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Queer Transgressions: A Queer Ecological reading of *The Handmaid's Tale* and *Dawn*

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1. Introduction

In this thesis, I will undertake the analysis of two major works in the genre of the feminist dystopia, *The Handmaid's Tale* by Margaret Atwood and *Dawn* by Octavia Butler, with a queer ecological perspective. The year 1985 sees the publication of *The Handmaid's Tale*, a dystopian speculative fiction novel by Margaret Atwood set in a toxic-wasteland version of the United States where a totalitarian regime, Gilead, has taken control of the American population. In 1987, Octavia Butler publishes the first novel of a trilogy titled *Lilith's Brood*. Written in the dystopian science fiction genre, *Dawn* is set on an alien spaceship orbiting the Earth, whose inhabitants - the humanoid but alien Oankalis - hope to save the few remaining humans from an Earth devastated by nuclear wars.

In *The Handmaid's Tale*, the deeply patriarchal and homophobic Gilead answers to ecological devastation by oppressing women, considering them as inherently sinful and in obligation to atone for their sins. The regime achieves complete dominance by reducing them to different powerless statuses: Marthas (the servants), Econowives (the wives of low-ranked men), Wives (the wives of high-ranked men) and Handmaids (who are each assigned to an upper-class household). The latter serve the purpose of birthing children for the Wives, in Gilead's fight against the rampant infertility caused by the toxic environment. In addition, there are Daughters (yet unmarried girls) and Aunts (trainers of the Handmaids). The Handmaids occupy a particularly precarious position as they are disliked by the Wives for having a sexual relationship with their husbands, even if a forced one and are thus also shown disdain from other women in general for their "work". If deemed infertile, unable or unwilling to contribute to society, the women are considered to be Unwomen and are sent to the Colonies, amidst the toxic wastelands. The Eyes, Gilead agents tasked with finding and punishing whomever rebels, target especially women, low-ranked men and any act considered as deviant on their part. At the top of the regime's systemic hierarchy are found the Commanders, the highest-ranked privileged men who rule Gilead and are each allocated a Handmaid to impregnate. The story follows Offred, a young Handmaid who has been assigned to her second household, in hopes of finally being able to conceive a child, for fear of being exiled to the Colonies. As she struggles with her new reality, holding onto events from her past life, she learns of an organisation that works to overthrow the government; the Mayday resistance. While secretly hoping for a way out, Offred remains prey to her

Commander's whims and becomes the witness of the high-ranked mens' clandestine sexual exploitation of women who risked being sent to the wastelands and chose to stay.

In *Dawn*, the protagonist is a young woman named Lilith Iyapo, whose story starts with her "Awakening" in a prison cell on an alien spaceship, 250 years after being saved from a then uninhabitable Earth. One day, after continuously refusing to give her mysterious jailers information on her identity, she receives a visit from an alien-looking creature called Jdahya. She gradually learns that the aliens who imprisoned her, the Oankali, plan to inbreed with the humans they deem fit to repopulate the Earth as this is what their nature dictates them to accomplish. Though giving humans no option other than staying on the ship or accepting their deal, the Oankali seem to be imagining a utopia where both species will co-exist peacefully, freed from previous human flaws. Interestingly, the Oankali have three sexes: male, female and ooloi. As a reluctant Lilith is guided by an ooloi to become accustomed to her new environment, she is forced to embrace this different way of life, where families generally encompass three parents, two Oankali male and female and one ooloi, and where no person is above another.

Lilith is genetically modified and coerced by the Oankali in order to experience the strong bonds that they have with one another. Gradually, Lilith starts to yearn for an erotic connection with her ooloi guide, Nikanj. When she finally gets to meet other human beings, she does not feel as close to them as she would have hoped. While *Dawn* shares similarities with the slave captivity narrative (Magedanz 2012) and the reader inevitably grapples with the moral issues within the story, it still positions Lilith as a heroic figure who struggles between her realisation of humanity's shortcomings during her life with the Oankali and her uninhibited desire for freedom from them.

Unsurprisingly, both *The Handmaid's Tale* and *Dawn* have been of great interest to scholars, in particular within the field of ecofeminism. The authors' choice of telling the stories of two captive female protagonists in the midst of ecological devastation has pushed academics toward analysing gender interactions in relation with the environment, focusing especially on Gilead's devaluation of both. At first interested in ecofeminism as a theoretical framework, what encouraged my interest to go in a different direction was the resemblance between the protagonists and their circumstances. Both mothers to children who either died or disappeared and forced to cooperate in a society where their status does not allow them to make important choices, Offred and Lilith's storylines develop however in tremendously different ways.

They do so partly as a function of their genre: a political dystopia for *The Handmaid's Tale* and an afro-futurist sci-fi for *Dawn*. Atwood's intent of considering Gilead as a warning for the readers, by means of representing a potential dreadful reality, plays into this difference as well. *The Handmaid's Tale* therefore illustrates an exaggerated version of Western society's shortcomings, such as the repression of the erotic and monitoring of sexuality. *Dawn* however offers an alternative future that nevertheless encompasses possible answers to said shortcomings (such as the thematising of pleasure and the erotic). It intriguingly also speculates on some characters' behaviours that resemble the mentality exhibited by the men in power in Gilead. Both novels seem to therefore criticise patriarchal configurations and their direct effect on the characters' tolerance towards each other's genders or sexual orientations. As these similarities and differences influence both protagonists and help shape their development, they stand as an interesting point of comparison.

This parallel encouraged me to look for the presence of the "queer" in *The Handmaid's Tale* and acknowledging that Gilead was, most of all, entirely built around systemic compulsory heterosexuality. Furthermore, this heteronormativity seemed to be at the root of the type of hierarchical system that was the very flaw of humanity that the Oankali in *Dawn* were seeking to destroy. Yet the ecofeminist works on *The Handmaid's Tale* rarely seemed to focus on the potential of a queer analysis within the novel. This finding laid the ground for my interest in queer ecology, as ecofeminist works on *The Handmaid's Tale* already offered a good basis for further reflexion.

In my thesis, I will thus attempt, by using the fields of queer ecofeminism and in particular queer ecology as a theoretical framework, to do a comparative reading of both novels, centred around the repression and the acceptance of queerness in a more general sense. I will firstly lay down the theoretical background, by discussing queer ecology, its well-known scholars and what can be considered its major works, as well as its place within the general discourse. This will lead me to discuss queer thought in nature and how it has been, according to theorist Greta Gaard, marginalised or generally left undiscussed in ecofeminist critical theory (Gaard 1997).

I will then argue how a queer ecological lens is an interesting approach to the study of both a novel openly discussing queerness as a central thematic (*Dawn*) and one where queerness is rendered invisible and is punished by the government (*The Handmaid's Tale*). Because queerness tends to be perceived as being against nature - more precisely as unnatural (Mortimer-Sandilands & Erickson, 2010) - due to its non-reproductive nature, the chosen novels offer an interesting corpus for queer analysis as

they both address the thematics of sexuality and reproduction amidst ecological devastation. The erotophobia – “a fear of the erotic so strong that only one form of sexuality is overtly allowed” (Gaard, 1997) - that is observed in *The Handmaid's Tale* also highlights the necessity of examining social and historical pre-conceived notions about sexuality. It also highlights how patriarchal, capitalist societies struggle with the idea of pleasure, especially when it concerns women.

The theoretical framework of queer ecofeminism will firstly allow me to consider the novels' interpretation and visions of nature and the dualism of "natural/unnatural". Using main concepts from queer ecology, such as Di Chiro's theorising of an embodied ecology (2010) and criticism of anti-toxic discourses or Gosine's consideration of queerness (2010), I will then address the queer characters' places within both narratives. Queer ecology's thoughts non-white reproduction potentially representing as much of a queer act as queerness itself will lead the rest of my thesis. I will focus in particular on the idea of forced reproduction that is omnipresent in both novels, and how a sci-fi utopia such as *Dawn* challenges the absence of queers from discussions on the future. I believe that dystopian fiction is a compelling genre of literature to discuss queer sexuality, as it tackles the possibility of an end to humankind, consequently containing possible alternatives to the idea of the queers allegedly being excluded because of their inability to reproduce.

1.1 Research question

In this thesis, I will therefore direct my interest into how the portrayal of female protagonists, imprisoned within a reproductive context that uses reproduction as tool to oppress not only women but also nature, queers, women, people of colour shows the importance of queer ecological thought. In order to discuss this statement, I will ask myself; what are the visions of nature and of the "natural/unnatural" in the two novels and how do their considerations of nature tie into their individual portrayal of queer characters? If queerness is understood as any act going against the imperative to reproduce, then how does a larger comprehension of the term impact a reading of both novels? And finally, how do the characters develop their individual frameworks of resistance to the system in which they live and how does their position impact their capacity of subverting said system? My hypothesis is that an analysis of dystopian feminist speculative fictions such as *Dawn* or *The Handmaid's Tale* helps reconsider the centrality of white heterosexual reproduction in visions of the future by highlighting its ties to heterosexist interpretations of nature and the "natural" that show an actual lack of concern for an ecological future.

1.2 Methodology

In this thesis, I will take on a comparative reading of *The Handmaid's Tale* and *Dawn*, with the aim of examining similarities and differences in their portrayal of the queer. The reading will be based on similar themes conveyed by both novels, such as the destruction of nature, ecology, imprisonment, sexuality, the erotic, patriarchy and violence. It will also focus in particular on the character development of both protagonists. I will consider the novels' genre and fictional worlds as speculative works; all the while undertaking a close reading of some passages. I will use literary analysis combined with a method of critical bricolage, drawing from the fields of foremost ecofeminism, queer ecofeminism and queer ecology, but also intersectionalism, postcolonial studies and race theory. I will also make use of some works of feminism and queer theory, unconcerned with ecology per se.

1.3 Literature review

The theme of reproduction is inevitably central to the ecofeminist speculative narratives of both *The Handmaid's Tale* and *Dawn*. Fertility being envisioned as the basic requirement to a healthy and blooming civilisation in collective consciousness, women and queer people in particular exist precariously within a patriarchal capitalist society allowed to decide of their usefulness. In fact, cultural ecofeminist authors have speculated throughout the years on what is according to them a privileged relationship between women's mothering attributes and nature, with the end goal to empower both. Such writings are for example Carolyn Merchant or Val Plumwood's early writings in ecofeminism. Some of the rituals described in *The Handmaid's Tale's* come from "fertility rites from early Earth-goddess cults" (*The Handmaid's Tale*, 1985, p.316). Such a description could be read as a reference to this branch of ecofeminism. It is only one example among many of women's fertility and care being associated with nature, although many ecofeminist scholars have since criticised this position that they consider to be essentialist. Janet Biehl, for example, was one of its most vocal opponents at its beginning.

Essentialism comes from the fear that declaring a special connection between women and nature might be a disservice to them. M. Zaki, for example, criticises Butler's essentialism in her portrayal of the protagonist Lilith and of men's, supposedly, inherent violence (M. Zaki, 1990). Several important works also seek to conciliate these different approaches (Carlassare, 2000 for example). Nevertheless, this heritage remains in popular culture, under the form of slogans in climate change protests for instance. Even if uninterested in having children, women cannot move away from this convergence. This is exemplified in the novels studied here, as they have both chosen to address ecological destruction through the perspective of a female protagonist. Moreover, the destruction of nature and the oppression of women are intrinsically linked according to ecofeminist thought.

When humanity and the Earth are on the brink of annihilation, such as in *The Handmaid's Tale* or *Dawn*, women are therefore even more oppressed for being the bearers and assigned primary carers of children. Many publications address motherhood in both novels, insisting on the lack of good choices that the protagonists have: "Giving birth to another being may be considered an experience of or an attempt at eternity while it involves potentially fatal consequences for mothers, literal and symbolic" (Jung, 2017) Jung here highlights the lack of agency that the women have

regarding their own future in *The Handmaid's Tale*. Scholars thus especially consider women's future as being dictated by this imperative, to the point of motherhood being described as their only sexual pleasure in *The Handmaid's Tale* (Montelaro 1995). In *The Handmaid's Tale*, as forced motherhood is being institutionalised by Gilead, it becomes a central notion that dictates any individual's potential future. Articles thus perceive queer people's existence on the other hand as threatened because of their being perceived as an obstacle to the reproductive imperative that is seen as often enabled in apocalyptic narratives (Schildcrout, 2015).

Each of the narratives chooses to explore queerness in its own way. The struggle of the queer in Atwood's novel is illustrated by the character of Moira, Offred's lesbian best friend. In *Dawn*, however, the character shown to us as being queer is a genderfluid alien, Nikanj, that the protagonist Lilith ends up engaging in sexual relations with. As such, both novels address the same subject - a queer character's place in an ecotopia - albeit in different literary genres: speculative dystopia for *The Handmaid's Tale* and science fiction utopia for *Dawn*. With the need to procreate and to ensure reproduction presented as central and even compulsory in both the depicted societies, it therefore becomes even more interesting for scholars to consider the positions of queer characters within such narratives. A controversial concept coined by Edelman (2004) elaborates on the idea of reproductive futurism. According to this concept, ensuring the birth and care for a child is equated with the fight for the future in popular imagination. It is consequently considered by the author to be detrimental to the non-reproductive individuals in scenarios where new births are scarce and where the future is questioned. The queer is therefore generally considered a failure before the characteristic struggle for survival at the centre of these narratives, according to scholarly texts. Queer ecology and queer ecofeminism have debated around this concept, as well bringing forth the omnipresent idea of the "queer being against nature" (Sandilands, 2010, p.51), yet nature being treated as dispensable and as a resource to be drained, even dismissed in favour of technology. Queer ecology therefore highlights an important discrepancy in the way patriarchal capitalist societies reject queerness.

Two other important thematics discussed in analyses in relation to the reproductive imperative central to both novels, are the character development of the protagonists themselves (Offred and Lilith) and the references to captivity narratives and slave history (Magedanz 2012, Hurley-powell 2019). Both novels are considered to have taken inspiration from the slave narrative tradition. Interestingly, while Atwood

chooses a clearly dystopian setting where severe laws are enforced upon the citizens of Gilead and reflect upon real-life dictatorships that humans have seen develop at the time of her writing, Octavia Butler adopts speculative science fiction as genre, bringing the narrative of *Dawn* to different realms of thought. The interest in doing a comparative reading of both these novels lies in this divergence, as both are usually discussed separately by scholars given their difference in literature genre.

As Montelaro's conclusive statement exemplifies, "Offred's discourse at least suggests the hope of social change as she begins to expose the gaps in the masculine logic which sustains the patriarchal economy of Gilead." (Montelaro, 1995) Offred is therefore presented by the scholars as hopeful, but unable to enact the change she yearns for. *Dawn*, by contrast, embarks us on an alien spaceship in a science fiction speculative narrative that refuses a come-back to any society resembling our present ones. Its protagonist, Lilith, is tasked by her jailers with saving humanity by teaching other humans to adapt to a life with the Oankalis. Right from the start, Lilith is presented to us as an active character (Mann, 2018) in articles discussing her potential as protagonist. Articles analysing their psyche therefore denote different aspects in their character development. Offred is described as rendered overwhelmed by the pressure to have a child (Montelaro, 1995), as it dictates her survival. Yet the authors also stress the importance of Offred's past in the novel, Jung even describing it as an obstacle to her future: "In the novel, Offred's troubled relationship with the memories that construct her past self represents the instability of her future being." (Jung, 2017, p.11). On the other hand, we know very little about Lilith's past or the person that she was before the present of the story.

The choice of Lilith as a protagonist has especially been of interest to scholars for its race, "the novel reframes notions of black maternity, figuring black female reproduction as essential, rather than ancillary or antithetical, to the project of human development." (Mann, 2018). Mann recounts her struggle as an example of pessimistic futurism, a concept that relies on looking into the future with the will to operate social change yet remaining aware of the past struggle that is the slavery and oppression of black people. As Bliss writes, criticising Edelman's vision on reproductive futurism: "Neither Edelman nor his Utopian critics seem willing or able to imagine a mode of reproduction that is not reproductive futurism; that is, Black reproduction." (Bliss, 2015, p.85). Black reproduction therefore stands out in these texts as a characteristic that is antithetical to reproductive futurism, yet is the central thematic of *Dawn*. Lilith therefore

stands in contrast to her white counterpart Offred, both in character development and in race.

When comparing articles that attempt to analyse the protagonists' relation to hope, it is also interesting that the authors analyse their potential at imagining a different future for themselves. *The Handmaid's Tale's*, as an open-ended dystopia, is present in Offred's vacillation between hope and despair. According to Jung, Offred is more passionate about her friend Moira potentially blowing up the leaders of the regime than about the thought of having a child again (Jung 2017: 12). On the contrary, Lilith, by embodying the concept of pessimistic futurism as analysed by Mann (2018) has no choice but to look forward and imagine a better future. Nanda stresses the importance of science fiction in this line of thought: "Butler utilizes the alienating effect of science fiction to call into question things that are stable and acceptable and that would pass by unnoticed in traditional literature." (Nanda, 2013, p.784). Lilith's potential as an agent of change is thus of central interest to me, as it inevitably relates to Nikanj's future and her own vision of both their futures.

In addition to her status as a black mother in *Dawn*, Lilith's story is also filled with discoveries of her own sexuality following Nikanj's guidance, that Mann deems to be tied to the concept of pessimistic futurism (Mann 2018: 62). Pleasure is also seen as something that can be reclaimed by queer people and non-white people in queer ecology (Gosine, 2010), therefore rendering the idea of a deeper analysis of the erotic in the novels interesting. Race is furthermore a concept that is addressed by scholars in their critiques of *The Handmaid's Tale* as well. Berlatsky (2017) advances that the idea that *The Handmaid's Tale* chooses to address racism by aptly removing coloured people from the narrative. This, to me, aside from underlying problems of racial representation within the novel, mirrors the choice to posit Moira as a figure mostly present in Offred's memories and thus also questions her representation in *The Handmaid's Tale*. By analysing sexual freedom in *Dawn* and its impact on Lilith's vision of a queer alien, it is even more important to consider how the erotophobic (Gaard, 1997) society of Gilead influences the protagonist's understanding of her own sexuality. Racial erasure (Berlatsky, 2017), representation of queerness, sexuality and the erotica, all within a context that enacts the imperative to reproduce therefore sets the basis for my analysis. The choice of queer ecology as a referential framework in the following work allows me additionally to further insist on the interconnectedness of different kinds of oppressions. A comparative analysis of *The Handmaid's Tale* and *Dawn* thus makes for a rich foundation to address the possibility of a queer ecological future.

1.4 Queer ecology

Ecofeminism is certainly not alone in seeking more just inter-species politics, but what makes ecofeminism specifically feminist and what ecofeminism brings to ecopolitics that no other approach brings I think, or perhaps queer ecology also brings, is that it makes visible the gender norms, relations and asymmetries that shape human experiences of environmental processes and change. It says that dominant gender norms of masculinity and femininity, and the structure of patriarchy are intertwined and entangled with capitalism and colonialism, and they must be treated as such and they must be analyzed as such, not least because we won't be able to adequately tackle the root causes of the current crisis, unless we understand how these crises are interlinked and mutually reinforcing. (The Ecopolitics Podcast, MacGregor, 2020, [00:11:55]).

