Representations of Identity in Three 21st-Century Dystopian Novels: Omar El Akkad's *American War*, Naomi Alderman's *The Power*, and Paolo Bacigalupi's *The Windup Girl*

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1. Introduction

This doctoral dissertation seeks to analyze the depictions of social identity within a new trend in contemporary dystopian fiction: the neoliberal dystopia. The critical tradition of the dystopian genre has established observable common tendencies, mainly the portrayal of negative, oppressive societies set in the future as a critical commentary of current perceived social misdeeds and threats. However, in the twenty-first century, society's intellectual framework has shifted, and current dystopian fiction also reflects such changes. Contemporary society is characterized by the rise of the age of globalization and the faltering of liberal democracies in which privatization, consumerism, and neoliberal politics now prevail. From the post-9/11 War on Terror to massive economic recessions, the expansion of alt-right ideologies, the Covid-19 pandemic, and Russian incursion and threats against Europe and NATO, Western society and progressivism seem to be faltering. This dissertation contends that twenty-first-century dystopian fiction no longer focuses on depictions of classical totalitarian regimes or critical dystopias with more hopeful outcomes. Instead, contemporary authors now identify other social currents that have influenced recent events, namely, neoliberalism.

Furthermore, the dissertation's objective is to study the confluence of social identity formation within contemporary dystopian novels. Neoliberal practices and dystopian societies both suppress or mold individual identity to support their systemic and ideological structures. Although a key aspect of neoliberalism is the advancement of supreme individuality, critics consider this more so a capitalist fallacy that lures the individual into promoting and sustaining the power of the one percent. Classical dystopian fiction erased such fallacies by rigidifying its citizens' social identity, so that the only possible group that they can identify with is that which enhances the dystopian system, thereby suppressing any rebellious identification. This dissertation attempts to examine the representations of social identity within neoliberal

dystopias to argue that they provide an illusion of individuality and freedom but only permit conformity via group membership and identification with the dystopian system.

In order to maintain ideological domination, social identity is constructed through binary opposition with the foundation of in-groups (us, the self)—considered aspirational and advantageous—and out-groups (them, the other)—detested and worthy of hostility. This incites individuals to strive to embody characteristics of the in-group and become members of a collective and, thus, achieve a superior social status. Thus, the subject must identify with and promote dominant ideological practices and values (those pertaining, and attributed to, the in-group) while rejecting any undesirable characteristics (encompassed by those belonging to out-groups), which are considered threats to the dominant ideology.

The interaction between social identity and neoliberal dystopia leads to the main area of analysis within this dissertation: the relationship between the individual and society in the formation of social identity. Based on Michel Pêcheux's terminology, this thesis considers three mechanisms of identification—counter-identification, identification, and disidentificaion—that influence the characters' social identity, progression, and final treatment within their respective dystopian societies and can be encountered in the three novels under examination: *American War* (2017) by Omar El Akkad, *The Power* (2016) by Naomi Alderman, and *The Windup Girl* (2009) by Paolo Bacigalupi. This dissertation aims to analyze the ways in which the characters of the three contemporary dystopian novels under examination construct their social identities and are positioned within said dystopian societies according to their belonging within limited and rigid groups.

Ultimately, the main objective in this dissertation is to examine the ways in which social identities are limited and rigidified within neoliberal dystopian fiction so that there is no space for a rebellion or counter-identification. This society solely allows a positive identification that enables it to continue. To create true social change, the character must disidentify and escape

the traditional social paradigm, which reflects a moment of ambiguous hope for change. The three novels examined, thus, were chosen because they provide clear examples of both neoliberal dystopias and of these three different mechanisms of identification.

Counter-identification is the key mechanism in the shaping of Sarat, the protagonist of *American War*, which centers the depiction of her social identity with the neoliberal dystopian society that promotes a Southern nationalism within the United States. Throughout the novel, the construction of Sarat's social identity has been rigid and limited to that of a radicalized Southern nationalist. After years of torture, this social identity is de-constructed and fragmented as violence and institutional power manage to dehumanize her. As such, she seeks vengeance and agency through a counter-identification with the neoliberal dystopian society. However, instead of gaining status and a more powerful social identity, her counter-identification results in failure as she does not achieve sustainable change within the United States. Human individuality and rebellious agency are then incompatible with the novel's neoliberal, dystopian society. Ultimately, Sarat self-destructs while trying to negotiate and implement change, and her social identity is annihilated in favor of maintaining the social status quo. Thus, this dissertation attempts to show how neoliberal dystopia does not permit any opposing social identity as it successfully manages to suppress incompatibility or threats to its system.

Identification with the neoliberal dystopian system is best exemplified in *The Power*, which portrays the reversal of patriarchy into an equally oppressive masculinist matriarchy where women gain supremacy without enacting qualitative change to the system's ideological structure. Some characters in the novel, such as Margot and Allie, identify with their oppressors to become so themselves, thus acquiring successful social identities and reaching elevated status within the dystopia. Others, such as Roxy and Tunde, continue to counter-identify with society and are suppressed and forgotten. The ending of *The Power* also portrays the maintenance of the status quo within neoliberal dystopias, regardless of the multiple opportunities to resist and

change its power structures. The social identities of Margot and Allie shift and are constructed to maintain and acquire individual relevance and privilege as they identify with the neoliberal dystopian hierarchy-enhancing forces. Characters such as Roxy or Tunde, who seek equality and parity by acting as hierarchy-attenuating forces, thus counter-identify with the collective and their social identities are oppressed and annihilated.

The Windup Girl exemplifies the mode of disidentification which this dissertation associates with the notion of *tabula rasa*: a wiping clean of the slate to create a new society. This disidentification, however, is only achieved via a posthuman figure, Emiko, who is capable of functioning outside of the social paradigm and conventions of humanity and can, thus, successfully construct an opportunity for change. In this case, the posthuman figure is a symbol of ambiguous hope: Emiko successfully disidentifies with society and constructs a social identity independent from the dystopia, yet the blank slate does not inherently provide a utopian promise, as the mistakes of humans can be repeated by posthumans or worse. Bacigalupi, though, does allow a space for ethical posthumanism which moves away from the concept of humans as monolithic, anthropocentric figures, and creates a fluidity and multiplicity that does not require a rigid, limited social identity. Emiko, a posthuman figure, can create an alternative to the neoliberal dystopian society that is characterized by its nativist discrimination, destruction of nature, and commodification of bodies. As such, she is able to liberate herself from her inferior social identity and position in the natural order with her individual power.

This dissertation analyzes how the novels' fictional characters evolve and adapt, and how their social identities are constructed and influenced by their respective environments, especially by their bodies, the dystopian ideologies, and institutional and individual power. Examined according to their materiality, these provide the three main thematic axes within the novels under analysis that influence the social identity of the narratives' protagonists in relation to the neoliberal dystopian society at large. The body is of a complete concrete nature: a physical

manifestation of one's material conditions. It is of special interest when examining social identity because it acts as a referent for identification as a clear marker of group belonging. On the other hand, ideology is on the opposite end of the spectrum, the embodiment of the abstract. While the former resides in the physical world, the latter is part of the realm of ideas or form. Power is considered a mix of the material and abstract; it operates in both realms as it controls both physical and psychological experiences.

To analyze these novels, this dissertation draws from a theoretical foundation that examines the history of dystopian fiction and of identity studies. The dystopian genre is defined as the portrayal of a speculative, distorted future, which creates a genre with a unique social strategy aimed at warning readers of their present collective wrongs by utilizing defamiliarization or estrangement. This work traces the tradition of dystopian fiction from the totalitarian regime of classical dystopian novel in the mid-twentieth century to the critical dystopian corporate dictatorship and hopeful endings represented in the late-twentieth century. This critical framework is founded on the seminal works of critics such as Erika Gottlieb, Raffaella Baccolini, Tom Moylan, M. Keith Booker, Gregory Claeys, Fredric Jameson, Mark Hillegas, and Raymond Williams to provide an extensive analysis of previous examinations and research.

The definition of identity employed within this work considers it something unique to each individual that helps differentiate the subject from others. Yet, at the same time, it also implies a relationship with others based on shared identity markers and experiences, i.e., a social identity. Focusing on the works of Louis Althusser, Zygmunt Bauman, Vincent Descombes, Michel Foucault, Francis Fukuyama, Kwame Anthony Appiah, David Harvey, and Amartya Sen, this dissertation can thus the role of the dystopian society on the construction of identity.

2. Theoretical Framework: Dystopian Fiction and Social Identity

2.1 What is Dystopian Fiction?

Coined by John Stuart Mill in 1868, the term "dystopia" first entered common use in the twentieth century to describe a negative or generally undesirable society, a "bad" place. Kingsley Amis describes these dystopian communities in fiction as "new maps of hell" that develop from science fiction and depict "with verisimilitude the human effects of spectacular changes in our environment, changes either deliberately willed or involuntarily suffered" (26). In this genre, dystopias are portrayed as feasible or realistic; they are positioned as the logical social and political outcomes of adverse historic developments.

Basing his analysis of dystopian fiction on Amis' seminal work, Darko Suvin describes science fiction as the confluence of cognition (science) and estrangement (fiction) becoming a "*a literary genre whose necessary and sufficient conditions are the presence and interaction of estrangement and cognition, and whose main formal device is an imaginative framework alternative to the author's empirical environment*" (7–8, emphasis in original). Although science fictions makes use of "omni-temporal horizons" that can range through all possible times, it mainly focuses on "cognitively plausible futures" (20–21). Suvin attributes this centering of futuristic temporality to the influence of "capitalist economy, with its salaries, profits, and progressive ideals always expected in a future clock-time" (73). By locating dystopian literature within this broader science fiction tendency, dystopias become a commentary of current capitalist sociopolitical or ecological actions and speculate on the consequences of such activities within the framework of an estranged, yet "cognitively plausible" future.

