler, *Dawn* 236-237).

In this part of the book being able-bodied is portrayed as being a requisite for creating a future on earth. The sensory arms are what an ooloi uses to assemble the new generation on Earth. Without it, they wouldn't be able to achieve this and are therefore no longer part of that future. And because there is such a focus within the Oankali society on reproduction and the evolution of their species, being disabled and losing the ability to reproduce is equated to dying.

Siebers discusses how "The ideology of ability represents the able body as the baseline of humanness. Absence of ability or lesser ability, according to this ideology, marks a person as less than human." (40). He argues that sex is seen as something that marks someone as being fully human. Disabled people are often seen as unable to have sex, or if they are able to have sex it is seen as something they shouldn't be doing, since they aren't seen as fully human. "Sex is the action by which most people believe that ability is reproduced, by which humanity supposedly asserts its future, and ability remains the category by which sexual reproduction as such is evaluated." (Siebers, 40-41). This idea that disabled people shouldn't have sex is also linked to the idea that sex is ultimately meant to be performed for reproduction. Edelman discusses this in regards to the novel *Children of Men*. The narrator of that novel, in which everyone has become infertile, reflects that life

and specifically sex has become meaningless because there's no longer a "point" to it. Edelman writes that the narrator "declares – but also gives voice to the ideological truism that governs our investment in the child as emblem of fantasmatic futurity: "without the hope of posterity, for our race if not for ourselves, without the assurance that we being dead yet live," her narrator notes, "all pleasures of the mind and senses sometimes seem to me no more than pathetic and crumbling defences shored up against our ruins" (13)." (Edelman, 21). This shows the idea that sex is ultimately meant for reproduction, and it can be enjoyed when it's not the sole purpose but it should still be a possibility. When we relate this to how sex and disability are connected it becomes clear that because disabled people are often seen as unfit to reproduce, this then also means they are seen as unfit to have sex. Sieber makes this connection in his work when refers to Barbara Wasman-Fiduccia's work who writes that the idea of disabled people being sexually perverted stems from the idea that disabled people wouldn't be able to have healthy children. He writes that "It is reproduction, then, that marks sexuality as a privileged index of human ability." (Siebers, 41). He establishes four different aspects to how able-bodiedness is seen as sexually attractive in society and disability isn't. The main point he makes is that

"The predominant assumption is that what we are will be visited upon our children. If a person does not measure up to society's ideas about ability, that person's opportunities to have sex will be limited. People with disabilities share with gay men and lesbians the suspicion that they cannot, will not, or should not contribute to the future of the human race." (Siebers, 41).

Siebers argument that disabled people are seen as people who don't or shouldn't have sex, because they are seen by ableist society as people who are undesirable for reproduction, is reflected in *Dawn*, and specifically in the section where they discuss the potential circumstances of Nikanj losing its sensory arm. If it would've lost its arm, this wouldn't just have affected its ability to reproduce. The sensory arm is also the way in which it lets it's sexual partners and itself have sex. The ooloi's sensory arm links to both its partners central nervous system, and through this connection directly stimulate the brain. It is through this stimulation that sex is experienced. In the novel sex isn't represented as something that is just done for reproduction. Sex is had to emotionally and physically connect to their partners and reproduction only becomes part of it later in the novel. But it's interesting to see that if they had lost their ability to reproduce this would also have meant they lost the ability to have sex, again equating one with the other.



## Conclusion

In this chapter I've discussed how in addition to the control of the female reproductive body, the imagined children of future generations are also controlled. This specifically results in the exclusion of all disabilities from the imagined future, based on the ableist ideas that those with disabilities don't have a future and aren't seen as fit for reproduction. In many science fiction novels, this has the result of disabled people being erased from the narrative. In science fiction this can come about in two ways: In dystopian novels disabilities often still exist becoming intrinsic to the idea of what makes it dystopian, whereas in utopian novels disabilities are often absent, and this is part of why they are seen as a utopian future.

The Handmaid's Tale and Dawn take up these two roles. In The Handmaid's Tale there is a high risk of children being born disabled. These children are dehumanised once it has been established that they are disabled, and disappear after being born, removing them from the imagined future. Women also lose their use when they become disabled and are erased from society, being referred to as Unwomen. These "Unwomen" are given terrible jobs cleaning toxic waste, away from society. In this way disabilities still exist in abundance in The Handmaid's Tale, but are quickly removed from the public eye and imagined future. However in Dawn, the Oankali have the ability to heal all disabilities, and remove them from future generations through genetic engineering.

While these two methods of removing disabilities from the imagined future are different, the goal is the same. In both novels, the group in power sees disability as a very negative aspect of society, and do everything in their power to get rid of it. The imagined future leaves no space for the disabled body and through this erasure the party in power decides what the future of the species will be.

## Conclusions

In this thesis I have analysed *The Handmaid's Tale* by Margaret Atwood and *Dawn* by Octavia E. Butler, with the main focus on how reproductive bodies are controlled within these novels where the human species are faced with the threat of extinction.

In chapter one I've discussed the dystopian novel *The Handmaid's Tale* and how the fear of extinction is used as an excuse to control the female reproductive body. Women that are seen as "deviant" by the government are forced to become handmaids and provide children for highly ranked officers and their wives. The government justifies these measures by arguing that if they don't do this the people of Gilead will go extinct due to the rise in infertility. I argue that since women are held solely responsible for this rise in infertility, the fear of extinction is merely used as an excuse to control women rather than the control of women being used to deal with the fear of extinction. The reproductive body of the handmaids is controlled through different forms of objectification. I discuss how Braidotti's theory of hypervisualisation is applicable to how the handmaids are constantly surveilled, and made visible. Through this hypervisualisation they become detached from their body which enables the government to use them as handmaids and take away their children. I then discuss how in addition to the objectification through hypervisualisation, these women are also objectified by reducing them to the position of a non-human animal. The handmaid's are compared to different types of animals throughout the novel, which has the effect of them being seen as an object to be used.

In chapter two I've discuss how in the novel *Dawn* human reproductive bodies are controlled in a different way. The premise of the novel is very different from the one in *The Handmaid's Tale*. While *The Handmaid's Tale* looks at the control of the reproductive body from within a species (humans), *Dawn* approaches it from an external perspective. In this way we see that the control of the body is enabled through one species taking control of the other and deciding they are "more intelligent". The focus is on how the relationship between an alien species and the humans species is established, and how the Oankali have the power to define the future and how they think extinction can be prevented.

Finally I discuss how in both novels it's not only the reproductive body that is controlled, but also the bodies of future generations. This control is primarily focused on defining the able body and expelling disabled people from the imagined future. The way in which this is achieved is different in both novels but the aim is ultimately the same. In *The Handmaid's Tale* there is a high average of disabled babies being born, Offred explains that this is because of different environmental pollution.

These babies are dehumanized and renamed Unbabies as soon as it becomes clear that they are disabled. They are then disposed of and are not allowed to exist in Gilead. In *Dawn* the Oankali have the ability to cure all disabilities that the humans might have and are able to control the genetics of future generations, ensuring no disabled children will be born. In both of these novels the group in power is able to control the body of future generations by removing the disabled body, and only allowing what they consider to be an “able body” to exist. Because disabled people are seen by ableist societies as having no future, their presence in these novels become tied to the idea of extinction, since their existence stands in the way of preventing extinction.

As a result the fear of extinction then leads to the further control of bodies in these two novels.

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