At the hearts of both ecofeminism and queer ecology lies the exploration of the interconnectedness of various forms of oppression in relation with gender and nature. As such, these frameworks offer an interesting theoretical background for an analysis of the queer in relation to nature in *The Handmaid's Tale* and *Dawn*, two novels set in a context of environmental disaster. However, this essay will not use ecofeminist works as main references but rather will acknowledge their influence in the birth of queer ecology and mention the subsequent interest some known ecofeminist authors have taken in including the queer in their work. The thesis will also discuss the ecofeminist critique of dualisms which was laid down by ecofeminism in relation to both novels, especially in the analysis of *The Handmaid's Tale*. As *Dawn's* narrative explores the idea of hierarchy, which is often addressed when discussing dualisms in ecofeminism, and *The Handmaid's Tale* exemplifies the colonisation of the "others" in dualistic pairs (Plumwood, 1993), it is important to recognise the existence of these dichotomies. It is equally necessary to understand the meaning of essentialism in ecofeminism and feminism:

Two interpretations have emerged from the feminist debate on human nature: the essentialist and the materialist. The former argues for the primacy of female anatomy as the central and determining factor in shaping the female unconscious and conscious mind. The female body, in other words, is the locus of difference as well as the basis for unity and social change. The materialist

interpretation, to the contrary, prefers to explain the oppression of women by focusing on the social and historical construction of gender and self (cf. Jones). (M. Zaki, 1990, citing Jones, p.240)

Plumwood describes the concept of dualisms as the human/nature (or nature/culture) dualism being “interrelated with other dualisms such as mind/body, reason/nature, reason/emotion, masculine/feminine” (1991, p.10). The aim of establishing a (non-exhaustive) list of such dualisms is to denounce the approach that Western thought has taken in constructing certain identities and attributes (from an anthropocentric perspective) as inferior to some others. The human/nature dualism best describes this idea, as it is often considered as incorporating and representing other dualistic pairs. In this respect, the mind, reason and the masculine are often associated and as far as equated with the “human”, while the body, emotion and feminine are tied to “nature”. These comparisons are still deemed by contemporary ecofeminist discourses (Plumwood, Gaard) to have shaped Western treatment and consideration of nature. They serve both the devaluation of nature and women, as they have instituted women as being inferior due to attributing to them emotions and the body, while inferring that the men are above such animalistic and inferior tendencies because supposedly only they possess reason and the power of the mind. This in turn has contributed to the exploitation of nature, as it is then seen as an entity that needs to be controlled and tamed.

This approach is consequently refined by Plumwood in 1993, in her famous book *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature*, in which she brings forth the concept of the master identity. She suggests that not enough had been done in ecofeminism to deconstruct the bias behind the assumed “male” characteristics (as well in generally radical and feminist approaches to nature), and that the unavoidable hierarchy and oppression of the system had not been addressed properly. She advances that the master identity consists in the colonisation of otherness (1993, p.191) and that there are progressive steps that are taken to establish dominance over the “inferior” attributes in dualisms. First come justification and preparation, then invasion and annexation, appropriation and finally, incorporation. This means that there is first a justification for the existence of dualistic thought and then an explanation on how the inferior others are open for colonisation by means of non-human nature being declared terra nullius (Cartesian thought, as mentioned by Plumwood, 1993, p.192). Afterwards, there is the dispossession of previous inhabitants and their rights in order to appropriate nature, ending with incorporation, considering nature to be a resource that gains meaning only

through its exploitation by the master. "The other is reinvested with agency and purpose only through being brought captive as means within the master's sphere of ends, through assimilation to the sphere of self via use, in commodification or consumption." (Plumwood, 1993, p.192).

This is where queer ecofeminism intervenes. Gaard, in her groundbreaking article "Towards a Queer Ecofeminism" develops on Plumwood's theory of the linking postulates. According to Gaard, the postulates that forms the master identity in Plumwood's work can and should be connected both "horizontally" and "vertically" in analyses, similarly to the dualisms themselves (Gaard, 1997, p.117). They should therefore be connected by their being categorised as "other" and inferior instead of just one versus the other, in a horizontal reading. The construction of the linking postulates lies in 5 steps: backgrounding (the master relies on the other but denies dependency), radical exclusion (highlighting the differences between self and other and minimising shared qualities), incorporation (the master's qualities are taken as the standard and the other is defined according to their possession or lack of them), instrumentalism (the other's sole purpose is to serve as a resource for the master) and homogenisation (the dominated class of others is perceived as uniformly homogeneous) (Gaard, 1997, p.117-118). Gaard especially mentions backgrounding, radical exclusion and incorporation as something that queers regularly experience. According to her, the heterosexual/queer dualism is one often ignored and ecofeminist works have failed to do more than simply adding it to the list, which is something most have even omitted (Gaard citing Sandilands, 1997, p.115). By being concerned about the horizontal and vertical connections between the dualisms and incorporating the queer into the equation, Gaard shares a similar objective to Plumwood, which is to dispute the hierarchal aspects attached to these categorisations.

One of Gaard's main arguments is that Western culture strongly devaluates the erotic and that this devaluation "parallels its devaluation of women and of nature" (Gaard, 1997, p.115). She adds that the queer identity is often associated with its sexual identity only and furthermore with a type of erotic that is deemed particularly perverse (Gaard, 1997, p.118). This allows her to stress the importance of discussing the heterosexual/queer and reason/the erotic dualisms. She also mentions that sexuality itself is derived from historical and social contexts and that one must thus be careful when discussing queer sexualities and whether or not they are closer to or against nature (Gaard, 1997, p.119). Gaard finally touches upon the subject that lies at the centre of queer ecological thought:

The critical point to remember is that each of the oppressed identity groups, each characteristic of the other, is seen as "closer to nature" in the dualisms and ideology of Western culture. Yet queer sexualities are frequently devalued for being "against nature." (Gaard, 1997, p.119)

This significant paradox, as she signals, is of no importance to the master (Gaard, 1997, p.119) as the purpose of constructing the queer as "unnatural" is firstly to devaluate and oppress, by invoking a conception of nature that supposedly considers it sacred.

Stacey Alaimo, in her essay in Sandilands' and Erickson's fundamental book on queer ecology, "Queer Ecologies: Sex, Nature, Politics, Desire" expresses the desire of going further than merely circling around nature/culture dualisms, who according to her, "attempt to locate the truth of human sexuality within the already written book of nature" (Mortimer-Sandilands et al., 2010, p.60), suggesting a discontent for the Western culture's view of nature. Nicole Seymour, in her equally influential work "Strange Natures: Futurity, Empathy, and the Queer Ecological Imagination", adds the following argument:

Gaard therefore suggests that we revise the ecofeminist list of oppressive structuring dualisms—such as "culture/nature" and "male/female"—to include the "reason/erotic dualism" (Gaard, 1997, p.118). Her points help us see that the impulse to manage non-human nature is inseparable from the impulse to manage human eroticism, as two central forces that threaten to break down the social order. [...] I belabor this point for a reason: recognizing connections between the queer and the non-human can allow us to challenge the interrelated oppression of queers and the natural world in ways that do not disavow that world. (Seymour, 2013, p.115)

This passage is critical to understand the perspective with which queer ecology, as theorised by Sandilands, Erickson and Seymour, seeks to address nature and queerness in relation to each other. The precautions taken not to disapprove of the natural world as a whole in favour of the queer stems from earlier works on queerness in relation to futurity, such as Edelman's well-known and controversial 2004 book "No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive", which criticises heteroreproductive futurism, relying on the idea that the "Child" is a symbol of that futurism which disapproves of the queer (Seymour, 2013, vii). According to Seymour, environmental discourses often assumed their audience see "the connection between reproductive futurity and environmental protection to be a no-brainer" (Seymour, 2013, viii), which

she rejects as being white-centric heterosexism, failing to take into account the queer. Furthermore, this inherent rejection of the queer in ecology posits discussions on the future and discussions on reproduction as sensitive topics for the queer community, which according to Seymour is the reason for an apprehension to address both simultaneously (2013, vii).

Queer Ecology thus symbolises the need felt by some environmentalists to create an approach that caters to both the need of integrating the queer in environmental discourses about the future and the need to still acknowledge the vulnerability of people of colour, poor people and children (Seymour, 2013, viii) - which were already included in contemporary environmental discourses - without one supplanting the other. Mortimer-Sandilands and Erickson stress the importance of taking both into account: "Here, we are advocating a position not only of queering ecology, but of greening queer politics." (2010, p.22). The field further interrogates and refutes as well the "queer against nature" paradox (Mortimer-Sandilands et al., 2010, p.31), not to establish a particular vision of nature, but to effectively seek ways of reconciling the queer and nature, with the aim to denounce Western culture's lack of consideration for all oppressed others.

Taking into consideration the aforementioned main concerns of queer ecological thought, I will delve into an analysis of *Dawn* and *The Handmaid's Tale* with the objective of unpacking the novels' different considerations of the queer. Their portrayal of two imprisoned women with different backgrounds within a context that thematises the imperative to reproduce will be seen as the aspect that allows for a comparative analysis of both. I will address the involvement of the queer in *Dawn* and the perhaps not so secondary view of the queer in *The Handmaid's Tale*. Examining the ways in which both female and queer bodies can be perceived as toxic, following Di Chiro's (2010) queer ecological analysis of anti-toxic discourses, I will then view the novels in the light of the "colonisation of others" (Plumwood, 1993). As the opposition between self and other is central in ecofeminism, queer ecofeminism and queer ecology, the construction of Plumwood's "master identity" will guide my thesis. I will understand her analysis of the "colonised others" in the light of queer ecology, that is to say, as a more general process of "othering" certain individuals.

I will rely especially on Andil Gosine's queer ecological essay *Non-white Reproduction and Same-Sex Eroticism: Queer Acts against Nature in "Queer Ecologies: Sex, Nature, Politics, Desire"* as it deals directly with many interesting aspects present in *Dawn's* narrative. The aim of the article is to consider both overpopulation and

homosexuality as fuelling white heteronormativity and Gosine consequently considers these acts to both be queer: “My characterization of both kinds of sex acts as “queer” is a recognition of their imbrications, and is intended as a kind of provocation to the theorization and practice of queer ecology.” (Gosine, 2013, p.150). Following his arguments, I will therefore also consider non-white reproduction to represent an “act of queerness” in addition to homosexuality, as it disrupts Western culture’s vision of nature and of the future, as I will later on argue. Gosine’s essay will further be relevant to my analysis for its aim to discuss the act that, according to him, renders the bodies toxic: “The Sex of Others”. My thesis will therefore culminate into a final parallel reading of sexual acts that seek to rebel against the imperative to reproduce: queer sex between “colonised others” and non-reproductive white heterosexual sex. Sandilands’ and Erickson’s book additionally contains essays dealing with essential concepts present in heterosexist considerations of the environment, such as the perpetuation of the species, or the possible future of queer desire, all of which will be of interest to my analysis. Finally, I will direct my research into discussing how these novels consider the possibility of a queer ecological future, in their representations of the divisive imperative to reproduce.

2. Queer bodies in a future centred around reproduction: an alien existence

2.1 *The Handmaid's Tale* against the essentialism of women and nature

Fraternize means to behave like a brother. Luke told me that. He said there was no corresponding word that meant to behave like a sister. Sororize, it would have to be, he said. From the Latin. He liked knowing about such details. The derivation of words, curious usages. I used to tease him about being pedantic. (The Handmaid's Tale, 1985, p.17)

The Handmaid's Tale and *Dawn* can be described as ecotopias within the domain of speculative fiction. *The Handmaid's Tale* is a dystopian version of the United States in which the environment is polluted because of radiation and the past government has been overtaken and replaced by a totalitarian regime named Gilead. The pollution additionally deeply affects fertility in men and women, a hindrance which the regime is organised around, with the main consequence of perpetually penalising women for the low birth-rates. Its protagonist Offred is a Handmaid, a title attributed to the few fertile women left in Gilead. *Dawn* is a mi-utopian, mi-anti-utopian (Hoda M., 1990, p.247) science fiction novel set in the aftermath of great ecological devastation due to nuclear wars that rendered the Earth uninhabitable. The story occurs two hundred and fifty years post-apocalypse, on a spaceship led by an alien race called the Oankali who have taken the sole survivors into their custody. While the Earth has meanwhile recovered, *Dawn's* human protagonist Lilith Iyapo discovers that in order to be allowed to return, the remainder of the human race must breed with the aliens. Both novels can be considered ecotopias because they lament the loss of nature, all the while building onto what a society could develop into within the frame of ecological devastation. While *The Handmaid's Tale* takes the form of a dystopia and *Dawn* finds itself between dystopia and utopia yet is mostly known as a science fiction novel, the imperative to reproduce dictates the future of their protagonists.

Atwood's novel presents a totalitarian society that thrives on the divide between human/nature, masculine/feminine but also of other dualisms that ecofeminism has historically placed at the centre of its critique. *The Handmaid's Tale* has thus understandably often been analysed and critiqued under its prism. In order to use queer

ecology as a theoretical background for both the analysis of this novel as well as Butler's and address the introduction of the queer in ecology, a reminder of some bases of ecofeminism and queer ecofeminism is useful for this thesis. By touching upon the aforementioned dualisms, an overview of the way in which the feminine is associated with nature in *The Handmaid's Tale* allows for an effective understanding of the reproductive imperative and its implications for women. Val Plumwood, eminent scholar of the field, places these dualisms as originally coming from Western thought:

As ecofeminism points out, Western thought has given us a strong human/nature dualism that is part of the set of interrelated dualisms of mind/body, reason/nature, reason/emotion, masculine/feminine and has important interconnected features with these other dualisms. (Plumwood, 1991, p.10)

Gilead is centered around the division between women and men primarily, with different roles allocated to the former in the presumed fight against infertility. While the men also occupy different positions of power in the regime, they inevitably hold more agency than the women, who have none. They are also never blamed for not being able to reproduce, as this responsibility rests in the hands, or rather wombs of the Handmaids, their assigned surrogate mothers. The high-ranking officers are given a household, a Wife, a Handmaid and Marthas to signify their rank or an Econowife to signify a lower rank, in which case they do not necessarily have a title. The Econowives will take on the role of each one of the other women in that case; wife, mother and servant. Lower-ranked men are not even assigned a wife, and if they are young, serve as Guardians in charge of securing human and car traffic within the city as well as taking care of shops or answering to the Commanders' (high-ranking officers) needs. The women are therefore given to the men as commodities celebrating their rank. The more powerful the men are, the better chances they have of having children. The Econowives are characterised by blue, red or green striped clothing and the Marthas - the servants to richer households - wear dull green. The Aunts, who are in charge of teaching and monitoring upcoming Handmaids, wear brown and are the only ones who are directly unassociated with the act of taking care of children. The Wives wear blue and are the only women with some semblance of authority, as they are associated with the Officers and ideally given a child to care for. Their only activities consist in attending birthing events, meeting up with other Wives or staying at home with small activities such as gardening or smoking cigarettes from the black market. Offred's Commander's Wife is an older woman whom Offred recognises as previously named Serena Joy, who used to be a television star back in pre-Gilead times. Upon their first meeting at the beginning of

the story when Offred is appointed to her household, the reader is made aware of the divide that their positions create:

I didn't say anything to her. Aunt Lydia said it was best not to speak unless they asked you a direct question. Try to think of it from their point of view, she said, her hands clasped and wrung together, her nervous pleading smile. It isn't easy for them. (*The Handmaid's Tale*, p.20)

The loss of a close connection between women in Gilead is often deplored by Offred and perceived as deriving from the dualism of masculine and feminine. At numerous points, she recounts her encounters with other women in the regime, most of them cold, judging or scornful. She admits her disappointment looking back at Serena Joy's cold welcome, saying she would have wanted her to be an older sister or a motherly figure who could understand and protect her (p.22). As such, the novel jointly addresses the importance of female friendship and how the lack of it in Gilead is the direct consequence of a patriarchal society where fertile women are enslaved for childbirth.

The women are presented to us in relation to their degree of suffering: the Handmaids have to bear living without any company, as they are both precious for their fertility, provoking jealousy in other women and at the same time shunned for having sex (despite it being rape by the Commanders). They bear the colour red, signifying their status and pegging them simultaneously as the objects of shame and desire. Offred plays with that notion, realistically acknowledging that her only source of power lies in teasing the Guardians that she passes in the street with her walking partner Ofglen:

As we walk away I know they're watching, these two men who aren't yet permitted to touch women. They touch with their eyes instead and I move my hips a little, feeling the full red skirt sway around me. It's like thumbing your nose from behind a fence or teasing a dog with a bone held out of reach, and I'm ashamed of myself for doing it, because none of this is the fault of these men, they're too young. (p.28)

Offred then reflects on her shame, as she imagines their frustration with their own sexuality. Meeting the Handmaids stands as a unique event in the Guardians' day, as nothing in Gilead would allow them to satisfy or express any kind of sexual desire. Sexual frustration therefore arises immediately as a major theme in *The Handmaid's Tale*, for the control it gains over both women and men. The Handmaids' surrogacy status contradictorily comprises both lust and institutionalised modesty and the reproductive imperative finds itself heavily linked to this frustration. Montelaro

elaborates on what could be seen as a discrepancy, yet is an integral part of Gilead's political agenda:

This masculine logic, by teaching women fear of and repulsion for their bodies, sustains an androcentric culture in that women are denied access to their bodies yet may only experience sexual desire by recognizing themselves as sources of erotic gratification for men. (Montelaro, 1995, p.234)

Offred being fully aware of the manipulation behind this thinking, therefore takes pleasure in playing with the interdiction to indulge in any kind of erotic touch. Similarly, in Butler's *Dawn*, Lilith eventually meets the first other human being on the Oankali ship, a man named Paul, some time after having gained the trust of her jailers. Akin to the young Guardians Offred both sympathises with and at the same time mocks, Paul is an adult who has however never met another human since his teenage years, rendering him immature and sexually frustrated. When Lilith simply wishes to rejoice in a newfound human company, Paul quickly lets his misplaced frustration take over and attempts to rape her. Both novels therefore highlight the embodied tensions ensuing such a strict monitoring of people's sexuality.