This social commentary that characterizes dystopian fiction is not only an attribute inherited from the science fiction genre, but also stems from its location within the utopian

paradigm as the antithesis to (e)utopia or "good place."[1] John Huntington, in "Utopian and Anti-Utopian Logic: H.G. Wells and his Successors," distinguishes utopias and dystopias as thought experiments that "free the reader towards an ideal or […] drive the reader back from a nightmare" (124).[2]

Representations of utopia and dystopia stem from a shared discontent with the authors' present society: utopia is defined by beneficial values that must be upheld and defended, whereas dystopia is characterized by harmful qualities that must be eradicated. Following this line of thought, Dunja Mohr considers that

> Where utopia uplifts the reader, dystopia holds up a hellish mirror and describes the worst of all possible futures. Although both utopian and dystopian imaginings of the future refer readers to the present and seek to implant a desire for societal transformation, they evoke different effects: the utopian defamiliarization takes the avenue of arousing readers' desire for utopia, whilst the defamiliarized dystopian society appals readers. Where utopia compares social vision and reality by creating difference, dystopia presupposes and thrives on the correlation and similarity of the present social order and the near-future scenario. Using opposed strategies, both utopia and dystopia, however, share the same objective: socio-political change by means of the aesthetic representation of a paradigm of change. (27–28)

Dystopian novels function as social critiques and warnings of present ills characterized by a wariness of idealistic drives. Robert C. Elliott refers to these as negative utopias in which the utopian impulses of "old reformers" have been successful but turn out to be dystopian nightmares (89). As M. Keith Booker comments on Elliott's ideas, "numerous works of modern literature have been suspicious not only of the *possibility* of utopia, but of its very *desirability*, equating conventional utopias with paralysis and stagnation" (*Dystopian Literature* 5). The dystopian novel highlighted the impossibility of such utopian dreams and desires, by stating

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[1] According to its etymology, "utopia" stems from the Greek οὐ meaning "not" and τόπος meaning "place" and was originally used to refer to any imagined, non-existent society. The term "eutopia," instead, reflects the common notion of an imagined "good," εὖ, place. However, "utopia," has shifted to encompass the meaning of "good" place or society, so that in most contemporary criticism, as with this dissertation, these terms are synonymous and interchangeable.

[2] Mark Hillegas' *Future as Nightmare: H.G. Wells and the Anti-Utopians* discusses such anti-utopianism and examines how social criticism is the basis of dystopian narratives by providing a formal analysis of the genre that traces its roots back to satire and a critique of utopian thought. In his essay "Utopia: The Problem of Definition," Lyman Tower Sargent defines utopia as a good place and dystopia as a bad place that remains within the utopian field.

how these could become deformed. This tendency to twist and distort these seemingly innocuous or hopeful urges and desires is present throughout most dystopian fiction, including the novels under study in this dissertation.

This focus on a speculative, distorted future creates a genre with a unique social strategy aimed at warning readers of their present collective wrongs by utilizing defamiliarization or estrangement. According to Booker, the dystopian genre draws on literature's evaluative and imaginative roles by presenting a critical vision of "existing or potential ills and injustices in society" through a creative lens that allows participants in the literary dialogue to imagine and "investigate new ways of defining [themselves] and of exploring alternatives to the social and political status quo" (*Dystopian Literature* 3). This is achieved by utilizing "estranged" or distant settings that allow the author to provide alternative outlooks on social, political, or economic conventions that he or she views as problematic but that society views as inherent or unavoidable. In doing so, this allows the reader to question how their own society's impulses and practices can be warped or carried out to produce dire outcomes.

Erika Gottlieb describes dystopian fiction's main function as that of a message of warning that identifies "specific aberrations in our own, present social-political system by pointing out their potentially monstrous consequences in the future" (13). Dystopian fiction calls the reader to recognize these "specific aberrations" and mend them in their own society; for if they continue unchecked, they will no longer be preventable, and reality could become a dystopia. Thus, readers can reflect on the current ills of our present society, with the hope that this can change, or simply to become aware of possible outcomes. In short, although a seemingly estranged and speculative genre, dystopian fiction has close ties to social actuality and seeks to provide a critical examination of the results of current ideological or sociopolitical practices. To understand how utopian impulses or current social aberrations can become

dystopian nightmares, one must first analyze the development and tradition of dystopian fiction.[3]

2.1.1 A History of Dystopian Fiction

Dystopian fiction emerges in the nineteenth century bringing forth the first dystopian turn which veers away from the previous utopian tradition. According to Gregory Claeys, the social impact of the French Revolution and its keen awareness of class injustices caused a dialectical discourse that divided the utopian literature into three ideals: utopian philosophy and treatises that expounded a direct critique of current, actual society; the creation of fictional utopias that permitted the social imagination to conceive of possibilities and consequences of utopia; and the anti-utopian or dystopian response that acts as an analysis of current, adverse social trends and their eventualities ("The Origins of Dystopia" 110). As Brian Stableford states, the literary imagery of the nineteenth century was characterized by "the lesson of social division" where the poor were abandoned and the rich created their own privileged, exclusive "eutopian microcosms" ("Ecology and Dystopia" 263). Stableford describes utopian and dystopian fiction of this time as "two sides of the same coin, the eutopia of the few being built at the expense of the dystopia of the many" (263).

With the rise of industrialization in the late nineteenth century and the realization that not all progress is beneficial, dystopia began to be incorporated within science fiction. Stableford partly attributes to the advent of science fiction the "stimulus of new scientific ideas" of this time which brought about a new pessimism and included more dystopian considerations of the future (*Scientific Romance* 11). Grubisic et al. argue that the impact of nineteenth-century

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[3] Dystopian and apocalyptic fiction are often considered as constituents of the same genre. Although both types of novels present undesirable and hostile settings, dystopian fiction focuses on an already established, rigid society (i.e., dystopia) that maintains a social order, whereas in apocalyptic fiction said social order has collapsed due to a man-made or natural event (i.e., apocalypse) which leads to an almost anarchic civilization focused on survival.

reality created a speculative fiction that visualized the damaging effects of "class divisions, rampant scientism, urbanization, and industrialization" in the future (6). Some examples of such nineteenth-century speculative fiction are novels by Jules Verne, including *Paris in the Twentieth Century* (1863) and *The Begum's Fortune* (1879), most notably *Erewhon* (1872) by Samuel Butler, and later on, novels by H.G. Wells such as *The Time Machine* (1895) and *When the Sleeper Wakes* (1899).

The second dystopian turn occurs in the twentieth century, leading to the common structure and content of what are considered traditional dystopian novels. As Claeys states, "after 1900 the characteristic form of the imaginary society would be both dystopian and often formally cast in the genre of science fiction, set normally in the future rather than the past or elsewhere in the here-and-now" ("The Origins of Dystopia" 110). By locating these societies in the future, the author could depict how the new dystopian social order had evolved and transitioned out of the reader's own. This setting insinuated that said dystopia could, in fact, become a reality, relegating its previous dreamlike or imaginary nature to the background.

2.1.1.1 The Classic Dystopian Novel

As Mark Hillegas argues, "one of the most revealing indexes to the anxieties of our age is the great flood" of dystopian works that respond to this crisis in twentieth-century thought by depicting nightmare societies whose slave citizens "are conditioned to obedience, freedom is eliminated, and individuality crushed; where the past is systematically destroyed and men are isolated from nature; where science and technology are employed, not to enrich human life, but to maintain the state's surveillance and control" (3). Twentieth-century dystopian fiction is considered the era of the classic dystopia, most popularly characterized by its depiction of totalitarian societies that reflected the authoritarian states and dictatorships present at the time of creation.

Claeys defines a totalitarian regime as a failed utopia characterized by absolute oppression, discrimination, inequity, and subjection via extreme collectivism that encourages dogmatism and repression. He states that the common theme of classic dystopian novels such as Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* (1932) and George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-four* (1949) is "the quasi-omnipotence of a monolithic, totalitarian state demanding and normally exacting complete obedience from its citizens, challenged occasionally but usually ineffectually by vestigial individualism or systemic flaws, and relying upon scientific and technological advances to ensure social control" (Claeys, "The Origins of Dystopia" 109). Of important note in this definition is the total power and control of a public institution, the pessimistic view of social and technological progress, and the ineffectual nature of conflict or individual rebellion.

The rise of totalitarianism entailed a historic loss of individuality intimately linked with institutional violence. Hannah Arendt determines that totalitarian regimes require violence and terror to remain in power and possess absolute control, using instruments of violence "to realize constantly its ideological doctrines and its practical lies" (341). Totalitarian regimes, thus, utilize organized violence as a weapon against dissenters and as a protection against outside forces so "a member fears leaving the movement more than he fears the consequences of his complicity in illegal actions, and feels more secure as a member than as an opponent" (Arendt 373). Members of the totalitarian regime need not fear the organized violence wielded by the state if they integrate with the collective and adequately assume their normative roles.

This fear of totalitarianism, coupled with the West's use of the atom bomb and mass destruction of Hiroshima and Nagasaki caused science fiction to lose "much of its optimism [in technology] as the greatest invention of the twentieth century" (Fitting 140). This led authors to explore themes of mass violence and destruction merged with totalitarianism's propensity for brutality within classic dystopian novels. Although the analysis of violence in totalitarian

dystopian fiction is of great import, it is commonly overlooked by critics in examinations of non-totalitarian contemporary dystopian fiction.

Erika Gottlieb analyzes five seminal dystopian novels: Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* (1932); George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-four* (1949); Ray Bradbury's *Fahrenheit 451* (1953)*;* Kurt Vonnegut's *Player Piano* (1952); and Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985). The critic extrapolates the commonalities of all five novels and applies them to classical dystopian literature, stating that the primary intent of the totalitarian regimes represented in this genre "is to deny the bonds of private loyalty and thereby to enforce not only uncritical obedience to the state but also a quasi-religious worship of the state ideology" through bombardment of state propaganda and the implementation of a restrictive state administration (Gottlieb 12). She states that the effect of this lack of interpersonal relationships and intimacy results in what was previously part of the individual's private world becoming public domain under control of the state. Thus, "by breaking down the private world of each inhabitant the monster state succeeds in breaking down the very core of the individual mind and personality – what remains is the pliable, numb consciousness of massman" (12). Totalitarian dystopian societies create a dialogically opposed tension between the individual and society by attempting to destroy the boundaries between the public and the private, making any individualism null and void. This tension between the private ("I") and the public ("We") is also quite prominent within identity studies which examine the balance between these in the formation of one's identity and will be examined in the upcoming sections.

The erasure of the individual is further accentuated by the climax of classic dystopian novels in which the protagonist typically must undergo an ultimate trial or confrontation with the figurehead of the totalitarian regime. Such confrontation results in the main character's failure and submission to state ideology: the rebel protagonist becomes a sinister puppet of the state. For the dystopian regime to remain in power, individual agency and thought are

suppressed. Thus, in traditional dystopian literature, there is no room for individual identity, an imposed social identity reigns supreme. This transformation of the protagonist into the "pliable massman" of the totalitarian regime acts as one of "the most conspicuous features of the warning in these classics of dystopian fiction" because it "represents the irrevocable damnation of his society" in that "once we allow the totalitarian state to come to power, there will be no way back" (4). Critics have understood this commentary as also stemming from popular perceptions in the West regarding the rise of communism. Western fears as to communist massification and populism is inscribed within dystopian novels whose totalitarian governments eradicate any individual difference and initiative to construct its citizens as pliable massmen. By damning this dystopian society, authors and readers also damn communist enterprises.