The divide created between men and women, as well as simply between being human beings in such contexts is shown as detrimental to their sexual health as well as skewing their perception of each other as fellow human beings. Instead, the masculine/feminine divide in *The Handmaid's Tale* is shown as exacerbating behaviours relying on sexual power, usually born out of frustration. The sexual act itself in *The Handmaid's Tale* is devoid of any eroticising, as shown by Offred's outwardly jaded reaction to the ritual rape of the Handmaid, called the Ceremony:

My red skirt is hitched up to my waist, though no higher. Below it the Commander is fucking. What he is fucking is the lower part of my body. I do not say making love, because this is not what he's doing. Copulating too would be inaccurate, because it would imply two people and only one is involved. Nor does rape cover it: nothing is going on here that I haven't signed up for. There wasn't a lot of choice but there was some, and this is what I chose. (p.101)

The mind/body and reason/emotion dualisms are therefore an integral part of Gilead's patriarchal structure, which is one of a theocracy. Everything must be controlled and monitored, there is no place for emotions or for expressions of any kind of sexuality. The entire organisation of the regime revolves around heavy religious imagery and sayings. This is where queer ecofeminism and the notion of erotophobia come in. Gaard, quoting Sandilands, suggests that "simply adding heterosexism to the long list of

dominations that shape our relations to nature” (1997, p.115) is not enough, and that this approach had nevertheless been central to ecofeminism up to that date. According to the author, erotophobia is symptomatic of a grander divide that places queers outside of any considerable realm of sexual possibilities:

As queer theorists have shown, the larger problem is the erotophobia of Western culture, a fear of the erotic so strong that only one form of sexuality is overtly allowed; only in one position; and only in the context of certain legal, religious, and social sanctions (Hollibaugh 1983, 1989; Rubin 1989). The oppression of queers may be described more precisely, then, as the product of two mutually reinforcing dualisms: heterosexual/queer, and reason/the erotic. (Gaard, 1997, p.118)

Erotophobia is additionally present in the naturalising of sexuality, which subsequently places queer sexualities as unnatural (Gaard, p.121). Gaard defines erotophobia as deriving from the early colonisation of the American continent. The Christian colonisers were not at ease with the Indians' sexuality or even their status as humans.

Subsequently, they decided to consider the expression of queer sexuality or models other than the nuclear family as unnatural. Anything that did not result in procreation was unnatural. From there comes the idea of the "missionary position" in sexuality, as it best exemplifies the act of heterosexual procreation. It also places the man above, in a position of dominance, with the woman below, in a more passive state. The naturalising of one form of sexuality is omnipresent in *The Handmaid's Tale*, as the only allowed sexual relations are between a woman and a man, and between the Commander and the Handmaid, in the missionary position.

Sexuality in Gilead is indeed subject to legal, religious, and social sanctions. Relying on various aspects of the Old Testament, the political structure of Gilead invokes a new faith, led by a group named the Sons of Jacob. Religion is omnipresent in every aspect of Gilead's daily life, from what its citizens say to each other, to any kind of gatherings and even to clothing. Offred's position of a surrogate mother is a central one in this respect. Her dress code is stricter than the ones of any other group as she has to remain "modest" at all costs. Her dress is red and she wears a veil - clearly a religious symbol - and her hair has to be long but covered, another contradictory rule in the Handmaid's handbook. Women have to restrain themselves from inciting any kind of desire in men, yet have to abide to a certain traditional and patriarchal vision of femininity. Offred relays her uneasiness to the reader when describing the Aunt's teachings: "My hair is long now, untrimmed. Hair must be long but covered. Aunt Lydia

said: Saint Paul said it's either that or a close shave. She laughed, that held-back neighing of hers, as if she'd told a joke." (p.68). Aunt Lydia's alluding to women's heads being shaved is reminiscing of the ways in which women were punished for adultery in the middle ages as well as to the women who were punished under the Nazi state for sleeping with the enemies. Her joke therefore comes rather as a warning or simply as Offred's reality.

Aunt Lydia's position as a teacher in charge of ensuring that the Handmaids behave, resembles also the use of Kapos in the concentration camps to watch fellow inmates. In order to make sure that the other inmates were behaving and monitor them, some people were chosen to enforce rules over them in exchange of small advantages, such as larger daily rations. The Aunts themselves receive the privilege of being able to write and read and avoid either being married off or serve as a Handmaid, although the contents they are allowed to read are mostly religious and hand-picked by the authorities. Considered a reenacting of the myth of Rachel and Leah from the Old Testament (p.95), the Handmaid is used as a vessel for the birth of another person's child, act which Gilead considers should be a blessing for the Handmaids. Both Bilhah (the Old Testament's handmaid) and Offred are tools to achieve something supposedly bigger than themselves, which is to "replenish the Earth" (p.95). In order to enforce such thinking, the men in power of Gilead have instituted the idea that women have to atone for their sins. Following the idea of covering their hair, the Handmaids must remain what is considered virtuous by the Sons of Jacob. This sense of virtue is extended to the sexual acts that happen in the bedroom. During the rape of the Handmaids, religiously called the Ceremony, there must be no erotic expression of desire and nothing that would be deemed inappropriate, such as kissing.

Women in *The Handmaid's Tale* are additionally compared and associated with nature on several levels. Val Plumwood elaborates on the human/nature dualism in Western thought: "In this dualism [human/nature dualism] what is characteristically and authentically human is defined against or in opposition to what is taken to be natural, nature, or the physical or biological." Prior to the Ceremony, the Commander is expected to read excerpts from the Genesis, which contain associations of women with nature on various levels, which the men in Gilead are exempt from. This divide is created to place men above women, since they are separated from nature and supposedly connected with culture (another dualism), while women are deemed inferior beings who belong with animals and nature. This is further exemplified by the men being allowed to read and write, activity which would provoke a death penalty if done by

a woman (aside from the Aunts). "Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the Earth." "Give me children or else I die. Am I in God's stead, who hath withheld from thee the fruit of the womb? Behold my maid Bilhah. She shall bear upon my knees, that I may also have children by her." (p.95). This extract from the Genesis is read by the Commander before the Ceremony, which occurs once a month during The Handmaid's ovulation. The Wives are traditionally there as well, as they are supposed to symbolically be one with their Handmaid by placing themselves behind them, but are also there in order to surveil the act. The women being described as fruitful is a way of intrinsically connecting them to nature through their womb, further describing birth as something that diametrically opposes men and women, essentialising the connection of women to nature¹. The function of mutual surveillance (as present during the Ceremony) is one applied to other circumstances too, such as the walks that the Handmaids do on a daily basis. Forced to walk in pairs, the Handmaids each meet with another Handmaid with whom they undertake their daily outside tasks. Unlike in *Dawn*, where Lilith is allowed freedom of movement to some extent, in Gilead the Handmaids are continuously confined to certain spaces. When outside, the fear of infiltrated Eyes (secret agents of Gilead) hangs above their heads, discouraging them from expressing their thoughts to the others. Offred's walking partner is a woman named Ofglen, with whom she initially shares very little. Their mandatory greeting is "- Blessed be the fruit - May the Lord open" (p.25), pointing once again towards the nature of their social position.

¹ Essentialism is something that was originally much disputed amongst ecofeminists in Western thought and is now mostly criticised and shunned by ecofeminism itself. Opposing cultural ecofeminists (such as Irigay) and socialist ecofeminists, it draws on the idea that women have an inherent connection with nature that does not rely solely on social or historical factors. Mallory testifies of this division: "Thus the party line in academic ecofeminism presently is that "good" or "true" or "politically effective" ecofeminism must eschew essentialism (the belief in an inherent or "essential" link between women and nature), and affirm only historically and socially constructed woman-nature links that nevertheless make the liberation of both conjoined struggles. According to these "emphatic anti-essentialists" (as feminist philosopher Bonnie Mann (2006) calls them), any ecofeminism that does not wish to degenerate into a regressive, biologicistic, and deterministic setback to decades of feminist work should take pains to disavow any claims, practices, or discursive colorations that suggest a non-historicized or non-contingent connection between women and nature." (Mallory, 2018, pp.19-20)

The Handmaids being an object of envy for both the other Handmaids and the rest of the society is once more shown when Offred and Ofglen encounter another Handmaid, named Ofwarren, who happens to be pregnant.

One of them is vastly pregnant, her belly, under her loose garment, swells triumphantly. There is a shifting in the room, a murmur, an escape of breath; despite ourselves we turn our heads, blatantly, to see better; our fingers itch to touch her. She's a magic presence to us, an object of envy and desire, we covet her. She's a flag on a hilltop, showing us what can still be done: we too can be saved. (p.32)

The Handmaids are under no obligation to go outside once they succeed in getting pregnant, as they are considered a precious resource in Gilead, which explains the reactions surrounding her appearance in the shop. The pregnant woman becoming an object of desire remains further on a recurring pattern in *The Handmaid's Tale*. The women in Gilead being encouraged to refuse any kind of sexual advances, as they supposedly come naturally to the men and are in the Gilead's Aunts' teachings just as natural for the woman to dispel, forces them to set boundaries (p.51). There is therefore a shift of blame from men's inappropriate actions to the women's possible lack of control over them. In the Aunts' teachings, it is natural for women to ignore their erotic potential, which is, according to Gaard, symptomatic of the overbearing need of Western culture to eclipse the queer and the erotic:

Attempts to naturalize one form of sexuality function as attempts to foreclose investigation of sexual diversity and sexual practices and to gain control of the discourse on sexuality. Such attempts are a manifestation of Western culture's homophobia and erotophobia. (Gaard 122)

Offred's awareness of her erotic being robbed in order to justify the consequential subordination of women necessary to achieve the end goal of a reproductive imperative is subtly alluded to as she describes the birth of Ofwarren's child later on in the novel. She refers to someone spiking the grape juice in order to make the birth less painful as a need for The Handmaids to have their orgies too (p.131). Then, as the Handmaids are in anticipation of the child arriving, Offred describes the moment with a sexual lexical field, as if she could potentially be describing an orgy:

She's calmer now, air sucks evenly into her lungs, we lean forward, tensed, the muscles in our backs and bellies hurt from the strain. It's coming, it's coming, like a bugle, a call to arms, like a wall falling, we can feel it like a heavy stone moving

down, pulled down inside us, we think we will burst. We grip each other's hands, we are no longer single. (p.131)

Montelaro cites Irigaray on the phenomenon of associating motherhood with sexual gratification: "Thus Freudian theory would have women achieve self-realization and sexual gratification through motherhood, that is, in the literal as well as symbolic reproduction of the male sex" (Irigaray in Montelaro, 1995, p.87). Following the idea of gaining sexual gratification through motherhood, Offred's commentary on the birthing event can be interpreted as an ironic understanding that Gilead's obsession with enforcing reproduction at all costs metaphorically replaces women's sexual gratification. By comparing the birth of a baby to something women sexually yearn for, Offred reflects justly on her own desperate need and want for a healthy baby as she acknowledges Ofwarren's post-birth misery thinking she will at least "never be declared Unwoman" (p.133). The union between motherhood and the erotic also stresses the importance of one's agency over one's own sexuality and one's own sexual practices. The reproductive imperative is from the beginning set as the Handmaids' greatest demise and by juxtaposing it with sexual release, the latter is from then on understood as just as crucial and the erotic as just as telling of the regime's repercussions on women's freedom.

The institutionalising of one type of sexuality in Gilead bears consequences as well on the queer community. Denying women's erotic potential altogether also seeks to undermine the "natural" existence of the queer, as confining people to one type of sexual act stresses the agenda of a heteroerotic economy (Montelaro citing Irigaray p.238). It is therefore not only women and nature that this type of configuration seeks to alienate, but equally all non-heterosexual and non-typically feminine or masculine people. As seen beforehand, the process of associating women and nature is a way of placing them in opposition to men and culture, regarding them as inferior. Interestingly, portraying queer acts as unnatural would however suggest that nature is to be respected and placed above everything else. Yet, nature and the natural as opposed to culture in *The Handmaid's Tale's* theocracy are both continuously disregarded and exploited in a systemic way. At the centre of queer ecological thought thus unsurprisingly lies the following dissonance: queers are continuously rejected for their existence purportedly being "unnatural" and nature is regardless of this generally admitted position destroyed and uncared for. Gilead testifies to that, as the reason for its citizens' rampant infertility is the presence of too much radiation and pollution in the air and in their bodies. It is therefore worth to further explore the rejection of queers

from Gilead and the ways in which the use of a heterosexist and exploitative appreciation of nature seeks to estrange them.

2.2 Women and queers' bodies as toxic

The pollution of the body and her lack of agency over it is a recurring topic in Offred's description of her physical state. She constantly describes her carnal envelope as betraying her, as if she were talking about a separate entity, something that does not belong to her. She is firstly shown as being disembodied from being forbidden physical touch and affection: "Can I be blamed for wanting a real body, to put my arms around? Without it I too am disembodied. (p.109) This outer-body experience is present during the mandatory ceremonies with the Wife and the Commander, as Offred purposely tries to remain mentally detached from the physical act. While searching for clues as to a possible pregnancy, Offred describes herself as sinking into her own body as if into a swamp, suggesting that it is therefore betraying her, that it is akin to "treacherous ground" (p.79).

The body of Offred's former partner, Luke, is also described as having been wounded and devastated by the new regime's rules. She makes a general observation as to the fleeting nature of bodies: "The body is so easily damaged, so easily disposed of, water and chemicals is all it is, hardly more to it than a jellyfish, drying on sand." (p.111) Her hopes of Luke having been saved and not killed when they were captured is described as seeing him "sitting up, in a rectangle somewhere, grey cement, on a ledge or the edge of something, a bed or chair." (p.110). A connection can be made between Luke's potential new home being devoid of anything welcoming, that would bring joy to a human being and the jellyfish's slow death on the sand, a habitat unnatural and fatal to the animal. In addition, Offred's words depict Luke as withered and older than he looks (p.110) suggesting that his death is made closer by the environment he is in. Women's bodies are not the only ones being associated with nature and animals - although in a large part - as the character of Offred does express how dire the situation is for all living beings. She also compares her body being used to merely reproduce with the way in which Western society treats nature as a resource, "Waste not want not. I am not being wasted. Why do I want?" (p.13). This link asserts from the start the closeness with which women and nature are being exploited in *The Handmaid's Tale*. This assimilation further accentuates the need to explore how women

in particular are impacted by toxins and how anti-toxic discourses are articulated within queer ecology.

Alaimo asks a therefore central question in that respect: “To what extent are particular struggles – against toxins in the home, the workplace and the neighborhood – gendered and to what extent are these struggles more indicative of the hierarchies of race and class?” (Alaimo, 2008, p.301). In her article on reproductive technology (2010), Gaard brings forth an argument shared by Di Chiro (2010): POPs (persistent organic pollutants) and other toxic by-products have caused a plethora of health problems, such as various cancers, heart disease or diabetes (Di Chiro, 2010, p.202) which have been overlooked in favour of pushing forward a white misogynistic agenda based around female reproduction. Gaard takes on an ecofeminist approach for reproductive justice, criticising reproductive technology’s monetisation of women’s reproductive organs. She considers it as a sign of the humans once again asserting control over nature (all the while she does not disapprove of the choice being given to women) and treating it as a resource:

These views treat nature as a “resource” for human needs rather than a living ecosystem where humans flourish through interdependence; they divide personhood into various bodily parts (i.e., the uterus, ovaries, breasts) which can then be commodified by “choice” and manipulated in concert with Western culture’s control of “nature” as a path to human liberation. (Gaard, 2010, pp.107-108)

Gaard’s argumentation joins Offred’s consideration of her own body as a resource used as a political and social tool. This monetisation (or institutionalisation in the case of Gilead) is also criticised by Montelaro:

[...] paternal authorities in Gilead respond to the alleged “crisis” of declining birth rates by institutionalizing surrogate maternity to ensure its male line of successors and to deny potentially rebellious women their former autonomy in deciding whether or not to give birth. (Montelaro, 1995, p.233)

Rebellious women in Gilead are described for instance as being lesbians (Offred’s best friend Moira) or women who took into their own hands their fertility prior to the establishment of the regime: “Some did it themselves, had themselves tied shut with catgut or scarred with chemicals.” (p.118). In her article, Gaard furthermore stresses how rising infertility - politically and socially a bigger concern than any other health issue - had been attributed to women delaying childbirth in favour of their careers instead of the undeniable health consequences of POPs (Gaard, 2010). This

misogynistic vision on women's reproduction is fully adopted in *The Handmaid's Tale*, as the women's former rights in terms of contraception or abortion are held to be responsible for the high infertility rates, instead of the pollution from radiation. Gilead's society even goes as far as forbidding any kind of medication for the mother during childbirth (p.131), creating another divide between "unnatural" and "natural" births.

The Handmaid's potential sterility as well defines them to the point that they would be sent to their death if failing to accomplish their duty: "I almost gasp: he's said a forbidden word. Sterile. There is no such thing as a sterile man any more, not officially. There are only women who are fruitful and women who are barren, that's the law." (*The Handmaid's Tale*, 1985, pp.66-67). The use of nature imagery to describe women's fertility or lack thereof highlights their belonging to a type of untameable nature that does not comply with man's/culture's need to control it. Offred also addresses Gilead's concern with reproduction above anything else: "Women took medicines, pills, men sprayed cows, cows ate grass, all that souped-up piss flowed into the rivers." (p.118). While she does mention toxins ingested by animals and humans alike, women are specifically set apart for their choice of taking medicine or pills, which appears as a reference to it being taken as the starting point of all fertility issues in Gilead.

Di Chiro chooses to address health issues derived from POPs as well, however taking a queer ecological approach that denounces the anti-toxics discourse in mainstream environmentalism. This discourse, according to her, while acknowledging health issues, "adopts the potent rhetoric that toxic chemical pollution is responsible for the undermining or perversion of the "natural": natural biologies/ecologies, natural bodies, natural reproductive processes." (Di Chiro, 2010, p.201) She argues against a discriminative approach that revolves mainly around the effects of toxins on reproduction and sexuality and subsequently deems bodies that do not follow a preconceived vision of "natural" reproduction as monstrous. They thereby reinforce or even reinstate heterosexist, queer-phobic and eugenics arguments (p.202) that work once again to exclude numerous members of the population. Gilead's teachings about bodies being vessels come to mean that female bodies and their fertility mirror the state of devastated nature around (and in) Gilead. As Offred remembers from her days at the centre for future Handmaids, "The Republic of Gilead, said Aunt Lydia, knows no bounds. Gilead is within you" (p.29). Describing what she learned at the Centre where she was admitted as a Handmaid-to-be, she retells a conversation about female bodies

and their obligation to carry pregnancies to term even if they are considered an unsafe environment:

The air got 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 unborn babies. Maybe a vulture would die of eating you. Maybe you light up in the dark, like an old-fashioned watch. Death-watch. That's a kind of beetle, it buries carrion.
(p.118)

Since the discourse on women's toxic bodies is a prerequisite for the good functioning of Gilead, female bodies are placed in a precarious social position. Being considered sinful by nature and in need to atone, it is therefore impossible for women to reclaim a healthy body and yet they are forced to consider atonement their ultimate objective.

The Handmaid's Tale illustrates how in a patriarchal society, this alleged desire and need to fulfil "natural" duties becomes a place of sexual violence. The men's knowledge on how women perceive their own bodies gives them the power to bargain sexual favours. Offred lives her monthly gynaecological check-up as an invasion of her personal space, both physical and mental. As she sits down to be examined, the doctor asks: "'Any pain, honey?' He calls me honey." (p.66). He then proceeds to suggest to Offred that he could help her get pregnant, as he has helped others before her. Not understanding what he could help her with at first, she asks how: "'How do you think?'" he says, still barely breathing it. Is that his hand, sliding up my leg? He's taken off the glove. "The door's locked. No one will come in. They'll never know it isn't his." (p.66) He then adds: "'I hate to see what they put you through,'" he murmurs. It's genuine, genuine sympathy; and yet he's enjoying this, sympathy and all." (p.67) Women's precarious position leads them to a space where they cannot either say yes or no, for fear of dying, as Offred's following hesitation and anxiety shows:

"I must leave the impression that I'm not offended, that I'm open to suggestion. [...] None of this has been said, but the knowledge of his power hangs nevertheless in the air as he pats my thigh, withdraws himself behind the hanging sheet. [...] My hands are shaking. Why am I frightened? I've crossed no boundaries, I've given no trust, taken no risk, all is safe." (p.67)

This scene also goes to show how one of the chore aspects in the society of Gilead, women's safety, is not respected. The doctor does not hesitate to raise the sheet that protects Offred's privacy in order to see her face. The reassurance given to women is

that they are in turn safe from men's "sexual" natures and yet the latter are allowed to blatantly breach this pretended trust. Similar to the doctor's attitude during the monthly check-up is the Commander's exploitation of Offred for his own physical and sentimental gains.

The gendering of anti-toxic discourses expands even further, attesting to Di Chiro's claim about the perversion of the "natural". Her comment on the monstrosity of some bodies is specifically relevant: "Moreover, this anti-toxics discourse argues that many estrogenic chemical toxins disrupt or prevent normal prenatal physiological development and disturb natural reproductive processes, leading to rising cases of infertility and producing disabled, defective, and even monstrous bodies." (Di Chiro, 2010, p.201). Two elements are important to delineate in this excerpt: the indirect blaming of women regarding their possible offspring and the use of "monstrous" to describe particular bodies. Instead of the pollution resulting from capitalist environmental destruction at least being studied or accepted in Gilead as the reason for the citizens' rising infertility, it is imputed to women's previous use of medication or tampering with their bodies. Secondly, the anti-toxic discourse in Gilead now allows to openly discriminate against bodies that were previously invisible and taboo. This change is best seen in Offred's cynical observations while Ofwarren is giving birth: "What will Ofwarren 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?" (p.118). The treatment reserved to non-conforming bodies in Gilead (sending them to the toxic wastelands) also contrasts with the protests for the right to abort that the Handmaids are shown in order to disgust them from the idea. They are presented with textual extracts from the signs held by women marching, choice which shocks them as they are not usually allowed such activities. They read: "FREEDOM TO CHOOSE. EVERY BABY A WANTED BABY. RECAPTURE OUR BODIES. DO YOU BELIEVE A WOMAN'S PLACE IS ON THE KITCHEN TABLE?" (pp.125-126). The text is then followed by an image of a woman on a table, dying from an abortion (p.126). The Aunts' clear disapproval of these messages stresses how not every baby is a wanted baby and how a pregnancy carried to term, even forced, is better than getting an abortion.

Another passage highlights the hypocrisy behind such thinking, as Offred describes her first sight of Ofwarren's pregnancy and how it affects the people around her: "Now that she is the carrier of life, she is closer to death, and needs special security. Jealousy could get her, it's happened before. All children are wanted now, but

not by everyone.” (p.32). Not only does being pregnant carry more danger for Ofwarren than if she had aborted, but clearly, not all children are wanted in Gilead. Babies with malformations or any physical deficiency are immediately rejected from society for their “monstrous” bodies. Additionally, their “unnatural” status affects their mother’s as well. Ofwarren delivering a “healthy” baby also gives her the assurance of her own safety: “But she’ll never be sent to the Colonies, she’ll never be declared Unwoman. That is her reward.” (p.133) “Unnatural” bodies also are victims of sexual violence, as Moira explains to Offred when they happen to find each other during one of the Commander’s trip to Jezebels (the prostitution ring in Gilead) during which he invites Offred. Referring to the hanging of non-conforming people to the Wall, “The two others have purple placards hung around their necks: Gender Treachery.” (p.149), she elaborates:

Discards, all of us. They’re sterile of course. If they aren’t that way to begin with, they are after they’ve been there for a while. When they’re unsure, they do a little operation on you, so there won’t be any mistakes. I’d say it’s about a quarter men in the Colonies too. Not all of those Gender Traitors end up on the Wall. (p.257)

“Unnaturalness” is therefore attributed to any people who are non-conforming to the patriarchal rules of Gilead, under the guise of pushing a political agenda based around reproduction. In reality, citizens are exposed to toxicity for failing to abide to a white patriarchal discriminating discourse on “natural” bodies. As anti-toxic discourses in *The Handmaid’s Tale* create even greater divide inside the population, they consequently reveal their queer-phobic nature. It is not merely about reproducing in order to survive (not even only for nationalistic motives), but about pushing forward the exclusion of anyone who does not adhere to white Christian visions of the “natural”. The novel’s denunciation of the systematic oppressions operating on several levels thus disallows for a consideration of queer people’s alleged “unnaturalness” as inherently attached to their non-reproductive statuses.

2.3 Dawn and the colonisation of the human "other"

“[...] since humans cannot always see the consequences of their actions on the environment immediately, nor the intricate interrelationships among all components in an ecosystem, they must be able to imagine them in order to act empathetically and ethically.” (Seymour, 2013, p.12)

It is no stretch of the imagination to perceive Octavia Butler *Dawn's* as blurring the limits of the West's use of the words "natural" and "unnatural" and perhaps seeking to defy the mere existence of dualisms. Incidentally, the imagination at play is the aspect that sets apart the genres of *The Handmaid's Tale* and *Dawn*. While both are considered dystopias within the domain of speculative fiction, *Dawn* explores as well elements of utopia (M. Zaki, 1990, p.239) and is mostly known as a science fiction novel. It is the first of a trilogy named *Lilith's Brood* and it follows the story of the first human woman to bear a half-human, half-alien child, Lilith Iyapo. The setting of the novel itself announces its intent to question what we think we know about the world. Lilith, a young African American woman, wakes up some 250 years after a nuclear war has rendered the Earth uninhabitable and has annihilated the entire human race. Imprisoned on a spaceship that is also a living organism, she comes to know that her captors are aliens named the Oankali, who have kept her in a sleeping state for an average of 248 years. Progressively, she understands that has been chosen to help the remainder of the human race, also imprisoned on the spaceship, acclimate to an existence shared with the aliens. The Oankali's project is to share their genes with the humans in order to create a higher life form that will be born without the flaws of the two races that helped create it. That is accomplished through reproduction amongst the three Oankali genders: male, female and ooloi, the latter being called by the pronoun "it" and appearing to be the closest to what humanity would conceive a gender neutral person to be. Their ultimate objective is to return to the Earth with the humans and create offspring once settled in. Life as Lilith knew it on Earth will never be the same, as the Earth itself has since healed without any human presence interfering, returning to the state of a wild planet.

Dawn is a complex novel, as it takes the form of a captivity narrative, albeit twisting some codes of the genre. As Magedanz writes about *Adulthood Rites*, the second novel of the *Lilith's Brood* trilogy, Butler draws on narrative elements that are familiar to the American literature genre, such as the civilised protagonist who is held captive by savages (2012, p.45). Magedanz also expands on the racist history of the captivity narrative during the Colonial period: "By casting the Indians as the evil enemy that the early white colonist must overcome, the narrative also helps to justify colonial motives and to define a uniquely white American national identity." (2012, p.46). The captivity narrative was however later reborn, in the form of the African-American slave narrative. This important branch of the genre was deemed to serve the construction of a new African-American identity and to protest against the clearly racist patterns of the

classical narratives (Magedanz, 2012, p.46). *Dawn* emerges as drawing its inspiration from this literary tradition. It consciously chooses for a black female protagonist to be kept captive by another race that even happens to be an entirely different species. Such a choice also rebels against the dominant science fiction genres which are often centred around white masculine characters.

Juxtapositions between women and nature are much less prevalent in *Dawn*, in comparison with *The Handmaid's Tale*. Butler still gives her protagonist a realistic approach to her situation: at first Lilith finds a lot of similarities between her own predicament and the policing of women's bodies back on Earth. Apart from the early questions that Lilith naturally asks to her captors about the Earth and the place where she finds herself however, it is mostly throughout the last part of the novel that the characters find themselves in nature and consequently need to navigate their natural habitat. Even then, it nevertheless consists of a fake forest called the Training Floor, created by the Oankali to test the humans' survivability skills. The novel instead places more importance on human nature and on the dynamics at play between individuals with different backgrounds, both human and non-human.

The interest of Butler's choice to adopt an African-American slave narrative as background for her story is the position that Lilith finds herself in. As an African-American person, she represents the quest for a new identity that characterises the slave narrative. As a woman, the fact that she is subjected to forced reproduction and giving birth to a half-human baby carries heavier weight than it would for a man. However, as a human held captive by aliens, she also represents the human race. The fascinating aspect of this choice is the status consequently attributed to the protagonist, which she cannot possibly escape from. As an African-American woman, she embodies a particular web of oppressions exercised upon individuals such as herself. Her being captured as a human by another species nonetheless places her as the oppressor being put in the usual place of the non-humans. She herself attests to this and realises the irony of this reversal: "She was nothing more than an unusual animal to them. Nikanj's new pet." (*Dawn*, 1987, p.57) In *The Handmaid's Tale*, as seen beforehand, women are eroticised and animalised as a way to dehumanise them. *Dawn* acknowledges at first the similarity of the treatment that the protagonist is subjected to with the treatments usually reserved to animals:

But, no, it was not that kind of experiment. She was intended to live and reproduce, not to die. Experimental animal, parent to domestic animals? Or... nearly extinct animal, part of a captive breeding program? Human biologists had

done that before the war - used a few captive members of an endangered animal species to breed more for the wild population. Was that what she was headed for? Forced artificial insemination. Surrogate motherhood? Fertility drugs and “forced” donations of eggs? Implantation of unrelated fertilized eggs. Removal of children from mothers at birth... (p.60)

Another dimension is highlighted in this excerpt: a similar consideration to Di Chiro’s (2010) or Gaard’s (2010) concern over the democratising of “eugenistic” pregnancies at all costs, especially at women’s health. A distrust for artificial help during reproduction is expressed by Lilith when talking to Paul, the first human she meets on the ship: “Just something called a birthing center - a place for pregnant women who don’t like the idea of being treated as though they were sick.” (p.91). Lilith comparing her situation to that of an animal though takes on a new significance in this respect. It is not only about being a woman, but also about being a human. Similarly, she adds later on: “How was a pet supposed to feel? How did zoo animals feel?” (p.58). When she learns that the Oankali have removed a cancer from her body without her consent, she is dumbfounded. Her reaction speaks of the intricacy of the implications of such an invasion:

This was one more thing they had done to her body without her consent and supposedly for her own good. “We used to treat animals that way,” she muttered bitterly. “What?” he said. “We did things to them - inoculations, surgery, isolation - all for their own good. We wanted them healthy and protected - sometimes so we could eat them later. (p.33)

Lilith’s position is best understood under the prism of the “colonisation of “others”” as brought forth by Plumwood (1993). The aliens exhibit eugenic tendencies: they have an impulse to trade genes in order to build the perfect race. They describe this impulse as genetic and unavoidable, lest they let themselves die. As Lilith first learns of her fate to serve as a test subject, she naturally links their trade to one of a different kind: ““What do you trade?” “Ourselves.” “You mean...each other? Slaves?” “No. We’ve never done that.” (p.24) The reader’s expectation is for Lilith to be right, especially as she is initially put in a cage (p.12) and therefore treated in the same way a slave would be. This expectation comes true when she ends up being put in contact with other humans and experiences sexism and racism. Lilith is subsequently treated as the colonised “other”, as both a black woman by the other humans and as a human, by the Oankali. It is then especially enlightening to consider the development of the novel’s narrative in light of Plumwood’s theory of the master identity.

The stages of the “colonisation of “others” develop as following: backgrounding, radical exclusion, incorporation, instrumentalism and homogenisation (Plumwood, 1993). *Dawn* can be separated into three main parts, each of which can be seen as exemplifying one or more of the stages of the process of “othering”. Lilith is first acclimated to the Oankali’s presence and then shown around the spaceship, allowed to test the terrain and accept her newfound reality. However, she is not allowed to see any other human, as she is a precious resource for them. This illustrates the stage of “instrumentalism” where the “other” serves as a resource for the master. The Oankali do say to Lilith that she is allowed to refuse the role of leadership if she so wishes and that the humans can choose to remain on the ship and not comply with the Oankali repopulation program, but if they do refuse it would mean the end of their species. The Oankali therefore do not exactly acknowledge their dependency on Lilith and the humans, which exemplifies the first step, “backgrounding”. Similarly, the humans do not acknowledge their dependency on Lilith’s knowledge of the Oankali society and decide to exclude her. The Oankali furthermore use dualistic justifications for holding the humans captive. These justifications can be summed up under the term that they use for humanity’s flaws, “The Human Contradiction”. As Lilith is under the supervision of the first Oankali she encounters, Jdahya, he explains to her the flaws he perceives in humanity:

You are hierarchical. That’s the older and more entrenched characteristic. We saw it in your closest animal relatives and in your most distant ones. It’s a terrestrial characteristic. When human intelligence served it instead of guiding it, when human intelligence did not even acknowledge it as a problem, but took pride in it or did not notice it at all...” The rattling sounded again. “That was like ignoring cancer. I think your people did not realize what a dangerous thing they were doing. (p.39)

Jdahya’s criticism of humanity can be analysed as a just commentary on the human tendency to create dualisms itself, and rightly so. The word hierarchy directly testifies to the dualistic pairs in which one side is always considered more positively than the other (culture versus nature, man versus woman etc.). The Oankali however use their understanding of human nature as a justification of their intention to colonise and modify them genetically. Moreover, the strength of Butler’s choice to depict aliens as the perpetrators of prejudices against another species is that it allows the reader to notice the inherent unjust judgement and use that we make of other species, for similar reasons. McWhorter attests to the “othering” that Jdahya exhibits:

When queer people and our advocates are drawn into public discourse on these terms, we defend sexual diversity as an integral aspect of the species—a natural variation rather than a “cancer,” an evolutionary asset rather than a sterile dead end. But the terms themselves are not challenged. As a result, the assumptions that the species is ontologically real and that it is morally prior to all else remain unquestioned. (McWhorter, 2010, p.76)

Because we consider ourselves to have reason, culture or civilisation, we elevate the meaning of these made-up characteristics in order to treat as inferior their alleged opposites: nature and primitiveness (as put forth by Gaard, 1997, p.116). Jdahya feels free to criticise the humans' intelligence, but the Oankali's discovery of cancer is also what allows them greater gene trading and healing abilities. What is flaw in humanity is also what allows the Oankali to have more power against the humans. This passage also illustrates the notion of "incorporating", as the master's qualities are taken as standard and the other is defined according to their possession or lack of them" (Gaard, 1997, p.117-118).

Lilith and Nikanj, on the other hand, recognise their dependency on each other and at least try to stop perceiving each other as "other". Lilith is then later sent to train the other humans in order for them to be accepted into Oankali society as well. This stage best shows the step of "radical exclusion": the humans minimise their shared qualities with the aliens and with Lilith, in order to place them both as "other". During the second part of the novel, Lilith is sent to accompany the other humans during their trial period. She then spends most of her time in what Butler calls the “Nursery” as her chapter title. This name interestingly points to a purposeful infantilisation of the humans, reminding of the patronising terms that were used (and still are sometimes) to characterise women or non-white people. This can be seen as the stage of "homogenisation", as the group of humans is seen as uniformly homogenous by the Oankali. Lilith is also progressively associated with the aliens by the humans, contributing to her being rejected as "other" by both sides. This is best shown when the Oankali decide to modify her genetically in order to make her more like them, effectively erasing similarities that she shares with the humans:

The Oankali modified me" Lilith told her. "so that I can control the walls and the suspended animation plants. I can't do it as well as they can, but I can Awaken people, feed them, clothe them, and give them a certain amount of privacy.
(p.138)

Lilith herself is being colonised, set as the “other”. In light of this colonisation, a widely

used terminology in *Dawn* is that of "species". The importance of addressing this usage is the history behind the concept. McWorther challenges the term "species", as seen above, as it has according to her been used for racist purposes (2010):

The term "species" acquired its scientific meaning in the late eighteenth century in the work of naturalist Georges-Louis Leclerc, Comte de Buffon. But the concept has never been free of controversy. It suffered through contentious transformations in the nineteenth century (including debates over whether Negroes and Indians were *Homo sapiens* or not), only to be destabilized again in the wake of Charles Darwin's work. It underwent revisions in the early twentieth century but became increasingly problematic as that century drew to a close—even while massive amounts of tax money were poured into species-specific genome research. Politically charged from its scientific inception, the concept of species has often brought great harm to both racial and sexual minorities over the past two hundred years. (McWhorter, 2010, p.75)

When Lilith defends her own people, the understanding of her statement is multi-dimensional: "We're an adaptable species," she said, refusing to be stopped, "but it's wrong to inflict suffering just because your victim can endure it." (p.70). Butler highlights the ridiculousness of Lilith having to defend a population against a eugenic use of its members. Later on, the term "species" is used again, to signify that a connection has been made between Lilith and the aliens: "Strangers of a different species had been accepted as family." (p.196). Joseph nevertheless refuses this association, showing that he therefore will consider Lilith as "other" if she becomes too close to the aliens: "What will we be, I wonder? Not human. Not anymore." (p.196). The term "species" therefore stands as what symbolises Lilith's "othering". It is not her strength or her capacity to lead the humans that will determine whether she is accepted by them, but whether they belong to the same species.

2.4 The alien and the refusal of the unnatural queer

The hyperfocus on the world turning into hermaphrodites participates in a sexual titillation strategy summoning the familiar "crimes against nature" credo and inviting culturally sanctioned homophobia while at the same time sidelining and naturalizing "normal" environmental diseases such as cancer. (Di Chiro, 2010, pp.210-211)

Contradictions lie at the heart of *Dawn's* narrative. The Oankali are concerned with the future in a eugenistic way. They successfully highlight the flaws of humanity, yet are deeply flawed themselves. Furthermore, the humans being accepted by queer aliens for their own reproductive purposes gives an ironic twist to the inability capitalist societies have with including the non-human in their political and ecological agendas; concern shared by both ecofeminism and queer ecology. The notion of the queers being alien to the future because of not being able to reproduce is here therefore also refuted. As seen earlier on with the colonisation of the "other", *Dawn* essentially admits to how comfortable it is in tackling stereotypes by provoking the imagination of the reader. It does not hesitate to show oppressions from a different angle, and the queer is an intrinsic quality of this reversal.

It is however not particularly beneficial, in light of queer ecology, to perceive this shift as being merely an unrealistic wish for an Earth where everyone contributes to the future by means of being included in the act of reproduction (it is also nonsensical, as humans do not lack in numbers, which is an irony queer ecology reproaches to heterosexist thinking through its various approaches). Hence it is more useful to observe the questions the novel raises regarding the intrinsic reasons as to why our societies are obsessed with the portrayal of certain bodies as unnatural. I argue that this intolerance is not merely a consequence of the existence of a white heteronormative society, but rather consists of a necessity to "other" certain bodies in order to sustain said system.