In discussing individuality and identity in dystopian fiction, Naomi Jacobs considers that the

> ideal citizen of dystopia is fully integrated with the social formation and has no self to express. The regimes of power in these classic dystopias understand free agency as based in individuality, and they use every means available to destroy any kind of identity that is separable from and potentially at odds with the collective. The realm of subjectivity is such a regime's primary focus of social control; without a clear sense of self, a citizen of dystopia will feel no need to rebel, even if means of rebellion were available. (92)

In her critique of this loss of individual self, Jacobs regards the classic dystopian novel as humanist in its perspective by promoting "the unique, self-determining individual [as] the measure of all things" (93). By creating a society in which the individual is disrupted, and individuality is oppressed or challenged, dystopian fiction establishes these notions as undesirable, supporting instead self-expression and self-determination, and warning that totalitarian institutions will do away with these foundations of the "truly human" experience. Classic dystopia's portrayal of individual subjectivity and the humanist subject "asserts the incommensurate desires and thoughts of a particular self located in a particular body/mind.

Agency is then seen as most authentic when the self asserts itself against some opposing social force or will; agency is enabled by the individual's separateness and independence from the social" (93) that attempts to eradicate this individuality and agency. In summary, a fundamental though within this dissertation is that classic dystopian fiction establishes an oppositional relationship between individual and collective identity: the totalitarian regime solely supports collective identification and submission, whereas the social critique inherent to the genre advocates for a humanist, unique, individual identity.

2.1.1.2 The Critical Dystopian Novel

Although the classic dystopian novel is characteristic of the twentieth century, in its late half (1980s-1990s), there occurred a shift in the genre which began to produce and popularize the critical dystopian novel. According to Jenny Wolmark, this transformation proceed from a mixture of utopian and dystopian elements and began to "critically voice the fears and anxieties of a range of new and fragmented social and sexual constituencies and identities in post-industrial societies" (91). Claeys argues that by the 1980s, the central theme of totalitarian despotism in dystopian fiction dies out—centralized state power evaporates—and is substituted by "corporate dictatorship in various guises, with the privatization, marketization, and monetization of all available resources, to the benefit of the wealthy;" yet, violence remains in a world of "war of all against all" (*Dystopia: A Natural History* 495). From this analysis, one can extrapolate that the continuation of violence remains distinctive of this genre and is encountered also within its contemporary literature. However, although twenty-first-century dystopian literature adopts a neoliberal, corporate dystopia along the lines of those represented in critical dystopian fiction of the 1980s and 1990s, it also retrieves the conflict between the individual and the collective of classical dystopian literature in its depiction of social identity.

Critical dystopias, according to Lucy Sargisson, are similar in most ways to classic ones. They reflect "the impact of an unseen and unexamined social system on the everyday lives of everyday people" (40) in a social "elsewhere" far worse than the reader's present "here." Critical dystopias begin, as is usual, in medias res, establishing the mise-en-scène "in an exponential presentation of the society's structure and operation" and then focusing especially on one of the subjects of said terrible place (40). As the plot develops, the protagonist recognizes the dystopian nature of their society and must "trace the relationship between individual experience and the operation of the entire system" (40). Whereas, in classic dystopias, the protagonist dissenter is usually crushed by the totalitarian system ending in resignation and defeat, in critical dystopias, the protagonist manages to gain allies, build interpersonal relationships, and collectively oppose the dystopian society. This conflict could result in liberating a small space of opposition or creating a grand collective movement that generates change. But regardless of whether the defiance is victorious, it remains in collective memory. And so, the primary feature of critical dystopian fiction is the inclusion of hope.

Rafaella Baccolini and Tom Moylan's research hinges on the notion of critical dystopias as open-ended and therefore hopeful. In opposition to the total control of the totalitarian state by the end of classic dystopian novels, "the new critical dystopias allow both readers and protagonists to hope by resisting closure: the ambiguous, open endings of these novels maintain the utopian impulse *within* the work" (Baccolini and Moylan 7). This is not to say that critical dystopias are not informed by fear, outrage, and a desire to warn the reader, but the conflict between the individual and society does not lead to doubt and despair; instead, it creates a sense of optimism and activism.

The critical dystopian novel rejects "the traditional subjugation of the individual at the end of the novel" and, in doing so, "opens a space of contestation and opposition for those groups (women and other 'eccentric' subjects whose subject position hegemonic discourse does

not contemplate) for whom subjectivity has yet to be attained" (Baccolini 18). Critical dystopia's hopeful spirit comes from uplifting the humanist individual identity and experience by granting a space in society for the private subject. By giving a voice to these denied and oppressed subjects, critical dystopias can "explore ways to change the present system […] creating a social reality that is shaped by an impulse to human self-determination and ecological health rather than one constricted by the narrow and destructive logic of a system intent only on enhancing competition in order to gain more profit for a select few" (Moylan, *Scraps of the Untainted Sky* 189). Thus, critical dystopias are placed within a new social system based more on capitalism and the beginnings of neoliberalism but create a space for contestation and change via the elevation of individual subjectivity and identity.

According to Claeys, there are three main methods of analysis of literary dystopias based on "authorial intention, presumed reader context/response, and content" (Claeys, *Dystopia: A Natural History* 290). Focus is especially placed on content-oriented analyses that study the portrayal of fictional relationships and regimes where "the estrangement and isolation of individuals, and their fear of each other, are central, as well as the ways this is engineered by external, usually collectivist, authorities" (290). Through scientific, technological, or social means, most characters usually suffer from dehumanizing oppression, while a select few benefit from this system. This dissertation plans to follow the traditional method of analysis of dystopian fiction by incorporating a content-based study that analyzes the relationship between society and the individual and the ways in which these interactions conclude by the end of the novels. By creating an opposition between the social masses and the individual experience, one must consider the role social identity plays within dystopian novels, and the social commentary—so imbued within the genre—surrounding the formation of said identity.

2.2 What is Identity?

The term "identity," as is the term "dystopia," are of relatively recent coinage, and first entered common parlance in the nineteenth century. According to Vincent Descombes, past definitions of the "question of identity" were more jurisprudential in nature; employed during legal investigations to ascertain whether a person was who they claimed to be or whether a corpse was a particular person and victim of a crime. Hence, these people were "identified by the elements of [their] civil status. Understood in this way, questions of identity arise only in the third person" (Descombes 4). Yet identity acquires a more social, collective connotation when analyzing its etymological derivation from the Latin term "idem," meaning same, which implies both similarity and difference.

Identity is considered something unique to each individual that helps differentiate the subject from others. Yet, at the same time, it also implies a relationship with others based on shared identity markers and experiences, i.e., a social identity. As David Buckingham states, the individual searches for a unique, true self-identity, yet

> also seek[s] multiple identifications with others, on the basis of social, cultural, and biological characteristics, as well as shared values, personal histories, and interests. On one level, I am the product of my unique personal biography. Yet who I am (or who I think I am) varies according to who I am with, the social situations in which I find myself, and the motivations I may have at the time, although I am by no means entirely free to choose how I am defined. (1)

Steph Lawler also examines the paradox of identity's sameness and difference: "that we are not only identical with ourselves (that is, the same being from birth to death) but we are identical with others. That is, we share common identities […] At the same time, however, there is another aspect of identity, which suggests people's uniqueness, their difference from others" (9). Richard Jenkins further elaborates on the notion of similarity and difference stating that with identity comes the term "identify" in that there "is something active about identity that cannot be ignored: it isn't 'just there', it's not a 'thing', it must *always* be established" by oneself and by others (17). Although criticism of dystopian fiction has taken into account the conflict

between the individual and the masses or others, it seems like an in-depth analysis of the role of identity is lacking and necessary to understand the nuances of how dystopia suppresses individual uniqueness and difference and elevates the concept of sameness to maintain its power.

Among identity scholars, there is a lingering debate as to the extent of the power of identity: if it is simply a classification one possesses or if it also implies evaluation and determines one's actions and behavior. According to Christine Agius and Dean Keep, identity is not a simple classification, but engages with "a complex series of meanings, intersections and possibilities of being, and relating that construct to the fabric of social, political, cultural and economic life. Identity underscores how collectives and individuals interact, their subjectivities, and how they manage complex problems and challenges" (3). The objective of this dissertation, thus, is to analyze the power and determining role of social identity within the paradigm of contemporary, twenty-first-century dystopian fiction, understanding how this dystopic setting impacts the protagonists' identities and, thus, their actions.

Scholars also refute a static nature of identity, stating that it transforms throughout time and context. It is not "singular but is the product of contested and multiple readings and hierarchies of identity" and so this means that there is no "natural" or essential identity (Agius and Keep 5). However, there is a tendency—which can be encountered and exaggerated in dystopian fiction—to "congeal established identities into fixed forms, thought and lived as if their structure expressed the true order of things;" thus, although identity "requires difference in order to be" it converts difference or variation "into otherness, into evil," so as "to secure its own self-certainty" (Connolly 64). For Stuart Hall, identities are based more so on difference and exclusion in that they "can function as points of identification and attachment only *because* of their capacity to exclude, to leave out, to render 'outside', abjected" (64). Unity and homogeneity or sameness being treated as the foundation to identity is actually a social

construct naturalized and processed to enact closure and erect identity boundaries and gain power through exclusion and marginalization.

2.2.1 A History of Identity Studies

After the Second World War, developmental psychologists produced a surge in the analysis of identity. Namely, Erik Erikson, in his work *Childhood and Society* (1950), began to recognize the social nature of identity and the importance of membership within groups and social roles that interact with the formation of identity, or what he calls, "ego identity." Studying adolescents and soldiers returning from fighting during WWII, Erikson coins the term "identity crisis," described as a "central disturbance" to that which "provides the ability to experience one's self as something that has continuity and sameness" (36). This weakening of one's sense of identity, i.e., one's continuity and sameness, is, thus, related to a sense of failure, of not living up to social ideals or expectations, which, in turn, endangers social status and personal integrity. Erikson's notion of identity is primarily related to one's feeling about oneself, yet also implies a broader social ideology at play in that one's sense of (continuous) identity is connected to one's place in society. In order to avoid or mitigate such identity crises, individuals seek ontological security or a certainty of sameness and self. Mitzen links this search for an ontologically secure sese of identity to a desire for agency in that it is the "subjective sense of who one is, which enables and motivates action and choice" and leads to a need for stability where "individuals value their sense of personal continuity because it underwrites their capacity for agency" (344). Thus, who one is depends on and influences what one does or is capable of doing. Here, agency and identity are interconnected, almost codependent, which leads to an essentialist perception of the subject's identity.