It is not innocuous to reappropriate ideas of nature (in this case ecological devastation) in order to explore such themes: "Gay men, lesbians, and others identified as "against nature" have historically used ideas of nature, natural spaces, and ecological practices as sites of resistance and exploration." (Mortimer-Sandilands & Erickson, 2010, p.22). *Dawn* can be seen as broaching the thematic from two different sides: by illustrating the irrationality at play behind the rejection or acceptance of the queer, and by addressing heads on the "perverse" nature attributed to beings and sexual acts that defy what we perceive as normal.

The first instance is best addressed through Gosine's article (2010) in *Queer Ecologies*. Gosine observes three major features of discourses on overpopulation and homosexuality. He seeks to reveal their more obscure aim, that of maintaining white heteronormativity through a pretence care for the environment (Gosine, 2010, p.150):

I consider three shared features of discourses on the ecological dangers of overpopulation and homosexuality that demonstrate how they similarly function

and are similarly invested in the production and maintenance of white heteronormativity: their commitment to projects of white nation-building; their use of linked arguments about public safety and morality to make claims about the dangers that non-white heterosexual and homosexual sex pose to nature; and their denial of the erotic, through their insistent non recognition of sexual desire and of sexual acts as pleasurable. (Gosine, 2010, p.150)

In light of Gosine's claim, the structure of the Oankali's society appears as a fundamental aspect to consider to address the "queer against nature" paradox. In fact, it helps a more critical approach of the tenets of *The Handmaid's Tale's* gileadean society as well. Indeed, the Oankali are firstly not committed to a project of white nation-building, unlike Gilead. Neither do they claim that non-white or homosexual sex can pose a threat to nature, quite the opposite. They in fact enforce the impossibility for human beings to conceive a child without their interference, by modifying their genes. This time, similar to that instance is the forced sterilisation of women who do not adhere to the rules in Gilead or whom they do not want to see reproduce by accident. Lastly, the Oankali do not deny the erotic and recognise sexual desire as an important component for aliens and humans alike, which contrasts again with the erotophobic Gilead.

It is therefore interesting to consider the aliens as holding a mirror up to humanity, showing us our own faults, as they themselves suggest. They however also attest to the idea that no society that enforces reproduction or places it at its centre can be truly utopian, as they do not give the women nor the men their bodily autonomy. The similarities of thinking between the Oankali's society and the society of Gilead, as well as their shared refusal of women's agency regarding their bodies points to the connections between their visions of enforcing the survival of a species at all costs. While *The Handmaid's Tale* rather considers the queer to be an inherently dystopian trope that cannot really be an positive or key intrinsic part of any depiction of the future, *Dawn* explores homophobia as a fearful social behaviour surrounding ideas of naturalness that are not necessarily tied to the idea of the non-reproductive queer.

As consistently addressed in the novel, the group of humans has a lot of trouble accepting the Oankali and in particular the ooloi's existence. They retain their claims of the queer being against nature, despite being shown that the Oankali have ecological objectives and are more conscious of their impact on the environment than the humans ever were. In fact, the destructive tendency of humanity, which is hierarchy according to the Oankali, appears as the reason for the Earth's destruction in a nuclear war and the

humans' misery and pain. Genova (1994) argues that Butler perceives it so too: "In her latest work of xenogenesis, a trilogy beginning with *Dawn*, Octavia Butler argues that the need for hierarchy is the fatal genetic flaw in human beings" (p.7). Jdahya even shocks Lilith by admitting that they thought the humans had simply agreed to such an end, out of self-destruction:

[...] it has been several million years since we dared to interfere in another people's act of self-destruction. Many of us disputed the wisdom of doing it this time. We thought... that there had been a consensus among you, that you had agreed to die. (p.16)

Lilith is progressively made aware of the ecological aspects of the aliens' organisation. The ship on which the Oankali spend their existence in the present of the novel is a live organism, with which they share some sort of a symbiotic relationship:

"Well, is the ship plant or animal?" "Both, and more." Whatever that meant. "Is it intelligent?" "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. [...]" "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." (p.35)

Lilith's first reaction to the ship being alive is to ask whether it possesses intelligence. Her defiance towards Jdahya explaining a loving symbiotic relationship shows still a strong adherence on Lilith's part to dualistic thought. Sandilands and Erickson deem queer ecology to have as an objective the dismantling of such thinking: "Yet, instead of reclaiming the naturalness of queer activity, the authors in this section directly challenge the split between nature and culture upon which charges of being against nature rely." (Mortimer-Sandilands & Erickson, 2010, pp.31-32). Lilith's reasoning that the ship can be perceived differently according to a human measure of value is, unsurprisingly, anthropocentric.

Furthermore, in *Queer Ecologies*, Alaimo cites anthropocentrism as a characteristic of some accounts on queer animals (2010, p.54), even though she does add that portraying them as "unnatural" is more prevailing. Chisholm, in her essay, expresses Deleuze's and Guattari's idea of a conceptual "plan of nature" that rethinks desire and that abandons "the conceits of anthropocentric humanism" (Chisholm, 2010, p.360). Perhaps ironically, Lilith's question can therefore be linked to some critics that sought to "normalise" behaviours or beings according to their own understanding of the

world. *Dawn* can be understood to criticise this aspect, as Lilith is represented as realistic and level-headed, but defensive as well. Her gradually more pronounced tendency to reflect on situations rather than judge however suggests that she does exhibit some of the flaws that the Oankali see in her, but that this capacity to think ahead sets her apart.

Lilith herself has an impulse to shun the ooloi's queer sexuality at first. Although her reaction does appear as irrational, similarly to that of the other humans, it also shows an objectification of the ooloi. At that point in the narrative, Jdahya, her first jailor, has introduced her to an ooloi named Kahguyaht (parent to Nikanj, the ooloi who becomes her partner), whom she dislikes as she perceives it as having a condescending attitude towards her: "Looking at Kahguyaht, she took pleasure in the knowledge that the Oankali themselves used the neuter pronoun in referring to the ooloi. Some things deserved to be called "it"." (p.49). Lilith's intolerance could have been disregarded, except she is later on bothered when other people try to debase the ooloi by insulting their sexuality in a similar way.

Upon meeting Paul Titus, the first human she is allowed to see, he exhibits a menacing stance towards her, hinting at a potential non-consensual sexual act between the two of them. He then deliberately berates the ooloi Nikanj by saying "he" instead of "it": "Maybe he thought we might be kind of inhibited if he stayed around." She deliberately ignored the implications of this. "Nikanj isn't male, she said. "It's ooloi." (p.89). Lilith's distrust of Paul Titus seems to be enlarged here, coming to encompass men's potential violent behaviours in general. Lilith's increasingly more tolerant attitude could be taken as a side-effect of the aliens modifying her genes to accommodate their own needs. However, her insisting that Nikanj is not male when feeling threatened could suggest that she trusts Nikanj to a certain degree because it is not male. *Dawn* later acknowledges this dimension, as it portrays some of the men she comes to meet as violent as well. Hesitating on whom to wake up among the humans, Lilith decides to go with women at first: "She did deliberately Awaken a few more women than men in the hope of minimizing violence." (p.145) Lilith even comes to see her human partner Joseph as a potential male threat when he calls Nikanj by the "he" pronoun: "The refusal to accept Nikanj's sex frightened her because it reminded her of Paul Titus. She did not want to see Paul Titus in Joseph." (p.170) She then says to Joseph: "We need to see them for what they are, even if there are no human parallels - and believe me, there are none for the ooloi." (p.170) This passage attests to Lilith's conflicted relationship with both the humans and the ooloi. On the one hand, she does

not trust men to display the same restraint or level-headedness as women do. Butler clearly adopts this stance, as she declares Lilith being chosen to lead partly for the fact that she is a woman (p.157). On the other hand, she realises that the ooloi are not human and are still holding her captive against her will. The queer therefore presents itself as both a place of comfort and as the instigator of pain. It is, however, mostly subject to Lilith's appreciation of the queer, and as such is understood as a way to escape a heterosexual mob mentality.

The general low tolerance of the humans for the ooloi's sexuality, in this case, can be explained by Di Chiro's depiction of a "sex panic":

What are presented by many environmentalists as critical scientific facts (and quite rightly worthy of alarm) can, however, work to create a "sex panic," resuscitating familiar heterosexist, queer-phobic, and eugenics arguments classifying some bodies as being not normal: mistakes, perversions, or burdens. (Di Chiro, 2010, pp.201-202)

Words such as "perversion" or "perversed" are omnipresent in *Dawn*. While the Oankali's society is not erotophobic, as it regularly engages in or alludes to sexual acts, these acts are viewed by Lilith with the same cautionary lens. When engaging in sexual intercourse with Nikanj and Joseph, she acknowledges that she perceives the act as "unnatural" but enjoyable: "In a perverse way, Joseph too was probably enjoying himself, though he could not have said so." (p.189). Lilith's consideration of the act however does not consist anymore of stressing the difference between her and the aliens. The word "perversion" merely seems important for her as a means of remaining conscious of the reality of her situation. When she describes the sexual encounter of a man (under drugs) who has exhibited sexism and violence with another ooloi, her tone changes drastically: "The drug seemed to him to be not a less painful way of getting used to frightening nonhumans, but a way of turning him against himself, causing him to demean himself in alien perversion. His humanity was profaned. His manhood was taken away." (p.192). Butler provides here an ironical comment on Peter's (one of the humans) imaginary manhood ideals being possibly annihilated by a queer alien act. This attests to the humans' perceived understanding of what is "natural or "unnatural".

The novel thematises this tension, as one of the first things that Jdahya attempts to do is to change form in order to accommodate Lilith: "Natural/unnatural "Is it hard for you to stay like this?" She asked. "Not hard. Unnatural. A muffling of the senses." (p.25) Seymour however notes the importance of not mixing up "nature" or "natural":

Indeed, at times “nature” or “natural” function in queer theory as synonyms for heteronormativity or political conservatism, while at other times they are benign synonyms for something like “character” or “status.” (Seymour, 2013, p.4)

In the case of Lilith describing Peter, it is indeed a critique of his own perceived vision of what is "natural" or "unnatural", hinting at the definition of heteronormativity.

Genova argues that, according to the perspective of Donna Haraway’s well-known Cyborg Manifesto, “to embrace a cyborg future is to relinquish the need for purity, origins, a self/other dualistic consciousness, and the fear of our evolutionary other.” (1994, p.18). While this essay does not take Haraway’s work as a basis for reflexion, the self/other dualistic thought in this quotation is interesting in a queer ecological perspective. Genova specifies following this suggestion that the point of Haraway’s Cyborg Manifesto is to avoid dualisms in Western culture by becoming something that is not quantifiable or definable by these same categories (1994, p.19).

The purpose of *Dawn* is however not necessarily to avoid dualisms altogether. In fact, Butler’s potentially essentialist views (M. Zaki, 1990) on men as inherently more violent than women do not avoid dualistic thought. It is rather, as I have argued, to provoke and change on whom the process of “othering” falls. Read in a feminist or ecofeminist perspective, the irony of the humans being subject to the treatment they themselves impose on non-humans might be lost in favour of addressing mainly the matter of forced reproduction. In a queer ecological perspective it paints though the possibility for a rather important debate on queerness and visions of nature. The scholars studying Butler’s *Dawn* however do analyse the importance that the choice of an African-American female character such as Lilith has on the narrative, dimension which stands as a central in this thesis as well.

3. Wider considerations of queerness: "othering" and reclaiming

Discussing queerness in environmentalism requires a more in-depth look into what the word "queer" encompasses within an ecological framework. "Queer" is foremost used in colloquial language today to label someone who is not cisgender or who is not heterosexual. While that holds true in the texts referred to in this memoire as well, scholars in queer ecology in particular seem to agree on that a queer approach primarily seeks to question compulsory heterosexuality but also, in their cases, the powers at work behind capitalism and mainstream environmentalism. Consequently, Seymour, Sandilands and Erickson all address extensively, in their respective introductions, the variety of topics and analyses that can emanate from a queer ecological point of view. To cite a few: heterosexism, overpopulation, speciesism, technology or racism, all with the aim to understand how the "queer" came to be perceived as "unnatural" and how this consideration is synonymous of an interconnectedness of various oppressions.

Although fields such as ecofeminism (Mallory, 2018 on the strengths of ecofeminism) or ecocriticism previously equally adopted an interdisciplinary point of view, queer ecology seeks to take a deeper examination of issues which other ecological fields have sometimes failed to address altogether (Gaard, 1997). It also hopes to illustrate how viewing the queer as central in environmentalism can bring much needed missing key thoughts to dismantle a capitalist ideology. Seymour's depicted use of the word "queer" already signals a potentially larger appreciation of what a queer approach can bring to environmentalism: "I employ "queer" as most queer theorists do: to describe that which questions the naturalness, and undermines the stability, of established categories of sex, gender, and sexuality." (Seymour, 2013, p.28).

The "natural" takes on a different meaning when mentioned in an ecological context. As addressed in the analysis of *The Handmaid's Tale's* compulsory heterosexuality, heterosexist views of nature have historically been used to undermine queer sexualities and describe them as "unnatural". However, these texts do not attempt to associate the "queer" with "culture" and therefore consider it in the same light that has divided humans and nature up until now in Western thought, which could be a potential path to take in order to validate queer sexualities. This would be a wrong direction to go towards, as Seymour emphasises: "[...] it is a mistake, rather than a radical provocation, for queers to embrace the charge of "unnaturalness" and align

themselves with culture, against nature.” (Seymour, 2013, p.5). Such a perspective would adopt the same contempt shown within capitalism towards anything non-human.

To deconstruct the idea of the “queer” as “unnatural”, queer ecology therefore needs to contend with the reasons why certain attributes or categories of humans have been considered “natural” or “unnatural”. In that respect, *Queer Ecologies* highlights the ties between racism, colonialism and views on reproduction by defining evolutionary narratives as being “self-congratulatory white heteronormativity” (Mortimer-Sandilands & Erickson, 2010, p.9) that has gotten to arbitrarily decide who was superior. Seymour also cites Noël Sturgeon who denotes an:

“anxiety about the successful reproduction of the white, middle-class, nuclear family form [, which] is presented as ‘normal’ and ‘natural’ without any critique of its complicity in the overconsumption of corporate products in an environmentally destructive system in which the toxins, waste, pollution and radiation produced are visited on the poor, the people of color, and the tribal peoples of the world” (“The Power Is Yours” 263). (Seymour, 2013, p.20)

The white middle-class nuclear family is therefore set as the only “natural” structure and all that do not comply would be considered “unnatural”. Furthermore, the responsibility of the West in terms of pollution and environmental destruction is diluted in favour of incriminating poor people and people of colour for reproducing all the while they suffer the most dire consequences of capitalism. The context of overpopulation being imputed to poor or racialised people is the one Andil Gosine chooses to base his research on (Gosine, 2010, p.149). Deciding to consider both homosexual sex and non-white reproductive sex as “queer acts”, Gosine thus adds that they threaten white heteronormativity:

Read against the heterosexist, racialized formations of nature engendered through these projects (the creation of national parks, etc.), heterosexual, potentially reproductive sex between non-white people and homosexual sex, I argue, threaten colonial-imperialist and nationalist ambitions. (Gosine, 2010, p.150)

He argues that he builds on the idea that certain bodies are constructed as toxic (as seen previously with Di Chiro), with the aim of discussing “the act of sex that makes them so” (p.151). Gosine explores this perspective by naming these acts “The Sex of Others” (p.151), of which I will use the word “others” as a reference to address the complicated status of both queer and non-white people. He posits the concern for perpetuating white reproduction as deflecting attention from the real causes of environmental degradation: capitalism, industrialisation and overconsumption (p.153).

This larger definition of queerness hence marks the interest of comparing two novels such as *The Handmaid's Tale* and *Dawn*. As seen in what has previously been discussed, both are conscious of the racist, sexist and environmentally destructive tendencies of Western patriarchal institutions. They also similarly decide to centre their narratives around the idea of forced reproduction, which is in both instances considered to be the only possible path to a better future. Even though, as has been concluded, the exclusion of the queer has more to do with ideas of what is "natural" and "unnatural" rather than simply the inability to reproduce. Still, this suggests that reproduction is generally recognised as being a focal point to address more than one form of oppression. It is therefore crucial to analyse how each of the novels responds to their more broadly environmentally, sexually and racially self-conscious depictions of future societies.

3.1 The "othering" of the queer and of the non-white individuals

The Handmaid's Tale is widely considered to be foremost a feminist or an ecofeminist dystopia. Atwood's aim was more precisely to raise awareness about the totalitarian direction the United States could potentially have been going towards in 1985 (Williams, 2017). Aside from the novel's direct references to sexist moral and societal rules derived from New England puritanism, the living conditions that the women have to bear with are however also partly inspired by American slave history and the African-American captivity narrative. The rebellious secret network of Gilead, for example, is called the Underground Femaleroad (p.254), alluding to the Underground Railroad that was used by enslaved African-Americans during the early 19th century. The women are also forbidden from reading or writing, have impersonal names and have very little freedom of movement, which is reminiscent of the status of former slaves. Offred's depiction of her room shows this lack of possessions and personal space: "My room, then. There has to be some space, finally, that I claim as mine, even in this time." (p.56). Offred mentions that she is a "refugee from the past" (p.235). It is then no stretch to consider Offred's character to be a speculative reenactment of a former black slave. Dodson goes as far as to say that "Atwood evokes background memories of this Puritanical exorcistic tendency to accentuate and develop her major American genre reenactment: the narrative of the enslaved black mother." (Dodson, 1997, p.67). She adds that we need to "empathetically descend to the Other's hell and then reawaken to the atrocities of the present." (p.67). The idea of confronting the problems of the present

at the time (in 1985), such as abortion rights that are an ongoing struggle for Offred to understand the importance of, to the horrors of what could be and is in Gilead stands as a central thematic in the novel.

Dodson using the word "Other" brings to mind Gosine's article that seeks to analyse the origins and the implications of "othering"². Plumwood's theorising of the master identity as well as Gaard's article equally delve into the matter of creating "others". *The Handmaid's Tale* thus purportedly presents itself as a warning of what could become of the United States under a totalitarian regime and how freedom to do certain things would be lost (Aunt Lydia's teachings, *The Handmaid's Tale*, p.30). Despite the clear recognition and representations of situations that former slaves in the United States, especially female slaves, have had to withstand, *The Handmaid's Tale* does not truly manage to dispel the feeling of "otherness" (standing for queer and non-white inclusion in discussions on reproduction and the future) as brought forth by queer ecology. Neither does it offer a fresh interpretation of the plight of an enslaved black mother, as Offred is not black, nor does her situation reflect it.

It is particularly interesting to note that Magedanz's article on captivity narratives mentions a very famous early Colonial account of the genre: the capture of Mary Rowlandson (2012, p.45). The white wife of a Puritan cleric, she is detained by Indians for eleven weeks during which she is cruelly treated and her story paints a pro-colonialist stance. It is therefore hard to consider Atwood's inspiration from the genre as reclaiming such a captivity narrative, considering the stereotype of the savage locals and especially the stereotype of the innocent white woman's suffering. Rather, it perhaps points to yet another example of the tendency of the West to appropriate others' culture and identity.