Essentialist notions are tied with Romanticism, stemming from "the idea of finding one's self—of discovering, by means of reflection or a careful attention to the world, a meaning

for one's life that is already there, waiting to be found" which presupposes an authentic, essential self that may later be distorted by social influences (Appiah, *The Ethics of Identity* 17). This perspective affects the notion of group membership in collective identities that "addresses the 'we-ness' of a group, stressing the similarities or shared attributes around which group members coalesce" (Cerulo 386). Thus, identity is considered essentialist in that it exists as a "pre-social" abstraction which must be discovered and reinforced by the subject's encounters with a social collective. The consequent "we-ness" that is established as a result of group coalescence further cements such notions. Instead of considering attributes of collective identity as the results of similar experiences and backgrounds between group members, they are considered natural or inherent qualities and predispositions that become the grounds for a unified or kindred social experience which serves to inform one's sense of self.

In contrast to the essentialist notion of identity, many critics, such as Kwame Anthony Appiah, developed a constructionist perspective. Essentialism, as he states, "is wrong because it suggests that there is no role for creativity in making a self, that the self is already and in its totality fixed by our natures" (Appiah, *The Ethics of Identity* 17). Although individuals may play a role in altering and manipulating their own identity, they cannot simply become anything they want, since parameters and socially imposed roles remain that define identity. This constructionist perspective, thus, focuses on the ability to construct an identity "in response to facts outside oneself, things that are beyond one's own choices" (18). Hence, identity is a dialogic construction between the individual and society.

Appiah uses the Platonic idea of "soul making" to discuss identity construction or "the project of intervening in the process of interpretation through which each citizen develops an identity" (164). He considers soul making or identity construction as "a *political* project, something done by the state" since governments affect and "enforce contracts and provide the physical security—from assault and the destruction of our property" (164). This governmental

security permits the pursuit of life by influencing performative actions and identifications: the circumstances that dictate the ways in which one creates one's life and forms one's identity. This notion of social and institutional influence on identity construction can be extrapolated to understand the manners in which identities are formed within dystopian settings.

Arnulf Depperman also links identity to choice and agency; identity constitutes "the unity of the individual as an agent" whose actions are bundled according to stable attributes and assigned to common identities (274). This "builds a bridge between the individual and society," making identity a product of social interaction whereby "individuals obtain their identity most importantly by their membership in social groups" (274). This classification and limiting of individuals' actions according to their identity group allows theorists to understand and anticipate future actions.[4]

Recent literature, especially that of gender identity, studies these collective identities and social groups under the lens of social construction. This view conceptualizes collective identities "as an interactional accomplishment, an identity continually renegotiated via linguistic exchange and social performance" (Cerulo 387). This does not seek to diminish the effects that social categorization can have one the subject's identity, i.e., collectives are classified according to distinguishing identitarian factors, and the subject's self-identification or forced social adscription to these groups immediately attributes to the subject these respective defining characteristics and their corresponding status within society. Gender identity studies simply highlight how these socially defined identities can limit behavior and individuals within domains of prescribed action and expectation.[5]

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[4] See Mead (1967), Habermas (1992), or Tafjel and Turner (1986) for more analysis of this agentive function of identity to socialize and classify the individual according to group membership.

[5] For information regarding the social construction of symbolic ethnicity and ethnic identity see Richard Alba's *Ethnic Identity: The Transformation of White America* (1990). For notions regarding ethnic identity as a choice and linked to community, see Mary Waters' *Ethnic Options: Choosing Identities in America* (1990).

George Herbert Mead, in *Mind, Self, and Society*, defines the self or "I" as a product that responds to the social demands of others that become internalized and form the "me." Although never using the term "identity," Mead provides an insightful reflection on the role of society in the creation of one's identity and self: "The 'I' is the response of the organism to the attitudes of the others; the 'me' is the organized set of attitudes of others which one himself assumes. The attitudes of the others constitute the organized 'me,' and then one reacts toward that as an 'I'" (Mead 175).[6] Through interaction with the social world, limits or constraints are placed on the construction of identities and subject formation. As Lawler states, "[t]hrough subjectivation, people become tied to specific identities: they become *subjects*. But also they become *subjected-ed* to the rules and norms engendered by a set of knowledges about these identities" (76). Identity is constructed via interaction with others, determined by social expectations and norms where the individual is defined by the group, and thus allowed to partake in society.

Madan Sarup defines identity as "a mediating concept between the external and the internal, the individual and society, theory and practice" (28). In relating identity with society, he considers a dualism within identity, dividing it between the inside or "private" identity which encompasses how we see ourselves and the outside or "public" identity which is based on "how 'others' have typified us" (14). This creates a tension between the inner self and the public identity assigned to us which Francis Fukuyama perceives as disjunction between one's inside and outside where

> [i]ndividuals come to believe that they have a true or authentic identity hiding within themselves that is somehow at odds with the role they are assigned by their surrounding society. The modern concept of identity places a supreme value on authenticity, on the validation of that inner being that is not being allowed to express itself. It is on the side of the inner and not the outer self. Oftentimes an individual may not understand who that inner self really is, but has only the vague feeling that he or she is being forced to live a lie. This can lead to an obsessive focus on the question "Who am I, really?" The search for an answer produces feelings of alienation and anxiety and can only be relieved

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[6] For more information on the loss of the individual in identity construction in relation to social experience, see René Girard's notion of interdividuality in *Things Hidden Since the Foundation of the World* (1987).

when one accepts that inner self and receives public recognition for it. And if that outer society is going to properly recognize the inner self, one has to imagine society itself being able to change in fundamental ways. (30)

The struggle and paradox between the individual and the social or collective identity is at constant play throughout dystopian literature. The question of "authenticity" mentioned by Fukuyama can correlate to the humanist drive encountered in classic dystopian novels in which protagonists rebel against the totalitarian state searching for their "true" inner self.[7] The characters' rebellion in these novels is linked to the notion of dissidence in which they define and position themselves, and their social identities, in relation or in opposition to the State's discourse. Serge Moscovici studies minority dissidence, especially in the Soviety bloc, as "*la dissidence d'un seul*" or the dissidence of one and the "one's" relation and influence over group dynamics. Moscovici analyzes the power of the dissidents—minorities of one—whose dissident actions transform themselves and others within the oppressive regime. He claims this transformation is possible via the minority's consistency: although the majority "has every reason to ignore, to distrust or laugh at, to regard as false or invalid, the positions or opinions of the minority," which is considered "deviant and thus dangerous," it is the minority's consistency, "the fact that the same positions and the same opinions are maintained, its degree of commitment" that grants its dissidence meaning and social value (Moscovici 30). Moscovici identifies this behavioral consistency as a projection of a "distinct social identity" which enables them to be dissenters to be perceived as "more dynamic, confident and even more accurate, than conformers" (30).

Both classic and critical dystopias emphasize the questioning and resistance to the social collective while the former portrays the individual's defeat, and the latter carves out a space for

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[7] Of note, we can compare this dystopian interplay of authentic versus social self, to Stephen Greenblatt's notion of "self-fashioning." In *Renaissance Self-Fashioning: From More to Shakespeare* (1980), Greenblatt coins the term "self-fashioning" to refer to the Renaissance method of social identity construction that embodied feature and characteristics which were socially praised and upheld in an attempt to mirror or impersonate the exalted, prescriptive identity model. This embodiment was not only based in aesthetics but also served as a means to promote the prevailing State-mandated ideology.

hope. In the twenty-first-century dystopian novels under analysis, there is no totalitarian government or hopeful, agentive resistance; feelings of anxiety and alienation remain, but are distanced from the search for one's authentic identity. As Agius and Keep state, identity "cannot form without exposure to and engagement with the outside world and others; it is through interaction that identity forms, and the relationship is co-constitutive" (5). Thus, the disjunction between the private inner self and public outer self is lessened, leaving only an analysis of a social identity.[8]

2.2.1.1 Social or Collective Identity

This dissertation, thus, considers identity in terms of social identity, first defined by Alvin Gouldner as that "which has been assigned to a person by members of his group" (283). The process of assigning a social identity first occurs when others "observe or impute to a person certain characteristics; they observe certain aspects of his behavior or appearance which they employ as clues to enable themselves to answer the question 'Who is he?'" and are later "interpreted in terms of a set of culturally prescribed *categories,*" in essence, classifying or "pigeonholing" an individual as being a particular type of person (283). And, "[t]he types or categories to which [one] has been assigned *are* [one's] social identities" which carry and incorporate expectations, rights, and obligations according to one's membership in certain groups (283).

Our social identity is dependent on our belonging to a specific group or category, and in order to have and maintain a social identity, humans seek unity with others. Via social identity and group membership, we can become subjects according to our group's "'We–I balance'. All [groups] function in different ways to provide us with a socially constructed definition of the self. Like it or not, 'I' am produced by 'we'" (Claeys, *Dystopia: A Natural*

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[8] For further study, whether identity can be anything but social remains a compelling area of interest.

History 34).[9] We only become individuals as "a function of being group members" and so when we attempt to become individuals independent from group membership, escaping the process of social identity formation, "it is always at the risk of increased alienation and ostracism—for no groups tolerate rejection lightly" (36). In a dystopian setting, this ostracism and social alienation is of greater extent and import, due to the dystopian society's greater control over the individual.

Social identity tends to lead to a collectivization and generalization of individuality. John C. Turner et al. call this process that enables collective identities, "depersonalization," which permits social stereotyping in order to create group cohesiveness and thus better establish group membership and gain a social identity (101). Thus, as Erich Fromm states, "the full experience of individuality" is mostly unachievable, "individualism was not much more than a façade behind which was hidden the failure to acquire an individual sense of identity" (60). Fromm's notion of individuality in the face of the social group and social identity, as will be seen in upcoming sections, can be compared to critics' discussion and questioning of individualism within neoliberal ideology.

Social identity can be considered a constant dialogue between the individual and the group. As subjects, people are constituted via their experiences and relationships with others and the social world. Mikhail Bakhtin describes identity construction as needing external forces and first defines this notion by coining the term transgredience: a self-experience, or self-construction, that necessitates an "other" or something "situated outside itself and capable of delimiting it from outside" to be considered a "whole that is capable of being consummated" (*Art and Answerability* 22). According to Bakhtin, we cannot consider identity as fixed or pre-social, but as a fluid entity in a continual process of formation and development through dialogue with the "other" or society. Thus, identity is a social product of a dialogic,

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[9] See Norbert Elias' *The Society of Individuals* (2001) on the balance between "we" and "I" in group identities.

intersubjective exchange with external forces: "I live in a world of others' words. And my entire life is an orientation in this world, a reaction to others' words" (Bakhtin, *Speech Genres* 143). He recognizes the tension between the private and the public, stating that identity construction does not take place within, but "on the boundary between one's own and someone else's consciousness" so that "everything internal gravitates not toward itself but is turned to the outside and dialogized, every internal experience ends up on the boundary, encounters another, and in this tension-filled encounter lies its entire essence" (Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* 287). Social identity is inextricable from personal, individual existence in that to exist as a subject—to have a social identity—means to exist for and through another. The internal or "inside" is non-existent, as a person is always located on the boundary, constituting and identifying oneself via the words or the existence of another.

2.3 Twenty-First-Century Neoliberal Dystopian Fiction and Representations of Social Identity

The formation of social identity focuses heavily on the role of the external and the domination of social forces over individual identities. Thomas Docherty states that "our identities, far from being autonomously determined, are, in fact, typically *given* to us […] as a means of officially delimiting and regulating our possible behaviours. Our identity is 'official,' an office limiting our possibilities precisely to the circumscriptions delineated by that office" and any action that would create resistance to or influence social systems would be considered "clandestine, a breaking with or a nonconformity with our office" (20). Because social identity is solely granted and achieved in the public realm, one's identity must be publicly recognized in order to act and gain agency, so "unless an identity is recognized there, there is no basis for effective action. The person needs recognition by others for the achievement of identity; in a political context,

this translates as a need for recognition by others in order to act" (Whitebrook 62). Society must give its members the opportunity to act through identity construction and recognition.

In a similar vein, the dystopian genre is characterized by its social analysis and critique and the interaction and tension between the individual protagonist and the dystopian society which limits the recognition of its citizens and grants them official identities. As Raymond Williams states, most dystopian novels contain "a conception of the relation between individuals and society; ordinarily a virtuous individual, or small person group, against a vile society" (45) that refuses to acknowledge any different or oppositional identity. By describing oppressive and adverse futures, the dystopian novel raises questions about human social identity. "Shall we be monsters, humans, or machines? Shall we be enslaved or free? Can we be 'free' or only conditioned in varying degrees? Shall we preserve our individuality or be swallowed by the collective?" (Claeys, *Dystopia: A Natural History* 498). However, the field of dystopian literary criticism—especially of twenty-first-century novels—seems to lack a thorough incorporation of identity studies and the ways in which the protagonists' social identities inform their actions, situate the characters in the "We-I balance" of group membership, and affect the dystopian "social world."

Although one can observe common tendencies throughout all dystopian novels, our intellectual framework has changed since the rise of the genre and twenty-first-century dystopian literature has now shifted its focus to reflect the current state of affairs of the world. Fukuyama aptly analyzes the development of global politics and the state of society within the twenty-first century characterized by a "growth of economic interdependence among nations, or what we call globalization" (13). He examines how successful liberal democracies start to slide backwards and do not provide the equity citizens believed it would. In fact, the benefits of economic growth streamed mainly to an educated elite and inequality increased, causing "a huge amount of disruptive social change" with races to urban communities and mass

international migration in search of more profitable labor markets and opportunities (13). Massive economic recessions, high levels of unemployment, and growing reactionary alt-right ideologies in the US and Europe began to reverse the West's progressivist momentum.

The three novels under study in this dissertation portray the extent of capitalism and neoliberalism in dystopian society, seeming to move away from the hopeful space of resistance in critical dystopian fiction without returning to the depiction of classic totalitarian dystopias. Levitas and Sargisson attribute this thematic shift in twenty-first-century dystopian literature to the aftermath of September 11th in the West in that the "effect of the atrocity of 11 September and the military response to it has been to close down the space for hope" (25). They consider "the murders on 11 September speak to—and perhaps come from—the desire to consume, eliminate, and destroy the Other", which in turn, is reflected in contemporary dystopian fiction (25).

According to Fredric Jameson, twenty-first-century society is marked by "the world population explosion, the desertion of the countryside, the growth of the megacity, global warming and ecological catastrophe, the proliferation of urban guerrilla warfare, the financial collapse of the welfare state, and the universal emergence of small group politics" which, in turn, influence contemporary dystopian visions (36). Jameson attributes this new lack of hope in dystopian fiction to "cynical reason" that "knows everything about our own society, everything that is wrong with late capitalism, all the structural toxicities of the system, and yet it declines indignation" because the "deconcealment" or critical exposure of this system that is characteristic of the genre is no longer effective since "there is no longer any false consciousness, no longer any need to disguise the workings of the system" (23–24).

As previously mentioned, dystopian fiction is characterized by its close ties to social reality: its main purpose is to provide a critical examination of current ideological trends that could prove undesirable. Because dystopias are "are a projection and a re-description of our

contemporary society that heightens present ideological trends and terminology in order to critique it" (McAlear 18), dystopian fiction must now incorporate the current neoliberal social context. Tom Moylan observes a shift in the dystopian imaginary attributable to the dominance of neoliberal theory in the late twentieth century. Contemporary dystopian literature transforms "from representations of the state as the locus of dominant power […] to economy as the motor of society" which Moylan considers to be "a symptomatic echo of neoliberal hegemony" (Moylan, "'The Moment Is Here'" 140). With the focus on hegemonic, capitalist, and corporate power, dystopian society still maintains control over its citizens, but these are also commodified and exploited. Thus, as earlier dystopian fiction focused on totalitarian power and centralized governments, current literature now includes and focuses more so on ecological, economic, and neoliberal challenges.[10]

2.3.1 What is Neoliberalism?

To understand why neoliberal ideology is relevant when discussing contemporary dystopian fiction and social identity, one must first understand what neoliberalism entails. David Harvey describes neoliberalism as a political economic practice that seeks to liberate "individual entrepreneurial freedom within an institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets, and free trade" (2). The state's only role is to preserve and secure this economic structure, avoiding intervention and regulation at all costs. According to Harvey, the defining feature of neoliberal thinking is the "assumption that individual freedoms are guaranteed by freedom of the market and of trade" (7). By linking freedom to the economy,

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[10] According to Gregory Claeys, the following five themes have dominated dystopian literature in the twentieth century: self-destruction of humanity; climate change and environmental crisis; mechanization and blurring of human/machine identity; mindlessness and massification; and, finally, war on terror anxiety (Claeys, *Dystopia: A Natural History. A Study of Modern Despotism, Its Antecedents, and Its Literary Diffractions* 447). Of note, the central topics discussed in twenty-first-century neoliberal dystopian fiction do not veer away from these themes, but incorporate them in different social, dystopic settings. As will be discussed later in the dissertation, the shift in contemporary dystopian literature occurs via the depiction of said topics and in the formation of the characters' social identity: individuality takes on a more nuanced perspective in the minority's dissidence and resistance to the dystopian society.

Harvey constructs the association of liberation to State-less privatization, absolute deregulation, and individualism.

However, the neoliberal notion of individuality does not, in fact, correlate to true individuality and freedom. As Booker states, "bourgeois society creates the illusion of individual freedom in order to assure that individuals will in fact behave themselves properly with the dictates of a capitalist economy" (*Dystopian Literature* 2). Although individuals in neoliberal societies "may have the illusion of having an increasing amount of choice[,] mental processes are themselves increasingly subject to external control" (Levitas 159), which leaves little space for true agency and change. Social expectations and parameters consume individual choice, similar to the tension between internal and external forces in identity construction. Therefore, neoliberal dystopia presents a diametric opposition between the individual and society in which society, a mass conglomeration, remains constant. Any change enacted by the minority results in minimal, ineffectual changes to the dystopian system. As will be discussed in later chapters, the novels under study posit that neoliberal dystopia and its effects on humanity's social identity are inseparable. As such, any semblance of a non-dystopian conclusion that permits a sense of hope and change is enacted through the removal of the human species and the possibility of a posthuman replacement.[11]

When understanding identity through the lens of neoliberal dystopia, one must take into consideration that, although neoliberalism creates the perception of true individuality, it is merely a capitalist myth to maintain the higher echelons in power. Booker equates these "myths of individual power and autonomy" to the "dystopian motif of the suppression of individual desire by demands for social conformity" (*Dystopian Literature* 15–16). This tension between the individual and the group remains and is exacerbated as neoliberalism attempts to provide

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[11] This is of special interest in the final chapter analyzing *The Windup Girl* by Paolo Bacigalupi.

an illusion of individuality. Thus, contemporary dystopian fiction is concerned with the seduction of neoliberal individuality that results in a farce.

In one of the few critical works dedicated to neoliberal dystopian fiction, Sezen Turkmen briefly considers the ways in which fictional characters in contemporary dystopian literature "may come to see the domination of the very forces which strip them of their power and rights as 'natural' or unchangeable" which he links to "the creation of a dystopian condition under the governance of neoliberal ideology" (8). Although he studies the ways in which characters interact with and are limited by neoliberal dystopian ideology, his examination does not include an analysis of social identity formation within this literary genre. As can be observed by the extensive critical foundation in this chapter, the fields of dystopian and social identity studies are well-established; however the confluence of both disciplines in analyses of social identity formation within dystopian novels could be further developed.

2.3.2 Rigid Social Identity and Incompatibility of Human Individuality within Neoliberal Dystopia

The interaction between social identity and neoliberal dystopia leads to the main area of analysis within this dissertation: the dialogical relationship between the individual and society in the formation of social identity within the three novels under study: Omar El Akkad's *American War*; Naomi Alderman's *The Power*; and Paolo Bacigalupi's *The Windup Girl*. Contained within a dystopian framework, identity groups become more distorted and social norms are more rigid or oppressive. This can be linked to the notion of identity as a "*conformity to a rule*" and "a matter for *regulation*" (Docherty 21). And in the case of dystopian novels, social rules and regulations are stricter, where society and the wellbeing of the group predominate over the individual. Thus, the subject is "decentered, multiple, and fluid; its desires are entirely product of social forces. There is no self to act or to be expressed. Although individuals may believe

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they are freely choosing and freely acting from a position of integrity, their choices and actions merely duplicate subject positions to which they have been 'called'" (Jacobs 93). This dissertation aims to analyze the ways in which the characters of the three contemporary dystopian novels under examination are "called" into social identities and positioned within said dystopian society according to their belonging within limited and rigid groups.