There are as well references to various foreign totalitarian regimes that are present in the epilogue critiquing Gilead, giving a uniform vision of the "foreign". The narrative hence continuously confines non-whites and non-Americans to the status of being "others", without ever escaping the very process of "othering". Pre-Gileadean times are present only through Offred's (distorted as she herself admits) memories and are yet remembered somewhat fondly, consequently given space to be interpreted as nostalgia for the past. Therefore, by centring the narrative on white reproduction, people of colour - and queers as I will argue - take a background to the main feminist and ecological issues brought forward. By not being directly involved in the narrative, except

² "othering": the word is not mentioned in the article as such, but I use this term to suggest that considering someone to be an "Other" is an ongoing process

for a brief encounter with Moira, the acknowledgement of queers and people of colour's even more dire situations serves only to indicate widespread suffering.

Memories of the past are seen to be central to the construction of Offred as a character. In fact, as Jung affirms, "Offred presents a more complicated relationship with her past. In fact, it is her contested relationship with the past that allows her to explore her relationship(s) with normative historicity." (Jung, 2017, p.9). Lessons taken from her past enable Offred to reflect on her present rights, or lack thereof. She is initially perceived as being unaware of the importance of her mother's fight for abortion rights or of her friend Moira's activism. She herself admits she was willingly detaching herself from such problems: "We lived as usual, by ignoring. Ignoring isn't the same as ignorance, you have to work at it." (*The Handmaid's Tale*, 1985, p.62). In this passage, Offred remembers when her and Moira had been disregarding what was happening to other women who were being killed and tortured at a time before Gilead ever existed. Offred shows to be conscious of her own act of ignoring, as she specifies that she was not ignorant but did not feel directly concerned: "[...] they were about other women, and the men who did such things were other men." (p.62). She adds: "We were the people who were not in the papers. We lived in the blank white spaces at the edges of the print. It gave us more freedom." (pp.62-63). She simultaneously illustrates how she did not feel implicated in such events and the illusion of freedom that the act of ignoring gave her. This passage can be read as another reference to slavery in addition to women's rights, as living in "blank white spaces" also means simply not existing, and in some way being shunned from History.

Similarly to how Offred and most women in Gilead are not allowed to read or write, she describes how they were already being previously left out and how they understood it meant something positive, even though they knew it should not have. In her memories, when women were being talked about it usually meant that they had already been the target of some malevolent act. Invisibility in society becomes endemic to the way women are treated and how they perceive themselves. Offred later saying that Moira scared the Handmaids by fleeing the centre supports that point, as the future Handmaids were already feeling more safe imprisoned within the walls built around them: "Moira was like an elevator with open sides. She made us dizzy. Already we were losing the taste for freedom, already we were finding these walls secure" (p.139).

Gilead furthers the idea of women being safer when invisible, which the protagonist is gradually made aware of. What is more, invisibility develops as a central theme in the novel: "From the point of view of future history, this kind, we'll be

invisible" (p.236). As Jung points out, "motherhood becomes estranged from mothers themselves and is forcibly redefined when women's lives are determined according to their reproductive status." (Jung, 2017, p.4). In a reproductive context, it is therefore suggested that motherhood takes on a different form for women, one in which "women's time becomes visible (Jung, 2017, p.4). Offred is conscious of this pressure:

Time has not stood still. It has washed over me, washed me away, as if I'm nothing more than a woman of sand, left by a careless child too near the water. [...] I am a shadow now [...] A shadow of a shadow, as dead mothers become. [...] Still I can't bear it, to have been erased like that. (p.236)

Queer people's non-reproductive status becomes therefore even more interesting. The Marthas, in their position as servants in households, are not intended to become mothers. They are described by Offred as wearing "dull green" (p.15), which paints a rather bland and forgetful picture. They are supposed to be forgotten, as their status is of little importance. If Moira had not originally been considered as a Handmaid, she would have either been sent to the Colonies (people living in the wastelands) for being queer, or sent off to become a Martha. Her ending up at Jezebels, a place hidden from most of the gileadeans attests to the inevitable invisibility of non-reproductive women. The Handmaids wearing red stresses the fact that it is their potential fertility which renders them visible.

In this light, the fate of people of colour itself is important to address. As white reproduction solely is wanted, what is their fate in Gilead? They are mentioned only once in the novel, during a television segment monitored by gileadean authorities: "Resettlement of the Children of Ham is continuing on schedule" (p.89). It is a reference to the Genesis. Cham, son of Noe, has a son Canaan who becomes a slave to his brothers' slaves, by means of a curse put on him by Noe himself. This passage is widely considered to be a reference to black people, who are then understood to be resettled, probably to the Colonies, or simply killed. This is hinted to be the case, as Offred expresses her surprise at the number of people being displaced at once (p.90). This suggests that once they are off on the ship, it is a very real possibility that the seafarers simply drop them overboard. Consequently, this fate also means that there are no non-white people in Gilead at all and that their stories are simply not told. They are, in a way, "othered" by the narrative. This novel is not about them, and it stands on their exclusion.

Despite Offred's character gradually becoming more aware of her former ignorance as to the fights for women's rights, the novel does not give space to her

queer friend Moira to actually advocate for herself and her convictions. As we are reading Offred's own semi-trustworthy interpretation and memories of former events, she is re-telling them differently from how they happened. Lee and Dow describe how the invisibility of lesbians is an aspect that is absent from Gaard's theorising of queer ecofeminism in her pioneer article and that needs to be addressed: "The omission of "lesbian" is thus not merely residual, but constitutive and prerequisite to the extent that it cannot be readily identified with that sexual access which defines "woman." (Lee & M. Dow, 2001, p.5). They expand on the argument that since Gaard alludes to nature and queers being feminised, she is primarily thinking of the stereotyping of gay men (Lynne Lee & M.Dow, 2001, p.4), as society's stereotyping of lesbians does not conform its idea of women's "nature".

Moira's place in the narrative is equally indecisive. Gilead's ways of dealing with women who do not fit their political agenda (Unwomen) is to send them to toxic wastelands or give them the option to work as Jezebels, Gileadean prostitutes, as Moira explains to Offred (p.257) when they happen to find each other during Offred's trip with the Commander to the Jezebels's headquarters. Offred previously mentions the conversation during which Moira announces to her that she likes women during which Offred reacts negatively at first. She also reproaches Moira that she wants to create a women-only utopia. Despite her saying this ironically, the novel gives her reason when Moira jokingly talks about Jezebels being a "butch paradise" (p.257). Moira also interestingly states that she is not a martyr, which adheres to Offred's vision of her as continuously fighting the system:

Well, shit, nobody but a nun would pick the Colonies. I mean, I'm not a martyr. If I'd had my tubes tied I wouldn't have even have needed the operation. Nobody in here with viable ovaries either, you can see what kind of problems it would cause. (p.257)

Offred's way of interpreting Moira's queerness and rebellious ways is to place her on an unrealistic pedestal that differs from her depiction of Moira as she was when they first met:

When I imagine the woman who wrote them, I think of her as about my age, maybe a little younger. I turn her into Moira, Moira as she was, when she was in college, in the room next to mine: quirky, jaunty, athletic, with a bicycle once, and a knapsack for hiking. Freckles, I think; irreverent, resourceful. (p.58)

Offred also recognises Moira's resourcefulness but rather as something inherent she possesses and is lucky to have, rather than something she's had to develop

perhaps because she doesn't fit society's standards for the "natural". She also trivializes Moira's activism by describing her as irreverent rather than someone who fights for just causes. The novel's consideration of Moira's bisexuality or lesbianism as a potential rebellion therefore also plays into the invisibilising of lesbians. In fact, this becomes the very essence of the Moira in Offred's memories: "If I were Moira, I'd know how to take it apart, reduce it to its cutting edges. I have no screwdriver but if I were Moira I could do it without a screwdriver. I'm not Moira." (p.176) Offred places herself as incapable of rebelling against the system and consequently elevates her friend to a position where she can do no wrong. This is present in her conclusion to seeing Moira again after so much time and yet realising how powerless she is as well. As Jung notes,

Offred talks most passionately about how "[she]'d like to say Moira blew up Jezebel's with fifty Commanders inside it" (250), not about becoming a mother again. The temporality of Moira's story encompasses the future, the present, and even the past." (Jung, 2017, p.12)

Moira becomes an immaterial guidance to Offred. She becomes someone who is above others which in turn does not give her materiality nor recognition for how deep the suffering of someone who is not acknowledged by a heteropatriarchal society is. Upon witnessing Moira's cynic observation on her dire living conditions, Offred realises that she is being unfair towards her friend. She nonetheless reiterates: "I don't want her to be like me. Give in, go along, save her skin. That is what it comes down to. I want gallantry from her, swashbuckling, heroism, single-handed combat. Something I lack." (p.257). Offred abandons any idea of understanding Moira's position and instead wishes her to be a martyr, which her friend precisely wishes to avoid. One passage in the novel is all that is given to Moira as a space to express herself, and that moment is also subjected to Offred's fragmented and selective memory as well as unconscious biases. Moira's lesbianism can therefore be seen as being an admittedly difficult aspect to represent well in the narrative. She is both being portrayed as a sacrificial lamb through Offred's vision of her and being subjected to the perverse games that the powerful men of Gilead indulge in. Her presence there is symbolic of the place that these institutions fail to give lesbians.

Memories of the past are also displayed as being important for serving as a reminder to allow the women to remember what freedom felt like: "You are a transitional generation, said Aunt Lydia. It is the hardest for you. We know the sacrifices you are being expected to make. It is hard when men revile you. For the ones who come after you, it will be easier. They will accept their duties with willing hearts. She did not say:

Because they will have no memories, of any other way.” (p.123) However, what Offred learns from the past only benefits her as a protagonist and does not provide the same advantages to the “Others” who are denied the space to exist on their own. In fact, the stories of others being told through Offred’s memories subjects them to her distorted recollections of them and allows for only her one-sided interpretation of their actions. I argue that they are therefore involved in a process of “othering” in which their stories are secondary and they still live within the margins, “in the blank white spaces”. At the same time, their own suffering is integrated to Offred’s narrative and used as most convenient to her personal development. She embodies at the same time the slave history that partly inspires her character’s suffering, the fight for women’s rights through memories of her mother and queerness through her friend Moira. Yet, these are not her fights, as she reminds the reader of when exposing her memories.

The use of a white female protagonist to embrace different social fights by recognising her former lack of understanding of them builds her strength as a character. It does not however give queers or people of colour more consistency as characters themselves. They are merely represented through a lens of suffering to emphasise what has led to the terrible situation that white women now have to go through. The necessity to untangle the meaning of the “natural” and “unnatural” adjectives and their use to oppress various categories of individuals (including white women) is therefore given up in order to thematise instead the idea of “what could happen to white people”. As questioning the nature/culture and other ecofeminist dualisms that lie at the very heart of *The Handmaid’s Tale* would need an appreciation of the interconnectedness of the “others”’s suffering in such categorising, the narrative thus does not encourage such reflections. The vertical analysis of dualisms as brought forth by Gaard and Plumwood, and supported by their successors in queer ecofeminism and queer ecology is therefore not enabled in the novel.

The process of “othering” these social fights is further pursued with the references to everything that is foreign to the characters. The novel references the Russian K.G.B. in the historical notes, as well as Romania regarding the banning of birth control, as inspirations for the regime of Gilead (p.313). The name “Jezebels” for example, referring to the women forced into prostitution in Gilead, is taken from the Hebrew Bible. Jezebel was said to be a Phoenician princess, who married Ahab, the King of Israel. In posterity, the name Jezebel was used to mean women who were promiscuous or controlling of men. This was in particular used to justify sexual violence on women during colonisation and slavery in the United States. The choice of the word

is therefore understandable in a novel that partly attempts to recreate similar situations. However, the use of a foreign name to describe women who supposedly do not fulfil their duties in Gilead further places the West, or at least white Christianity, in opposition to “others” once again. The women living as Jezebels are shown not to have had a choice in the matter, being forced to either live there or be sent off to the toxic wastelands.

This position can lead us to question the place given to religion in the narrative. Although it seems as though the enactment of strict principles derived from white Christianity is undoubtedly considered to have drastic implications for all involved, religion as an institution is not questioned. Offred herself, after ironically stating that the women are praying “to be filled: with grace, with love, with self-denial, semen and babies.” (p.200), feels compelled to clarify that she does not disavow Christian religious faith. She adds during a prayer of her own: “Though maybe it’s not Your doing; I don’t believe for an instant that what’s going on out there is what You meant.” (p.200). While the reason for Gilead’s existence is of course not faith itself but worshippers with a particular interpretation of the Old Testament, it is nevertheless interesting that the narrative takes care in breaking all ties between religious beliefs in Gilead and “real faith”. A queer ecological reading renders aware of the numerous connections between white Christianity and the oppression of “others” still today, to allow for certain branches of Christianity altogether to be posited as having nothing to do with morals such as those sustaining Gilead. An interview with Atwood from 2017 further actualises the debate on the influence of white Christianity on problematics discussing gender and the environment:

Of course faith can be a force for good and often has been. So faith is a force for good particularly when people are feeling beleaguered and in need of hope. So you can have bad iterations and you can also have the iteration in which people have got too much power and then start abusing it. But that is human behavior, so you can’t lay it down to religion. You can find the same in any power situation, such as politics or ideologies that purport to be atheist. Need I mention the former Soviet Union? So it is not a question of religion making people behave badly. It is a question of human beings getting power and then wanting more of it. (Williams, 2017, Atwood’s second answer)

This excerpt is an interesting interpretation of faith and power. However, considering atheist views today as being completely detached from the consequences of centuries during which colonised “others” and queers were perceived as lesser than and

“unnatural” and women were oppressed goes to show the difficulties Western societies face when attempting to overthrow these social and cultural tendencies.

While not disavowing religious faith would not particularly stand out by itself, in the light of queer ecology, the lack of inclusion of “others” in the novel suggests that their historical consideration as “unnatural” by white Christianity are purposefully left undiscussed. This highlights a wider problem with questioning institutions. It is not merely power as suggested, but also the history behind some organisations that needs revision. Queer ecology (*Queer Ecologies: Sex, Nature, Politics, Desire: Introduction*) insists on the centrality of deconstructing such institutions. This goes to sum up what is at stake when discussing power relations, racism, gender and the environment. While *The Handmaid’s Tale* acknowledges and criticises this interconnectedness, it appears to struggle with the perspective of giving space to colonised “others” to bring their own vision in how their status affected them. And when they are given the opportunity, the protagonist does not truly learn from them. The novel adopts instead their invisibilising or their positions as martyrs to illustrate what could come about in the United States. The “foreign” additionally uniformly serves as an example of what has gone wrong elsewhere in the past, while no lessons are taken from what other societies have also done better in the past.

The novel also enables a sense of nostalgia for pre-Gilead times that is present at some moments in the narrative, when Offred is allowed to smoke (despite cigarettes “polluting” the body) or when she gets an invitation from the Commander to visit him in his room in secret and he hands her a magazine: “Staring at the magazine, as he dangled it before me like fishbait, I wanted it with a force that made the ends of my fingers ache.[...] What was in them was promise.” (p.161). The novel therefore does not distance itself truly from what came before, but is also conscious of this fact. Offred is aware of the futility of caring about a magazine that she would not have previously even given a glance. Nevertheless, the sense of nostalgia is present throughout the narrative.

The Handmaid’s Tale thus decidedly remains feminist and ecofeminist in its narrative, in some ways mirroring queer ecology’s and queer ecofeminism’s own critique of early queer ecofeminism. The answer however does probably not lie in simply adding the queer and stir, as Gaard suggests is futile to do (Gaard, 1997). Gosine, in critiquing Gaard’s pioneer article, interestingly suggests a different way of discussing the interconnectedness of oppressions: “Thus, rather than think about a “coalition” of “different” interests (e.g., Gaard’s and others’ calls for feminists, queers,

and non-white people to forge alliances), might a queer ecological political project present a different kind of framework of resistance?" (Gosine, 2010, p.168) He suggests that a queer ecological perspective might differ from separate queer and ecological considerations of a given problem. He hints here at a more intersectional approach that would also consider how both entities enmesh in a particular context, thus giving an entirely new perspective. My question is therefore, does *Dawn* with its portrayal of a black female protagonist offer a different framework of resistance?

3.2 Looking into the future and reclaiming an afro-pessimistic past

"Can we imagine environmental-feminist coalitions that can forge a critical normative environmental politics (we all should live in a clean environment; we all should have the right to healthy bodies) that resist appeals to normativity?" (Di Chiro, 2010, p.203)

Resisting appeals to normativity within a context of ecological destruction is a fundamental component of *Dawn's* narrative. The future is both shining bright under the promise of a healed Earth, yet the past and present threaten the very possibility of a new beginning. The condition to go back to Earth is to mate with an alien species, which seems an impossibility to all of the humans, including Lilith. The position she occupies nonetheless differs from anyone else on the ship. She has been colonised as an "other" by the aliens. Her genes have changed from their intervention. She is neither entirely human, nor has entirely assimilated to the Oankali's society. In fact, she rebels against their authority until the very end, acknowledging her humanity above all else:

"Let them decide for themselves what they'll do. Otherwise people who decide later to come back will seem to be obeying you, betraying their humanity for you. That could get them killed. You won't get many back, anyway. Some will think the human species deserves at least a clean death." "Is it an unclean thing that we want, Lilith?" "Yes!" (p.246)

Lilith's fixation on cleanliness could be perceived as perpetuating an anti-toxic discourse on queer sexuality and yet, it seems to attest more to the coercion exercised by the aliens and the nature of what they are asking from the humans. This suggests that there is no possibility of having a clean environment, as Di Chiro wishes for, as long as the weight of the future lies heavily on female reproduction and on the production of the "perfect" child.

The Oankali's end objective is to create children who will be better than their parents, except that their value is not inherent but genetically induced: "'Our children will be better than either of us,' it continued. 'We will moderate your hierarchical problems and you will lessen our physical limitations. Our children won't destroy themselves in a war, and if they need to regrow a limb or to change themselves in some other way they'll be able to do it.'" (p.248). Lilith having been genetically modified by them sets her however as an "other" to every other human on the ship, disallowing her from belonging to a group: "She had had time to get used to the idea and to understand that she must struggle not against nonhuman aliens, but against her own kind." (p.149). Lilith insisting on the "nonhuman" side of the aliens suggests an equal distrust on Butler's side for humankind. She nevertheless possesses human intelligence, which is a trait that is admired by the aliens: "You are hierarchical. That's the older and more entrenched characteristic [...] When human intelligence served it instead of guiding it, when human intelligence did not even acknowledge it as a problem, but took pride in it or did not notice it at all..." (p.39). Humanity is therefore seen as having potential, intelligence is the very characteristic that could help humans overcome their hierarchical tendencies.

M. Zaki writes: "Butler believes that human nature is fundamentally violent and therefore flawed. The origin of violence, she suggests, lies in the human genetic structure, which is responsible for the contradictory impulses towards intelligence and hierarchy." (M. Zaki, 1990, p.241). Despite the essentialist aspect of this consideration regarding inherent violence, Lilith is not included in this general projection of humanity's downfalls. The choice to have a protagonist such as Lilith representing humanity and being its saviour thus stands out as meaningful. As she is "othered" by both the humans and the aliens, she is conferred a special status. It starkly contrasts with *The Handmaid's Tale* representation of black people, who are effectively invisible in the narrative, taken into account only for their suffering. Butler's decision to have an African-American character save humanity and be the reason for a possibly better future is therefore a major facet of *Dawn*. As Gosine (2010) hypothesises, non-white reproduction can be considered a queer act, seeing that it goes against a white heteronormative agenda, against the status quo.

As Osherow puts forward, the figure of Lilith in the science fiction genre tends to represent "alien" minorities, in this case African-Americans (Osherow, 2000). Lilith is originally considered to be a demon in Jewish tradition, which results in Butler possibly reclaiming bad names or features that have been wrongly attributed to women, in

particular black women. This stands particularly true in view of Gosine's article exposing the origins of discourses on overpopulation. Offred and Lilith differ on several levels. One is a necessary participant in the completion of white heteronormative and ableist eugenic aspirations. The other portrays the character who would threaten such an order simply by existing in the same narrative.

As has been noted when discussing women's invisibility in *The Handmaid's Tale*, time is an entity that is continuously slipping away from them. Offred's obsession for memories of the past indicates how she finds solace in the life she has already lived, realising that the one she has now places her on the margins. Lilith's relationship with time is different. The Oankali have kept her asleep for 248 years and awakened for 2 years: "How old was she? Twenty-six, she thought silently. Was she still only twenty-six? How Long had they held her captive?" (p.7). This means that Lilith is 28 at the present of the first novel. One of the particularities of the Oankali is that they increase longevity in humans, in order for them to be able to live way beyond their normal human lives. The past therefore gains a different meaning for Lilith than it does for Offred. She is rather encouraged to leave her past life behind, as it is meaninglessly short compared with her future life. Similarly to Offred, she had a son and a husband, both of whom however died in a car accident and not during the nuclear wars. This has its impact on the psyche of the character. Offred is pushed to relive her past, as the system in which she is now is directly responsible for her daughter and husband missing. Lilith, on the other hand, had already lost everything even before the destruction of the Earth. Her framework of resistance and her vision of the future thus differs vastly from Offred's.

The relationship between the past and the future animate Lilith. She embodies the uncertainty of what is to come and at the same time, she is meant to survive. Mann's article "Pessimistic futurism: Survival and reproduction in Octavia Butler's *Dawn*" is especially meaningful as a means to delineate Lilith's potential as leader of humanity:

In its deployment of Lilith as an agent working to subvert the forces of hierarchy – racism, misogyny and nationalism chief amongst them – the novel suggests that the human contradiction is not a necessary or inevitable destiny. It presents Lilith as a unique figure, a black mother who has known loss and who therefore understands the stakes of self-destruction. (Mann, 2018, p.62)

It is therefore Lilith's attributes who render her deserving of this role. The stakes of self-destruction, as Mann understands them, are both embodied by Lilith as a black mother

who has lost a child and are subsequently often referred to by the aliens as what humanity is most prone to. Lilith is thus considered to be prepared to undertake the saving of humanity. Mann further exemplifies her status, by referring to the dimension that Gosine evokes: overpopulation being an argument used against people of colour, especially women:

In its presentation of Lilith, the novel reframes notions of black maternity, figuring black female reproduction as essential, rather than ancillary or antithetical, to the project of human development. Despite these investments, the novel expresses its own anxieties about the potential for such world-making endeavours. Lilith herself remains dubious of her ability to re-make the human social order without patriarchal white supremacy. (Mann, 2018, p.62)

Indeed, Lilith is submerged by anxious feelings in the beginning of the novel:

She tried to imagine herself surrounded by beings like him and was almost overwhelmed by panic. As though she had suddenly developed a phobia - something she had never before experienced. But what she felt was like what she had heard others describe. A true xenophobia - and apparently she was not alone in it. (p..23)

Butler's meaningful use of the word "other" accentuates Lilith's status as an African-American woman. She had never experienced xenophobia and she is now tested to see how she responds to prejudices that have affected her, in particular. Mann's suggestion that Lilith is dubious of humanity's ability to function without a white supremacist order (2018, p.62) resonates more as a realisation that humanity has functioned following such a mode of thinking until now.

Butler acknowledges the difficulty of accepting this change, as she illustrates Lilith's fear by showing her uneasiness at stepping out of the cage she is held in: "She took a step backward, away from all the alien vastness. The isolation room that she had hated for so long suddenly seemed safe and comforting. "Back into your cage, Lilith?" Jdahya asked softly." (p.30). The reference to Lilith being more comfortable in a cage is a direct allusion to the slave narrative and a provocation to Lilith. This would not be understood in the same way by a white character, and Lilith is aware of the implications of Jdahya's comment:

She stared at him through the hole, realized at once that he was trying to provoke her, make her overcome her fear. It would not have worked if he had not been so right. She was retreating into her cage - like a zoo animal that had been shut up for so long that the cage had become home." (p.30)

Lilith alluding to her cage becoming a home is important to consider in light of Di Chiro's article on anti-toxic discourses which advocates for an embodied ecology. Indeed, she underlines the possibility of finding well-being and a healthy environment by reclaiming one's body: "The body can be reclaimed and refigured as home—that desired place of connectedness, family, and well-being—with full realization that the body/home is sometimes the site of exposure to just the opposite: abuse, hunger, polluted water and air." (2010, p.200). Such a vision of the body resonates immensely with Lilith's past and future. With this suggestion, Di Chiro offers a solution, a pattern of thinking that can be adopted, non-exhaustively, by queers, women or people of colour to reclaim their body despite what it has endured. *Dawn* encourages Lilith to step out of her comfort zone. The provocation on Jdahya's part highlights that Lilith cannot dwell on the past, whether her past as a mother or her past as a black woman. It would have been impossible for Lilith to lead in the context of white supremacy and yet she is chosen in *Dawn* to represent humanity, whence the pertinence of Mann's proposition: "pessimistic futurism" (2018).

Referring to Lilith's doubts about her own strength, Mann lays out the premise of his article: "These oscillations between certainty and scepticism exemplify what I term 'pessimistic futurism'. Pessimistic futurism couches the prospects of tomorrow in the uncertainties conditioned by the past and present." (Mann, 2018, p.62). He exemplifies his suggestion by alluding to the sexual encounter between Lilith, Joseph and Nikanj:

Both initially revile the creature but eventually come to rely on it for bodily pleasure and survival. During their first sexual encounter, Nikanj wraps its 'sensory arm' around Lilith's throat, 'forming an oddly comfortable noose' (Butler, 2001: 158). Through the noose, Nikanj has access to her brainstem, and by extension her central nervous system and the body it controls. In this position, it brings Lilith and Joseph unimaginable pleasure during sex. Yet the noose's 'odd comfort' paradoxically evokes its legacy as a symbol of sexual violence, murder and terror. This paradox, captured by Lilith's feeling of 'odd comfort', reveals the text's acute ambivalence. (Mann, 2018, p.62)

As Di Chiro suggests in her proposition for an embodied ecology, the body in *Dawn* is here similarly the place of past pain and yet the home to a possible pleasant present and future as well. Lilith's reluctance to consider the aliens' actions as healthy, despite their care for the environment, takes all its meaning in this excerpt. If advocating for a truly healthy environment, they would not be coercing the humans into taking part in sexual relationships against their will. However, *Dawn* also shows how impossible it is

for either Lilith or Joseph to avoid this fate. Subsequently, acknowledging that the body cannot be safe from outside influence yet can still be one's home is essential.

Mann considers that "pessimistic futurism" encompasses the need to incorporate and acknowledge what has happened in the past (2018). Jdahya explaining to Lilith how the Oankali interact with their memories testifies to that: "No, they'll recognise one another. Memory of a division is passed on biologically. I remember every one that has taken place in my family since we left the homeworld." (p.36). The aliens pass on their memories biologically, however this suggests that Butler considers the past of an African-American woman to be something that should also be passed on. Lilith cannot forget, but she must move on; her need to construct a better home for herself is mirrored by the genetic predisposition the Oankali have to move to a new place and start over. As Lilith embodies this past, she can now look into the future: "The novel presents life as an active and ongoing struggle rather than a passive state of being." (Mann, 2018, p.67). Her relationship with the past pushes Lilith to look into the future, which is something Offred does not do. As Mann notes, the unknown future is enticing to Lilith and this is what pushes her to survive (Mann, 2018, p.65). Offred seeing her life as already over shows that her memories embody a certain nostalgia about a past that is no more. Needless to say, Offred herself has hardly any possibilities of subverting the system of Gilead, however, as a character, she is also less aware than Lilith is and consequently more passive. At numerous places in the narrative, she is shown to have separated herself completely from her body, differing vastly from Lilith's reclaiming of hers.

Similarly to the idea of retaking one's own body and reclaiming power, Aunt Lydia in *The Handmaid's Tale* refers to a possible takeover:

Men are sex machines, said Aunt Lydia, and not much more. They only want one thing. You must learn to manipulate them, for your own good. Lead them around by the nose; that is a metaphor. It's nature's way. It's God's device. It's the way things are. (p.149)

Aunt Lydia's suggestion to the Handmaids of leading the men by the nose does not take on a meaning of reclaiming power here. Firstly, it directly hints at the fact that nothing can change and secondly, it encourages men and women to use each other and accept that there are essential differences between both genders that cannot be changed. Atwood's critique of essentialism here marks a possibly non addressed aspect of Butler's novel. M. Zaki conveys her possibly essentialist views in his article: "To accept Butler's notion that males are genetically (i.e., inherently) more violent than women is to

accept an essentialist view of human nature similar to that of some radical feminists, such as Julia Kristeva and Luce Irigaray.” (M. Zaki, 1990, p.241). It is true that there is a defiance on Lilith’s part towards men and a general distrust expressed regarding their behaviour in the narrative. However, putting entirely the weight of essentialism on Butler’s choice of a female protagonist would be adopting a simplistic approach. Lilith’s choice of waking women up first instead of men does resonate on some level with an inherent violent quality attributed to men on the author’s part. However, in a queer ecological perspective such as Gosine’s, Lilith is a character who grew up with both a female and a coloured person’s background. As such, she is exhibiting a different framework of resistance, one that she needs to apply to herself for personal protection. The potential of Gosine’s proposition is exemplified here, as Lilith being a black woman gives her a different perspective on gender relations than if she had been only a woman, or only black. *Dawn* therefore stands as evidence of the very potential that a queer ecological approach contains with regards to trying to create a better future. Without being conscious of the implications that systems have on individuals of various backgrounds, a queer ecological future would be impossible.

The visibility given to both queer and non-white individuals in *Dawn* stands as a fundamental difference with regards to *The Handmaid’s Tale*. The latter stands as seemingly more aware of feminist and ecofeminist issues, however, the former is undoubtedly more inclusive. This inclusiveness takes away the implicit thought that queerness has to irremediably suffer in a futuristic setting and that the dialogue would inevitably end in more pain. Butler is aware of this exclusion: “For Butler, there is a pervasive human need to alienate from oneself those who appear to be different-i.e., to create Others.” (M. Zaki, p.241). *Dawn* remediates this exclusion by responding to the lack of varied backgrounds in science fiction characters.

The idea of reproduction and the reproductive imperative being in the hands of beings who present various forms of queerness, whether in terms of sexual orientation or non-white reproduction highlights intersectional webs of oppression. Furthermore, it has the consequence of dismantling discrepancies behind heterosexist future thinking. In opposition to *The Handmaid’s Tale* where the oppression of queer beings enabled by capitalist patriarchal thinking is semi-present and lamented, but mostly seen through the oppression of women and the exploitation of nature, *Dawn* is decidedly queer in its form. Queer aliens not used to convey suffering but rather to exemplify multi dimensional manners of oppression, in which the implicit message is that white heterosexist thinking cannot help create a better future.

Dawn indeed permanently questions the reasoning behind every character's prejudices: "How, she wondered, did these people manage their sex lives, anyway? How did the ooloi fit in? Were its two arm-sized tentacles sexual organs?" (p.51). Her questions resemble the homophobia that the lesbian community typically has to bear with, the perpetual "how does it work?" for lesbian sexual intercourse. The narrative thus engages in questioning queers' presence and where they fit in discussions on the future, but also encourages the protagonist to be aware of her own shortcomings. Lilith does learn, as she herself knows how significant the pressure is for people to behave a certain way: "How much did sex determine personality among the Oankali? She shook her head. Stupid question. She did not know how much sex determined personality even among human beings." (p.82). Lilith's active thinking and reflecting on how to be better and do better despite the situation she is in is representative of a dimension that is absent from Offred's passive stance. While she would not necessarily have been as aware had she been put in a situation similar to Offred's, her behaviour indicates that the need for change is of the utmost importance. *Dawn* illustrates what is still happening now: the "othering" at play is indicative of the present and not only of a distant future, such as in *The Handmaid's Tale*. Butler's novel thus appears as intersectional, in the act of choosing a character perceived as an "other" and placing them within a decision-making dialogue for the future.

3.3 Resisting from the margins: non-white reproduction and non-reproductive sex

Lilith is an important character because she demonstrates that women can exercise resistance in complex ways from the margins, which can then empower women readers to find their own ways that resist gender-based oppression in complex ways in the real world. (Hurley-Powell, 2019, p.14)

In order to analyse the more in-depth implications of the two different approaches to inclusiveness in *The Handmaid's Tale* and *Dawn*, it is only fitting to consider Gosine's suggestion regarding the "Sex of Others". Instead of the queer being a background indicative of widespread generated suffering and sidelined in favour of greater concerns, as has been seen, *Dawn* reclaims sexual pleasure for everybody. A central theme that opposes both novels is therefore the relationship with the erotic. Erotophobia is prevalent in *The Handmaid's Tale*, where any sex act bears severe implications. Reproduction and desire are antagonistic, and even desire that would

result in white reproduction in compliance with societal norms is forbidden. The only non-monitored sex is the one potentially exercised by husbands and wives, however it is absent from the narrative. It is even hinted that it is far from being frequent or a norm. In contrast, *Dawn* accepts erotic pleasure as a main component of its narrative. Nikanj often asks Lilith about her pleasure, or asks if he can help her achieve it. Although the ooloi coerce the humans into partaking in sexual intercourse by means of changing their brain chemistry, pleasure is seen as something that needs to be present in an individual's life. The insistence on pleasure during intercourse also highlights a major difference between the two novels. In this respect, it is interesting to understand what Gosine defines as the "sex of others":

The sex of "Others" has long preoccupied the imaginations of social and economic stewards of Euroamerican culture. Prior to European colonization of the Global South, fantasies and anxieties about its "monstrous races" and lascivious "Wild Men" and "Wild Women" circulated in oral and written texts. (Gosine, 2010, p.151)

Equal to Di Chiro's reclaiming of the body as home (2010) is the necessity to reclaim desire. However, Gosine highlights how desire for non-white people is not merely a matter of experiencing it, but of reclaiming historical and social perceptions of the erotic of "others". Incidentally, Nikanj's first discussions with Lilith about pleasure comes from the idea of her "remembering" things she could not otherwise. He first suggests to Lilith a change in her brain chemistry in order for her to feel pleasure during sexual intercourse: "In the end, there will be a tiny alteration in your brain chemistry. [...] I would like to wait, do it when I'm mature. I could make it pleasurable for you then. It should be pleasurable." (p.75). When Lilith reacts badly to his proposition, as expected, he retaliates with another argument: "Would it be so bad to remember better? To remember the way Sharad did - the way I do?" (p.76). Sharad was a little boy that Lilith met during her detaining period. He was able to remember things in a way that Lilith could not:

She sang songs to him and he learned them instantly. He sang them back to her in an almost accentless English. He did not understand why she did not do the same when he sang her his songs. She did eventually learn the songs. She enjoyed the exercise. Anything new was treasure. (p.10)

Lilith is presented as having a thirst for knowledge. Just as Offred, she is not allowed to have paper or any kind of tool to write with: "Writing materials. Such small things, and yet they were denied to her. Such small things!" (p.63). The Oankali nevertheless insist

that she learns their way. Nikanj telling Lilith that she will be able to memorise as well as them after agreeing to his proposition suggests the importance, once again, of memories. Erotic pleasure is therefore seen as directly impacting an individual's well-being and awareness. Following the analysis of the past in regards to a black protagonist, the involvement of memories in this instance highlights that Lilith embracing the erotic could lead her to a better understanding of her position in this newfound society.

As Anderson writes in her article, "A queer ecocritical reading also takes into account not just homosexual behaviors, which are most closely associated with the term queerness, but also heterosex that does not necessarily result in procreation." (Anderson, 2011, p.53). In *The Handmaid's Tale*, therefore, the erotic is seen as a transgression, as it does not include reproduction. Offred however does not engage in what Gosine would call transgressive sex:

Nationalism is always predicated on racialized heterosexuality, as the survival of nations demands the reproduction of bodies. It is for this reason that women have been regarded in nationalist discourses as objects of both reverence and slippage; they are biological reproducers of the nation, but any sexual transgressions on their part (lesbianism, interracial sex) mean that they also threaten its survival (Anthias, Yuval-Davis, and Cain 1992)." (Gosine. 2010, p.156)

Offred lives in a society that thrives on nationalist discourses. Subsequently, taking part in sexual relations outside of what is permitted would be the greatest of transgressions. The protagonist fully embrace and revels in the potential rebellion deriving from forbidden acts:

There is something powerful in the whispering of obscenities, about those in power. There's something delightful about it, something naughty, secretive, forbidden, thrilling. It's like a spell, of sorts. It deflates them, reduces them to the common denominator where they can be dealt with. [...] So now I imagine, among these Angels and their drained white brides, momentous grunts and sweating, damp furry encounters; or, better, ignominious failures, cocks like three-week-old carrots, anguished fumbblings upon flesh cold and unresponding as uncooked fish. (p.230)

Offred's use of words such as "naughty", "secretive", "forbidden" or "cocks" also highlights how her desire to transgress translates to sexual desire. As has been discussed before, the erotophobia in Gilead drives Offred to construct her relationships

with those around her following this measure as well. For example, her encounter with the Guardians highlights how she feels sexually empowered, as she knows that these men yearn for something that is forbidden to them. However, her sense of what is transgressive does not necessarily adhere to what the society of Gilead inherently perceives to be transgressive behaviour.