2.3.2.1 The Need for Groups

Notions of social identity and collectives are traditionally viewed as positive and enriching because of the possibility of intersectionality. Individuals do not solely pertain to one collective; their social identity is constituted by the intersection of several group memberships. However, in dystopian fiction, society transforms social identity by limiting the number of communities or collectivities to which the characters belong, ostracizing all those who are different and do not conform to the norm. Collectives provide a sense of agency to "consciously coordinate action; group members consciously develop offenses and defenses, consciously insulate, differentiate, and mark, cooperate and compete, persuade and coerce" (Cerulo 393). Thus, dystopian institutions or systems attempt to limit dissent and collective action that could result in their demise or loss of power by restricting group memberships available within society. And in neoliberal dystopian fiction, when these groups are under domination and limited to maintain normativity and the status quo, the group as agent consumes any individual agency available.

In such contexts, groups are valued because they offer "protection or security. All groups of any size also aim to create, shape, and sustain a common mentality or 'group mind'" (Claeys, *Dystopia: A Natural History* 40–41), which helps maintain neoliberal ideology. The question of conflict or tension between the individual and the public or group normally ends in the subordination of the individual. As Chandran Kukathas states, cultural identity and many cultures "do not place such value on the individual's freedom to choose his ends. Often, the

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individual and his interests are subordinated to the community. Moreover, the individual might be expected to accept uncritically the long-standing practices of the cultural group" (120). Thus, neoliberal dystopian fiction takes these notions of individual subordination to an oppressive and depersonalizing community further by creating a dominant monistic society, eradicating any space for diversity and individual freedom. As previously discussed, dystopian novels promote social homogeneity, leaving little room for minority resistance and difference.

Within neoliberal dystopias, groups begin to erase individuality and eliminate any dissent. In the novels, these groups become more rigid and strict in their membership: relational boundaries are severed; common purposes become more influential; valuing individuals only occurs when they espouse the same values as the group itself; and the capacity to face discontent is minimized.[12] In order to establish clear limits that define group membership and corresponding social identities, collectives require the Other as a form of distinguishing themselves from the rest or undesirable collectives. Humans "ascribe a great deal of significance to the distinction between those who share our identities and those who don't, the insiders and the outsiders […] people tend to favor those of their own identity and to look down on out-group members" (Appiah, *The Lies That Bind* 35). In the novels, it does not matter whether these identities and group memberships are long-established or recent; they serve as markers and permit favoring and prejudice. They allow the protagonists to situate themselves within the confines of social norms and memberships, and will determine, by the end of the novel, what the protagonists' relationship with the neoliberal dystopia shall be.

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[12] In his book, W.R. Bion recognizes three different types of groups: fight–flight groups who are organized around self-preservation and dealing with enemies; dependency groups that rely or depend on powerful leaders; and pairing groups, who hope for an unborn leader or millennial change. Of note is that each novel under examination portrays one of these groups, yet due to the scope of this dissertation, this issue will be set aside for the time being.

2.3.2.2. The Rise of Violence

Dystopias are mostly characterized by totalitarian regimes of violence and oppression as classic means of maintaining power, but the newer tendency is for the dystopic image of control to be represented by corporations. Following a Foucauldian line of thought, violence or repression is enacted as an answer to a minority's dissidence or social disobedience, which, as previously discussed can have transformative effects on society. As such, it has no independent origin— there is no violence for the sake of violence—but occurs as a reaction or preventative measure.[13] However, violence and conflict remain, since "neoliberalism can result in more conflict and, perhaps more importantly, that it can produce new and different forms of violence" (Schönwälder and Gutiérrez Sanín 4).

Following Elcheroth and Reicher, identity is about doing: binding people together and allowing them to "concretely act together in the terms defined by that identity" (99). The critics connect this notion to violence in that it shapes "common identity" through actions that repattern "social practices through which a group of people perform and uphold their common identities" (99). Brutality impacts social identities by breaking most "ordinary social connections," leaving only "bonds of solidarity and sociality" that are merely "*radical reductions of identity*" (100). This leads to a typical feature of identities affected by violence: rigidity. The critics state that "by giving up alternative ways to define themselves, people also lose […] their capacity to navigate flexibly between a variety of relevant identities" (100). Thus, violence not only transforms identity, but also restricts the identities one can embody. It is "something that limits us, which takes particular identities that correspond to one mode of being and freezes them into our only possible ways of being" (124).

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[13] A clear example of this can be seen in *The Hunger Games* trilogy in which the capital government of Panem, as a reaction to District 13's insurgence and rebellion, destroys the district and establishes the Hunger Games for the rest as a violent reminder and preventative measure against further dissidence.

Madan Sarup aptly discusses the notions of rigid social identity, violence, and the mentality of Othering to maintain power, order, and unity in which the boundaries of social identity must be "sharp and clearly marked. The vital distinction between inside and outside has to be kept" (50). He links this to Zygmunt Bauman's notion of ambivalence, which, as a result, must be suppressed. Bauman places this ambivalence and ambiguity with the notion of the Other, stating that modernity is defined by its "effort to exterminate ambivalence: an effort to define precisely -- and to suppress or eliminate everything that could not or would not be precisely defined" and that the Other is, to an extent, undefinable or self-defined (*Modernity and Ambivalence* 8–9) This desire to exterminate ambivalence leads to intolerance, a rigidity that delimits social identity and the Other.

Violence is incurred through neoliberal ideology and dystopian institutions that seek to maintain dominance over the population through the eradication of ambivalence and the Other and rigid demarcations of social identity groups. For this reason,

> a fostered sense of identity with one group of people can be made into a powerful weapon to brutalize another. Indeed, many of the conflicts and barbarities in the world are sustained through the illusion of a unique and choiceless identity. The art of constructing hatred takes the form of invoking the magical power of some allegedly predominant identity that drowns other affiliations, and in a conveniently bellicose form can also overpower any human sympathy or natural kindness that we may normally have. The result can be homespun elemental violence, or globally artful violence and terrorism. (Sen 15–16) [14]

Thus, by limiting group membership to only a singular, rigid group—much like the novels in question—violence is further pronounced. In these dystopian societies, there is no room for intersectional social identities, there is only one defining or dominant element to the protagonist's identity. This adherence to a singular social identity group signals the radicalism

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[14] Thus, to enact violence, one must have an enemy or rival. This creates a rigid identity not only for "us" but also for the "other;" i.e. the "them" against which we fight, who enacts violence upon us but also on whom we enact brutality. The other is a rival that must be destroyed but also serves as a counterpoint for our differentiation. See James Aho's *This Thing of Darkness: A Sociology of the Enemy* (1994) for further information on the reification of the enemy and the duality of us vs. them/other. See also G.W.F. Hegel's *Phenomenology of the Mind* (1931) on the struggle between the one and the other. As a way of assuring the recognition of superiority of the one, Hegel discusses the creation and adoption of inherently violent roles: master (the one) and slave (the other who is subjugated by means of violence and brutality).

within dystopian settings. Groups in the dystopian novels advocate for a unique social identity imbued with a violent purpose so as to eradicate any dissent and eclipse any other affiliations outside of the group. According to Amartya Sen, rigid collective identities contain the "martial art of fostering violence [which] draws on some basic instincts and uses them to crowd out the freedom to think and the possibility of composed reasoning" (149–50). Thus, critical thinking and rational thought are done away with, to better accept the dystopian society. Those characters in the novels who are not radicalized to adopt only one social group are consequently suppressed and eradicated from it.

2.3.2.3 On Body, Ideology, and Power

This dissertation has encountered three main thematic axes within the novels under analysis that influence the social identity of the narratives' protagonists in relation to the neoliberal dystopian society at large: the body, ideology, and power. These notions will be examined according to materiality. The body is of a complete concrete nature: a physical manifestation of one's material conditions. It is of great import for social identity in that "the human body is simultaneously a referent of individual continuity, an index of collective similarity and differentiation, and a canvas upon which identification can play. Identification in isolation from embodiment is unimaginable" (Jenkins 41).Meanwhile, ideology is on the opposite end of the spectrum, the embodiment of the abstract. While the former resides in the physical world, the latter is part of the realm of ideas or form. Power is a mix of the material and abstract; it operates in both realms as it controls both physical and psychological experiences.

All three novels view the body in terms of physical strength. However, *American War* focuses on the notion of rejection, *The Power* also emphasizes the embodiment of sex/gender, and *The Windup Girl* considers the body through the posthuman lens. Ideology in all three works stems from historical social enmities that create a discourse of us or self identities versus

them or other identities. *American War* considers these enmities through patriotism and nationalist ideology, *The Power* adopts a patriarchal perspective, and *The Windup Girl* includes notions of nativism and postcolonialism. The final theme of power is discussed in all three novels through the enactment of violence: focusing on war, torture, gender, and subalternity.

All social identities must be connected to embodied individuals, and identification normally begins with the body. As Richard Jenkins states, "Selves without bodies don't make much sense in human terms" and selfhood "begins – literally or figuratively – from or at the body" (68), so this becomes the first theme one must analyze. The body is attached to identity formation and what is described as "human-ness" or "the primary identity of external definition. It is necessarily the work of others, with reference to perceived and interpreted bodily characteristics, to categorise" individuals as humans and decide or deliberate the nature of "human-ness" according to the body (76).

This dissertation draws upon Michel Foucault's work on how discipline and violence over the body are used as a means of subjugation and subjection that ties the individual to identity. The individual and their body are constructed by the social order's imposition of norms on bodily movement and activities while also excluding any who deviate or do not conform. This ties the body to a process of meaning and connects it to an identity. The body is constituted within the material realm but also in the political field as the locus for power relations that "have an immediate hold upon it; they invest it, mark it, train it, torture it, force it to carry out tasks" (Foucault, *Discipline and Punish* 25–26). Describing the influence of discipline on the body, Foucault states that "discipline produces subjected and practiced bodies, 'docile' bodies" (138) that can be dominated and further tied to a rigid social identity.

Critics such as Booker analyze "fundamental individual versus society opposition so common to dystopian fiction by suggesting that the individual is largely a social phenomenon and that the two poles of this opposition therefore cannot be neatly separated" (*The Dystopian*

Impulse 56). Booker attributes this common dystopian impulse of negating individual identity by constructing "subjects in a way advantageous to the prevailing ideology of the society" to Louis Althusser's notion of "interpellation" (55) . Althusser expounds that ideology "'acts' or 'functions' in such a way as to 'recruit' subjects among individuals (it recruits them all) or 'transforms' individuals into subjects (it transforms them all) through the very precise operation that we call *interpellation* or *hailing*" (190). By recognizing said hailing and responding to it, the subject, or social identity, is constructed. Thus, ideology "has the function (which defines it) of 'constituting' concrete individuals as subjects" (Althusser 262).

Booker compares methods of ideological interpellation to dystopia's means of domination: "Althusser's suggestion that individuals live very much in the power of large impersonal forces that exist beyond their understanding or even perception also shares a great deal with the depictions in many works of dystopian literature of manipulation of individuals of oppressive governments" (Booker, *Dystopian Literature* 15). This notion of ideological interpellation resembles the dialogical relationship between society and the individual's social identity within dystopian fiction. Many characters in the three dystopian novels resemble Althusser's notion of the subject: "a subjected being, who submits to a higher authority, and is therefore stripped of all freedom except that of freely accepting his submission" (Althusser 269), and these novels reflect on the construction of a social identity within these confines.

The characters in the three novels can be said to follow the three different mechanisms of subject creation and identity construction that Michel Pêcheux—contributing to Louis Althusser's notion of ideological interpellation—formulates in *Language, Semantics and Ideology: Stating the Obvious* (1982): identification, counter-identification, and disidentification. Identification is the subjection of a "good subject" who "freely consents" to the superimposition of the image he/she is given and must reflect it (156–57). Counter-identification is that of the "bad subject" or "trouble-maker" who "turns against," challenges,

or questions "the discursive formation imposed on him" only within the boundaries of the dominant ideology they are struggling against (157). Pêcheux adds the third modality of disidentification to describe "*taking up of a non-subjective position*" to create a subject of a "new type" where ideology "does not disappear, but operates as it were in reverse, i.e., on and against itself, through the 'overthrow-rearrangement' of the complex of ideological formations" (158–59).

Ideology defines social identity by creating boundaries that contribute to the establishment of a community or collective. As Jenkins states, "'Community' is ideological: it not only says how things are, it says how they should be" (136). Jenkins considers that the legitimation of social domination is intimately linked with ideology and collective identification. This indoctrination of the public to accept and legitimate a dominant ideology, then, is created by using a sense of belonging to a collective and thus becoming a subject, i.e., subject creation. Individuals in the three dystopian novels are constituted and recognized as subjects, and therefore are allowed to belong to a specific collective group.

In order to maintain ideological domination, social identity is constructed through binary opposition with the foundation of in-groups (us, the self)—considered aspirational and advantageous—and out-groups (them, the other)—detested and worthy of hostility. This incites individuals to strive to embody characteristics of the in-group which allows them to become a member of the group and, thus, achieve a superior social status. This allows the subject to further identify with and promote dominant ideological practices and values (those pertaining, and attributed to, the in-group) while rejecting any undesirable characteristics (encompassed by those belonging to out-groups), which are considered threats to the dominant ideology. Deppermann discusses the relation between in- and out-groups in social identity theory and concludes that "In-groups are more positively evaluated than out-groups, which are overwhelmingly associated with negative properties" (277). This results in the stereotyping of

out-groups which contributes to historical enmities defended by ideology, such stereotyping becomes internalized and impedes change.

According to Jenkins, "group identities are often treated as the most powerful forms of identification" (8), and so power must be analyzed in this dissertation. Power and authority are critical in categorizing individuals according to social identity and placing limits on who is considered a part of a certain collective group and who is othered: "Identities exist and are acquired, claimed and allocated within power relations. Identification is something over which struggles take place and with which stratagems [sic] are advanced – it is means and end in politics – and at stake is the classification of populations as well the classification of individuals" (45).

Elcheroth and Reicher expand on this notion and define power as "the power to shape identities, in particular by creating settings in which people are led to meet each other as foes or friends" and link power not only with identity construction but with violence as a "reciprocal relationship" where violence is derived "from the ways that identity is defined and controlled" but also "serves as a means of gaining power over identity and defining it in ways that establish particular people as authoritative" (67).

3. *American War* by Omar El Akkad

Published in 2017, *American War* was written by Omar El Akkad, an Egyptian-born Qatari citizen who moved to Canada as a young adult. El Akkad has previously worked as a journalist covering NATO's invasion of Afghanistan, the Arab Spring in Egypt, and the trials at Guantanamo Bay. Writing from the perspective of someone not native to the United States, El Akkad's experiences have informed his fiction writing and are present throughout his debut novel, *American War*. In an interview, the author highlights that nothing within *American War* has not already occurred, instead, these events have merely happened in another spatial and temporal setting (Knopfdoubleday).

El Akkad chooses to locate his novel within the United States to highlight the fact that this descent into strife and injustice is not something to which the American people are immune. Within these traumatic circumstances, anyone could become damaged and resentful. He considers the United States "a country that prizes its mythology above all else," whose history proves that it "tends to unleash its most self-destructive impulses immediately following—and in direct response to—those moments in which it seeks most boldly to achieve its stated ideals of freedom and equality" (El Akkad, "Donald Trump and America's New Civil War" 7). The author defines this American mythology as the notion that one must be left alone to think and do whatever one wants. However, this interpretation constantly collides with reality, where only certain people, who fit within the superior group identity, may do so. As such, according to El Akkad, the land of the free has a veneer of goodness that is implicit yet is not a guarantee. What is truly important is how US society will classify and categorize the individual and to which identity marker society will latch onto to do so (Oregon Humanities).

The novel is set fifty years in the future, in 2074, and follows the Chestnut family—Benjamin and Martina Chestnut, their son Simon, and their twin daughters Sarat[15] and Dana—

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[15] As will later be discussed, Sarat's given name is Sara T. Chestnut, which she changes to Sarat.

throughout the Second American Civil War in an ecologically ravaged United States. The country is divided along traditional cultural and ideological lines after the ratification of a regulatory bill that seeks to illegalize the use of fossil fuels within the country. Seeing this as an affront to states' rights and individual autonomy, Mississippi, Alabama, and Georgia secede to form the Free Southern State, otherwise known as "The Mag" or Free Southern State.

The Chestnuts initially reside in their family state in Louisiana, a "purple" state that is under Northern, i.e., Blue, rule but holds Southern, i.e., Red, sympathies. However, when Benjamin ventures to Baton Rouge to apply for a work permit to move North and away from insurrectionist fighting, he is killed by a Southern rebel domestic terrorist or "homicide bomber." The death of Benjamin Chestnut leaves the family desolated and forces them to relocate to Camp Patience, a Southern refugee camp stationed within Red country. Whereas their previous "purple" identity allowed them to remain neutral, this relocation cements their social identities as pure Southerners and informs their future experiences throughout the Second Civil War.

Throughout the family's stay in Camp Patience, the children are targets for rebel recruiters. At the age of twelve, Sarat befriends Albert Gaines, who indoctrinates her to sympathize and identify with Southern nationalism. The refugees at Camp Patience are massacred by Northern soldiers in retaliation for prior rebel attacks, killing Martina, and leaving Simon with an incapacitating head injury. After the slaughter, Sarat becomes an active rebel insurrectionist and relocates her remaining family to Lincolnton, Georgia, where she hires Karina, an immigrant nurse, to care for Simon. After years of operations as a rebel, Sarat is captured by the Northern government, detained, and repeatedly tortured in Sugarloaf Detention Facility for over a decade. This has lasting effects on her social identity, and once the civil war seems to be concluding, she is allowed to return home. However, her home has drastically changed: Karina and Simon are now married and have a son, Benjamin, together. As El Akkad

notes, *American War* asks the reader to watch the progression of civil conflict and what damage does: damaged people can react with love, while others simply continue with violence (Oregon Humanities). The novel depicts how Sarat becomes the latter, when she decides to enact the ultimate revenge and turns her body into a bioweapon that spreads disease during the peaceful "Reunification Ceremony," eventually killing 110 million people and continuing the civil conflict for decades.

El Akkad characterizes Sarat as defined by a fierce curiosity and desperation to know (Knopfdoubleday). As such, the arc of her life is portrayed by the way this desire for knowledge is manipulated by the gruesome events of the Second Civil War, and especially by those around her. By focusing on the experiences of one of the protagonists, Sarat Chestnut, the novel portrays a confrontational social identity, or what Michel Pêcheux calls "counter-identification," which leads to her total annihilation along with a destabilization of the government and society. However, said society ultimately remains the same and continues the status quo, and so, the influence of the individual on society is damaging and disrupting yet fleeting. As Fukuyama states, "All societies have had rebellious teenagers and misfits who didn't want to accept those rules, but in this struggle, society almost always wins out by forcing inner selves to conform to external norms" (39). Thus, it is Sarat's immovable rebellious nature that leads to her downfall as, by the end of the novel, she is incapable of conforming to the dystopian external norms.

El Akkad describes *American War* as the American Nightmare in which the country experiences a loss of international power, trouble with resources, and social division that is incredibly familiar (Oregon Humanities). Once again, the U.S. is partitioned between the North and South, but this time, both factions are struggling for control over trade and the market in the form of fossil fuels, instead of enslaved people. In this novel, the author attempts to pinpoint the existential threat to the United States: it is a society whose every vector is oriented away

from communal good and towards individual good as a function of capitalism, the free market economy, and the mythology of the self-made man (Oregon Humanities). The crisis occurs due to the fact that American society finds itself in a moment in which these vectors need to veer away from the personal towards a communal good, yet discourse continues to focus on individual instead of institutional action. As such, El Akkad takes neoliberalism, an ideological tenet currently characteristic of the U.S., and juxtaposes it with a new, uncontrollable, and apolitical crisis, i.e., ecological disaster. When faced with such danger, capitalist neoliberalism causes violence in an effort to remain influential and "free" from regulation. According to Harvey, the "assumption that individual freedoms are guaranteed by freedom of the market and of trade is a cardinal feature of neoliberal thinking, and it has long dominated the US" (7). Through his depiction of the historic enmities between the North and South, El Akkad correlates the South's secession and fight for individual liberties with its defense of the economic freedom of the market to continue the use of nonrenewable energy sources. In essence, Southern secessionists equate freedom of the market to personal freedom from perceived Northern oppression and injustice.