Although sex for the Handmaids is obviously forbidden to them outside of the Ceremony during which only the Commander and the Wife are allowed, Offred never engages in lesbianism or interracial sex. Yet those are the acts that Gosine perceives to be transgressive, in light of a nationalist discourse. Even though the society of Gilead seeks to control the population through erotophobic measures, it mostly serves as a way to avoid births that are not in compliance with what is preached by the leaders. Offred thus considers ways of transgression that do not truly take anything away from the regime. She even adheres partly to some of the ideas conveyed by the society, notably that sex without love is somehow inherently devalued. When she remembers Luke, her husband, she thinks about how uncertain she felt about their future: "I was nervous. How was I to know he loved me? It might be just an affair. Why did he ever say just? Though at that time men and women tried each other on, casually, like suits, rejecting whatever did not fit." (pp.56-57). She imposes a clear judgement on people who value sexual compatibility or who engage in regular sexual relations with no serious relationship in mind. Although this extract is from her past life, before the regime, it can be seen that Offred does not change her way of thinking later on, in her relationship with Nick. She first feels interest for Nick, the Guardian assigned to their household:

Nick walks in, nods to all three of us, looks around the room. He too takes his place behind me, standing. He's so close that the tip of his boot is touching my foot. Is this on purpose? Whether it is or not we are touching, two shapes of leather. I feel my shoe soften, blood flows into, it grows warm, it becomes a skin.
(p.87)

Offred's allusion at a metaphorical erection of her shoe shows that she yearns for a physical connection with Nick. Her focus on sexual arousal is illustrated again during the first Ceremony with the Commander:

It has nothing to do with passion or love romance or any of those other notions we used to titillate ourselves with. It has nothing to do with sexual desire [...] Arousal and orgasm are no longer thought necessary [...] They are so obviously recreational." (p.101)

Although Offred centres her thoughts around arousal and orgasm, she addresses them within a context where she more broadly considers them to be deriving from passion, love or romance. This shows that her need is perhaps more to experience these feelings again and does not realise that she is not necessarily driven by the idea of committing a transgression. Yet, she still finds what she thinks is transgression enticing, as she feels empowered when the Commander asks her to his room without his wife's knowledge (p.145). There therefore seems to be a confusion in Offred's mind between what Gilead forbids (any sexual transgressions), her own desires (love, passion and romance) and what can be described as a basic need for human touch (sexual arousal, orgasm). She herself testifies to this confused state: "You can think clearly only with your clothes on" (p.149). While *Dawn's* Lilith is always conscious of what she is about to engage in, sexuality-wise, Offred's behaviour is seen as impulsive and careless about the possible consequences of her desires. Her consideration of sexuality can even be seen as essentialist, as she describes a moment in the past:

The summer dress rustles against the flesh of my thighs, the grass grows underfoot, at the edges of my eyes there are movements, in the branches, feathers, fittings, grace notes, tree into bird, metamorphosis run wild. Goddesses are possible now and the air suffuses with desire. (p.157-158)

Given that she associates her desires for a sexual experience with a metaphorical liberation of nature, she adheres to a cultural ecofeminist's consideration of women and nature. While this is not inherently problematic, it translates into her vision of men as well. Offred is still driven by the sexist mentality of having power over other women who are just as bad off as she is: "Also: I now had power over her, of a kind, although she didn't know it. And I enjoyed that. Why pretend? I enjoyed it a lot." (p.167). This is also present in one of Moira and Offred's interactions pre-Gilead. Offred accuses Moira of wanting to "create Utopia by shutting herself up in a women-only enclave" (p.177). She is answering in allusion to a fight they were having regarding Offred's start of a relationship with Luke while he was still married. Offred does not see the problem in her actions, while Moira suggests that since the power relations between men and women are not equal, it would mean that Offred is over-stepping a virtual boundary between women. An allusion to Offred's lack of compassion for other women's situations was also seen in her discussion with Luke on the word "sororise" (p.17). She clearly states that she did not see the need to construct different relationships between women, as testifies her disdain towards Moira who, in her own words, decided "to prefer women" (p.176).

Offred is overly concerned with what men think of her, even in a context where this is of no importance. When the Commander takes her to Jezebels and gives her a sexy outfit to wear, she worries about how Nick will perceive her: “I can see Nick looking at me through the glass, He sees me now. Is it contempt I read, or indifference, is this merely what he expects of me?” (p.241) In a similar instance, Offred exhibits once again worries over how she perceived by him when they finally get to have sex:

He says nothing, just looks at me, unsmiling. It would be better, more friendly, if he would touch me. I feel stupid and ugly, although I know I am not either. Still, what does he think, why doesn't he say something? Maybe he thinks I've been slutting around, at Jezebel's, with the Commander or more. It annoys me that I'm even worrying about what he thinks. (p.269)

She is conscious of her own worries being futile, yet they still take over. Although her character grows because she realises the ways in which she has not been actively defending and advocating for women beforehand, she is still worried about what a heteronormative and patriarchal society tells women to care about.

Gosine shows how manners of sexual expression such as the one present in *Dawn* would however provoke the mentality of such a white heteronormative system:

Although not much is about sex or sexuality in Malthusian work, identification of overpopulation as the cause of poverty and environmental degradation necessarily implicates the people said to be engaged in dangerously overproducing themselves: non-white men and women living in the Global South engaged in heterosexual sex. Sex itself, then, is the act of destruction. (Gosine, 2010, p.154)

Lilith engaging in reproductive sex therefore sets her in the position of someone who commits an act of destruction. This once again can remind of Jdahya's comment on the humans' potential for self-destruction. Lilith though still engages in sexual acts with Nikanj, while knowing the potential weight they bear. In fact, it ends up impregnating her, creating offspring that defies a white heteronormative society.

Aside from Offred being a woman and therefore being subjected to the terrible treatment reserved to them in Gilead's society, her character is not subversive in itself, unlike Lilith. This results in decisions her character makes not being a true defiance to the system. As Gosine points out:

Not only is death the inevitable consequence of both forms of queer sex, but sex itself is seen as failure of its initiators to civilize; sex is not a conscious decision

to seek out erotic pleasure, but rather the consequence of unfettered desire.” (Gosine, 2010, p.164)

Offred’s sexual encounters with Nick do not disavow the functioning of a world responding to white compulsory heterosexuality. The potential side-effects of their physical relationship would, on the contrary, respond to the very demands of the system: white reproduction, which Gilead sees as “clean” and desired. There is indeed an unfettered desire in the society of Gilead, but it is recognised as human need by both of the characters as well. Death is therefore not the consequence for either of them. However, Lilith’s refusal to let go of humanity even though she realises its deep flaws because her own experience as a black female character, lets her understand that there is no perfect society that does not recognise historicity and its own flaws. And consequently, her status is something she must embrace as a potential subversiveness, which she does. Offred, on the other hand, feels that she cannot escape from what humanity is doing to her. She is still mentally imprisoned by some of the same ideas that have given the foundation for the society of Gilead.

Lilith’s sexual pleasure is therefore effectively transgressive by itself, more so than Offred’s: “[...] if black female bodies are ‘tethered representationally and ideologically’ to their reproductive capacities, what opportunities lie in exploring the latent potential in those assumptions?” (Mann, 2018, p.67) It is once again useful to consider these acts in the perspective of Di Chiro’s embodied ecology:

Thinking of the body as home/ecology, especially in consideration of those bodies, communities, and environments that have been reviled, neglected, and polluted, provides an apt metaphor and material grounding for constructing an embodied ecological politics that articulates the concepts of diversity, interdependence, social justice, and ecological integrity. (Di Chiro, 2010, p.200)

Lilith’s awareness about the treatment her body survives not defining her as a person speaks of such a perspective. Juxtaposed with the irrational sexism exhibited by other characters, the reader can only understand the importance of her reclaiming her body: “Strip and screw your Nikanj right here for everyone to see, why don’t you. We know you’re their whore! Everybody here knows!” (p.241). Despite being conscious of how others perceive her acts, Lilith knows that in order to survive, this is a necessity. She also realises that her body will not be tainted by such acts. Her engaging in a pleasurable act (even though as seen before, it is also uncomfortable for her) thus shows that she has decided to rise above what white heterosexist thinking might forbid her from doing.

A popular adage that is mostly pushed onto women consists of saying that one's body is a temple. The aim of considering the female body as a temple is to encourage women to guard their virginity, or at the very least to not "give" themselves away to anyone. Firstly, such thinking encompasses the idea that the female body can be tainted, spoiled. Secondly, it places it as a resource, as something that can be gifted and used, but never taken away once given. Once the female body has been subject to sexual violence, this saying advances the idea that nothing can be done and that it is irremediably defiled. Going against such sexist beliefs testifies to *Dawn's* feminism. It equally represents an opportunity for readers to introspectively consider their own limitations. If Lilith had been a white character, this meaning would have been less impactful, as the past may not have weighed as much in her decisions. But as the reader is aware of Lilith's racial background and of Nikanj's queerness, the strength of her actions bear more significance. Lilith, as an African-American woman, is therefore indeed resisting from the margins, as Hurley-Powell would put it (2019).

4. Conclusion: building a queer ecological desire

“Queer fictions and theory are known for their cynicism, apoliticism, and negativity, such that “queer environmentalism” sounds like an oxymoron.” (Seymour, 2012, p.2)

In this memoire, I foremost explored the articulation of the queer in *The Handmaid's Tale* and *Dawn*. I started off with ecofeminist and queer ecofeminist analyses of dualistic thought in *The Handmaid's Tale* that allowed me to contextualise my research within the scope of my theoretical background. This search led me to state that erotophobia, as theorised by Gaard, is institutionalised in *The Handmaid's Tale*. The fear of the erotic and the oppressive monitoring of women's sexuality furthermore was found to be deriving from a religious and heterosexist vision of nature. This vision in turn was used by the men in power to categorise individuals following a natural/unnatural dualism. Similarly, medication, pills or material that could have helped especially with women's health was equally forbidden. Health was thus found in this research to become secondary to the performance of one's sexual or gender roles.

The overarching concern over a “rightful” form of sexuality was then determined to be tightly linked to what Di Chiro described, in a queer ecological reading, anti-toxic discourses to be. The important thematic of toxicity and of polluted female bodies in *The Handmaid's Tale* was then shown to possibly criticise the consideration of nature becoming perverted by toxic chemicals. Queer characters and other non-conforming individuals were shown to be particularly impacted by such thinking, as systematic erotophobia and the consideration of certain bodies as “unnatural” targeted them more than anyone else. All of this was discovered to be perpetuated under the guise of an imperative to reproduce. The eugenic discourse in Gilead was however found to testify against the rejection of the queer being linked to a non-reproductive aspect only.

An ecofeminist and queer ecological approach was then used to discuss dualistic thought in *Dawn*. I considered *Dawn* to be attempting a reversal of usual roles, by putting humans in the usual place occupied by animals. Furthermore, the protagonist Lilith was encountered to be a victim of the process of colonising of “others”, as theorised by Plumwood (1993). Butler's choice of an African-American female protagonist in a narrative discussing the future was revealed to resonate with that process. Representing the quest for a new identity characterising the slave narrative, she was also constructed as an “other” by both the alien and the human characters in

Dawn. Lilith's plight then helped identify a more general discourse on "others" within the narrative that denounced our rejection of different species.

Using a queer ecological perspective, this research then determined *Dawn* to be a critique of the paradox that is the consideration of the queer as being against nature. It firstly illustrates the irrationality at play that enables the enactment of such thinking and secondly directly addresses the perceived perversity of queer sexuality. These biases were then found to be related to what Gosine (2010) defined as white nation-building, which suggested that non-white heterosexual and homosexual were considered to pose a threat nature. Their "othering" was subsequently shown to be associated with the lack of recognition of sexual acts as pleasurable. *Dawn*, with its acceptance of the erotic, then embodied again the refusal of the queer against nature. The purpose of the narrative was however recognised to be more a critique of white heteronormativity than a wish to avoid dualisms altogether.

These findings led to an acknowledged necessity of having a wider understanding of queerness. Drawing from queer ecology's critique of racism, colonialism and proscriptive reproduction, I once again focused on the idea of a white heterosexist agenda. The setting of one form of family and one possible performance of sexuality as "natural" was noted to be criticised by both novels. *The Handmaid's Tale* was however found to be less conscious of the process of "othering" certain categories of individuals than *Dawn* was. Non-white people were found to be absent from the narrative, which, while justified by the premise of the novel, I considered to be less self-reflexive than the inclusion and agency of non-white people in *Dawn*. Furthermore, the depiction of the sole queer character in *The Handmaid's Tale*, Moira, existed almost uniquely through Offred's memories, consequently giving her an immateriality. Offred's vision of her as a martyr further allowed for an "othering" of queer people from discussions on the future. While women were justly depicted as suffering, *the Handmaid's Tale* did not engage in the same way as *Dawn* with the interconnectedness of all oppressions.

The thesis then focused on the development of the protagonists' different frameworks of resistance. Lilith's character, being an African-American female, worked on a more intersectional level, as brought forth by queer ecology. This particularity was illustrated using Mann's consideration of "pessimistic futurism" (2018). This concept suggests that Lilith, partly because of being considered an "other", developed her thinking in a way that acknowledged the difficulties of the past (as both a woman and an African-American), while still looking into the future. This suggestion was then

compared with Di Chiro's suggestion of an embodied ecology (2010), where the body is both the place of past pain and a possibly pleasurable future. *Dawn* was finally considered to be more self-reflexive on the place of "others" than was *The Handmaid's Tale*. Considering the body to be the place of both pain and pleasure, bodily transgressions were then analysed, under the form of non-white sex for Lilith and non-reproductive sex for Offred. This was seen to boil down to a need to "reclaim" the imprisoned body. Offred was however shown to be still worried about sustaining a certain form of heteronormativity, and her acts to be less transgressive than Lilith's. While the possible consequence to Offred's acts was still aligned with a white heteronormative vision, Lilith's acts were transgressive by nature, as well as in their possible physical consequences (a non-white child). It is therefore most suitable to consider *The Handmaid's Tale* and *Dawn* to be different feminist narratives, one more ecofeminist and the other one more in par with queer ecology.

This memoir therefore explored prescriptions about sexuality and gender, examining how we came to think of nature as source of normative behaviour. Throughout, it came to the idea that how we react to the most intimate acts can project our desires and our capacity to reflect on who we are and what kind of future we want to live in. One of the most important legacies of queer ecology, in the form it is understood in this memoir, is the almost insistence with which heterosexism impacts all areas of our lives. Both novels portray this prevalence, albeit with different conclusions. *The Handmaid's Tale* bathes in metaphors revealing women and nature's similar treatments, illustrating how women are sometimes treated as no better than animals. *Dawn* reflects on such treatment of animals and questions the most silenced and controverted impacts of white heterosexism. The literature discussed in this memoir thus foremost showed the importance of intersectionalism. In order to tackle problematic use and consideration of nature, as well as the oppression of certain individuals, we need to observe from different perspectives. This memoir, by using an intersectional and varied theoretical framework, hopefully helped illustrate this need.

In order to conclude on a more hopeful and reflexive note, it is worth to speculate on the possibility of applying a queer ecology. Seymour mentions above her frustration with a tendency in queer fictions to express negativity or cynicism regarding environmentalism. The awareness and concern for the future that transpires from *Dawn's* narrative makes sure that it does not in the least "[...] leave the health and future of the planet looking like a frivolous concern." (Seymour, 2013, p.6). Seymour's analyses of queer fictions want to show that queer environmentalism can exist and

welcome positive reflections. She deplors the lack of such interest among queer theorists: "It seems, then, that many queer theorists have reached a point at which they cannot imagine a queer futurity and, by extension, where they cannot imagine environmentalism, much less a queer one." (Seymour, 2013, p.8). That would seem to be the general thought process adopted by *The Handmaid's Tale*. True, it is not considered to be a queer fiction and thus the fact that it does not concern itself with queer worries is unsurprising. It nonetheless chooses to address queer sexuality in a context with the imperative to reproduce. Seymour's fears come true: the novel fails to imagine a queer future. Indeed, as environmentalism embodies the fight for the future, it stands as a necessary component of any useful reflection on the latter. *The Handmaid's Tale* portrayal of Moira shows her as someone who is doomed to suffer. This tendency of which the novel is merely an example of stresses the importance of having a queer ecological desire; a will to include the queer in the future and explore the possibilities that this inclusion might mean.

Di Chiro's embodied ecology asks, once again, the most essential questions: "And, how might we develop a more proactive (rather than polluted) politics that argues for the integrity, security, and health of bodies, homes, families, and communities without reproducing the eugenics discourse of the "normal/natural"?" (2010, p.210) *Dawn* can be seen as trying to accomplish that, by mobilising the importance of healthy bodies and of communities, while including characters who embody what is not considered "normal/natural". The Oankali sustain a eugenics discourse, yet they do so no more than humanity does. Our perhaps initial horrified reaction at what they advocate for and force onto the humans is telling of how numb we have become to real-life instances where similar discourses take form. The general tries on Nikanj's part to be more tolerant and understanding of the humans also sheds even more light on the intolerance of the humans in the narrative.

Dawn's strength however lies in its protagonist. Lilith is a character we can identify with. We do not know nor need to know much about her past. Her past family is seldom mentioned and she is aware of the fact that this is a new beginning for her. She never stops fighting for the future, which places her as an irrevocable advocate for queer ecological desire:

She would have more information for them this time. And they would have long, healthy lives ahead of them. Perhaps they could find an answer to what the Oankali had done to them. And perhaps the Oankali were not perfect. A few fertile people might slip through and find one another. Perhaps. *Learn and run!* If

she were lost, others did not have to be. Humanity did not have to be. (p.248)

The inclusion of the queer in a narrative discussing the imperative reproduce is also telling of a wish to involve the queer in discussions regarding children:

Despite the potential of his approach to assemble a new queer coalition of negation, it fails to engage those queers who despise pro-life fascism yet desire to have children. Moreover, in its single-minded attack on pro-life, it offers nothing toward re-imagining queer involvement with life's creative and multiple becoming. (Chisholm, 2010, p.377)

Chisholm expresses here the need for the queer to be involved in the positive discussions on life's endless possibilities. As Alaimo states, queer desire has been often situated "within an entirely social, and very human, habitat." (2010, p.51). Furthermore, *Queer Ecologies* expands on the ways in which queers have been wrongly perceived as "denaturalising" natural spaces. *The Handmaid's Tale* offers, in this respect, an adequate portrayal of such thinking. Moira desperately seeks to find her place in a society where she is not wanted. Even though the queer has been contained and associated with urban spaces, queers are now expelled from the city, into the toxic wastelands. The novel exemplifies how the adjective "unnatural" is wrongly attributed to queerness. The obsession that Gilead has with religion and ancient visions of nature and the natural shows a complete lack of concern for any kind of ecological future. This goes to show how pervasive our need to make use of the "natural/unnatural" for our own gain is, yet without reflecting on what we even mean by "nature". Unfortunately, a society such as Gilead is not necessary in order to enact similar capitalist views, as our society attests to.

The aim of the memoir was however not to offer other interpretations of nature or the "natural/unnatural" but to uncover inherent biases that dystopias might have towards the portrayal or the even the presence of non-conforming individuals. Whether non-conforming in the ways they express their sexuality or in their aspirations for the future as characters who yet do not belong in the future in the collective mind, *The Handmaid's Tale* and *Dawn* both provided this opportunity. More specifically, they also offered the possibility to think about ecological matters and sustainability under the perspective of social inequalities. By showing how the construction of certain individuals as "others" is interrelated with our lack of care for nature, this thesis helped ground the importance of discussing the interconnectedness of oppressions. The idea of "othering" remains as a central concept not to forget in order to create a queer ecological desire. It is, after all, about *desiring* the inclusion of everyone who is alive on

this planet in our vision of the future: "Specifically, I show that queer values—caring not (just) about the individual, the family, or one's descendants, but about the Other species and persons to whom one has no immediate relations—may be the most effective ecological values." (Seymour, 2013, p.27). Such care is possibly the solution that would allow for everyone to be able to consider their own future within different communities in an enticing way.

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