Rising water levels and temperatures have rendered the geography of the nation drastically changed, further displacing its citizens and resulting in an "Inland Exodus" (El Akkad, *American War* 3). The United States and the self-proclaimed Free Southern State or FSS—constituted by Mississippi, Alabama, and Georgia—wage a brutal war over the criminalization or illegalization of the use and trade of fossil fuels. The North, or U.S. government, believes that due to climate change, the country must become more sustainable and depend only on renewable energy sources. However, the South fights for its right over an unregulated market where its citizens can continue to profit and use oil and other ecologically harmful materials, which they deem to be more efficient. Neoliberalism is at play within the novel with this struggle over the free consumption of fossil fuels by "capturing ideals of

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individual freedom and turning them against the interventionist and regulatory practices of the state […] [they] emphasized the liberty of consumer choice, not only with respect to particular products but also with respect to lifestyles, modes of expression, and a wide range of cultural practices" (D. Harvey 42). By following Sarat, a young girl and displaced refugee, the reader is allowed to perceive the ways in which she is indoctrinated with Southern, neoliberal ideology. She is not originally from the Free Southern State, yet her forceful removal from her home in Louisiana situates her as a refugee in a camp within the FSS. While here, rebel militias and international corporate powers recruit her for their own vested interests.

The novel begins by presenting the reader with an updated map of the United States from the year 2075. In this cartographical excerpt, the reader can observe changes to the geography of the continent, where many states have been swallowed by the ocean. By presenting these defamiliarized signs, El Akkad signals typical dystopian patterns in which "societies [are] significantly worse than the society of the reader, but uncomfortably close to it" (Donawerth 30). In conjunction, the prologue states that "the planet turned on the country and the country turned on itself" (El Akkad, *American War* 3). From the beginning, El Akkad provides an agency to the ecological events that occur within the novel, making it clear that the narrative events are shaped by characters' past and present actions; the setting is not a passive situation but a result of society's exploits leading to rising water levels, the Southwest in embers, and the Great Plains devoid of people after the "Inland Exodus" or mass migration. Paul Collier studies the reasons behind civil war and determines that "low income, slow growth, and primary commodity dependence make a country prone to civil war" along with rebel propaganda and discourse (22) and these seem to be the causes for the Second Civil War in the novel as well.

El Akkad intersperses excerpts of several non-narrative documents to provide seemingly objective perspectives belonging to the dominant discourse utilized within the novel. The first

document excerpted is from a government syllabus module that teaches the Second American Civil War. The secessionist states were initially Mississippi, Alabama, Georgia, and South Carolina, and the primary cause of the war was Southern resistance to the Sustainable Future Act that prohibited the use of fossil fuels. This act, according to said document, was met with Southern outcries of injustice, discrimination, and oppression. Thus, neoliberal ideology within the South creates a vicious cycle that utilizes and expounds ideals of individual freedom—deeply rooted in U.S. culture—to influence sociopolitical structures so that "a neoliberal market-based populist culture of differentiated consumerism and individual libertarianism" (D. Harvey 42) is attained and that said "differentiated consumerism" is intertwined with and is the sole meaning of individual freedom.

Key events that kickstarted the conflict were the assassination of President Daniel Ki by a secessionist suicide bomber, Julia Templestowe, in Jackson, Mississippi in December 2073, and the deaths of Southern protestors in Fort Jackson, South Carolina. There were years of Union victories and fighting subsided, but rebel insurrectionist groups continued with guerrilla warfare and were aided by foreign agents, especially those belonging to the newly formed Bouazizi Empire. During Reunification Day, after peace talks, a "secessionist terrorist"—which the reader later learns is Sarat—releases a biological agent known as the Reunification Plague that kills 110 million people. The "identity of the terrorist responsible remains unknown" to the public (El Akkad, *American War* 23), but the reader will follow Sarat throughout her life and gain insider knowledge about these historic events. The novel begins in 2075, once the war has already commenced, and depicts the events and experiences that influence Sarat's social identity and eventually lead to her mass biowarfare terrorist act.

3.1 Stigmatization and the Body

The body holds a special relationship with social identity because it functions as humanity's first identity marker. Thus, the body becomes a precondition to reflect on and construct one's identity (Tancke 213). The composition of social identity tends to be based on group formation and assumptions connected to one's performance of a role, and so, the body is also imbued with social expectations concerning physical markers that allow it to be grouped and categorized. According to Alexandra Howson, the body is material: it is "lived, experienced, but is done so in ways which are profoundly influenced by social processes and shaped by particular social contexts" in that our identities are intimately linked to our bodies since "we *are* bodies, our sense of who we are is inseparable from our own body." (13). Acquisition or attribution of a social identity is acquired via social interactions of embodied beings. Through these interactions, the body is granted social significance and social identities are connected to material aspects of the body (i.e., race, gender/sex, size, etc.). This creates identity-specific expectations surrounding these corporeal markers and influences the ways members of these groups must behave.

The body, thus, acts as a mediator or "instrument by which all information and knowledge is received and meaning is generated" within a social context (Grosz 87). To properly interact with society and acquire appropriate social identity, the material body must exist and be constructed as a "vehicle of being in" (Merleau-Ponty 94) as well as a "means of communication with" (106) the social world. The body's role in social identity can be understood as twofold: it is an instrument or medium that interacts with and relates to external cultural meanings, and it is also a product that does not have any significance prior to socially constructed markers of gender, race, or other physical attributes. Thus, the body comes into being in society through these marks, which serve to categorize embodied individuals according to different social identity groups and, thus, grant them personhood via this membership.

Although these marks of the body act as a means of inclusion within social identity groups, they can also function as methods of exclusion for those who cannot or do not adhere to the physical characteristics that define group membership. These visual recognition markers serve to distinguish non-members and thus exclude any bodies deemed undesirable or unworthy.

3.1.1 Bodily Identity Markers

According to Erving Goffman, the body acts as a central marker of differentiation for social identity because it is the initial recognition mechanism used to categorize and assign given roles according to social expectations. Bodies are powerful indicators of identity as they are a material means for assigning stigma and rejection or belonging within a group; hence, they are used to reinforce an individual's proper place within society (Goffman 4–5). Social embodiment or "corporeal visibility is marked by biological criteria, such as **phenotype**, that separate people into distinct groups—as gendered, racialized or nationalized—in order to dominate or exploit" individuals by internalizing a socially constructed "self-image" that exerts influence over their sense of worth and "moral value" (Howson 24, emphasis in original). An important phenotypic marker of social identity is that of skin tone. Frank Harvey highlights the role of biology and the body in social identity since racial or "ethnic ties are inherently more potent (and fit) as an organizing force" rather than those based on more experiential markers of class or occupation (F. P. Harvey 40–41). He argues that ethnicity "ties individuals together and provides a sense of communal anchorage and protection lacking in other forms of organization" (F. P. Harvey 41), and thus, it is an effective category for social identity.

Throughout *American War*, the Chestnut family are constantly classified and differentiated according to their physical markers or, as El Akkad terms, "demarcations." For example, Martina considers how her family has always been judged and ascribed specific social identities according to "meaningless, bigoted demarcations; all the times she'd been made to

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feel alien to some stranger's expectation of what constituted the right and normal world—the color of her skin, the ethnicity of the man she'd chosen to marry, even her tomboy daughter" (El Akkad, *American War* 81). The social pressures of these physical identity markers can be described as "norms of identification" for group membership (Appiah, *The Lies That Bind* 19). Material factors are construed as demarcations or markers of specific social identity groups that construct normative regulations on one's body in order to fully be considered a member. In this case, the body is used to attribute commonalities to group members and alienate or stigmatize those who do not adhere to these normative demarcations. Thus, the characters' bodies are the first to ascribe them value and belonging to a certain group, which, in turn, pressure individuals to comply to certain expectations about behaviors and practices ascribed to these groups. In the case of the Chestnuts, and especially Sarat, her body is socially stigmatized and "made to feel alien" due her skin color, masculine features and attitudes, as well as her large body.

To better understand the ways in which these corporeal markers affect Sarat's social identity and rejection, El Akkad creates a significant physical contrast and dichotomy between Sarat and her twin Dana, which highlights the difference in their acceptance, status elevation, and construction of social identities. Dana is assigned more social worth and value as she is light-skinned and petite, whereas Sarat, due to her dark skin and considerable height and size, is stigmatized. These given traits or phenotypic differences establish a disparity within their personalities: Dana becomes more feminine as she is granted a more aspirational social status that esteems such aesthetics. In turn, Sarat, who cannot fit into women's clothes because of her enlarged body, must adopt more masculine or tomboy values, and is, thus, outcast as her gender expression does not fit into the accepted norms assigned to her biological sex. The twins' bodies essentialize their social identities and gender construction. As children, Dana enjoyed wearing makeup and pretending to be a lady, while Sarat liked to play in nature and roughhouse. Although the sisters are told by their parents they are "made of the same flesh," Dana is

described using more positive, endearing attributes with an "easygoing wit and sincere smile"(El Akkad, *American War* 12), while Sarat is characterized as tough, difficult, and androgynous. She is "stubborn, hard, undaunted by calamity" (12). The skin colors, physical appearances, and demeanors of the twin girls influence their social identities and their treatment in society. In line with the rigidification of social identity of twenty-first century dystopian literature previously mentioned, Dana and Sarat's have been limited by their bodily disparities.

The twins' skin tone phenotypes define the ways in which they are treated and accepted in the novel. Colorist prejudices consider Dana's hair, which is long and smooth, to be more acceptable and desirable, while Sarat's is "unruly and revolt[s] to fuzz in the humidity" (17). Hair, an important signifier in the black community, not only reflects the sisters' personalities, but also determines their experiences. The multiple descriptions of Sarat's hair throughout the novel serve to foreshadow her future actions and her journey as an unruly or lawless person who revolts against society. Dana's social situation is eased because of her light skin and enviable looks. Her perceived beauty is an asset that bestows social and financial power. For example, while at Camp Patience, foreign news agents film Dana for almost an hour and pay her for her appearance. When discussing her physical appearance, the refugees at Camp Patience and other news agents describe her as a potential star since "Foreign hacks will pay all kinds of money to film themselves a pretty little Southern refugee girl, and you got the prettiest little refugee girl anyone's ever seen" (76). The international currency Dana receives is of significant value in such an impoverished refugee site, granting her further socioeconomic value and power. Her social identity is elevated because she is "the prettiest little refugee girl" with markers of traditional beauty (light skin and long, silky hair), petiteness, and femininity. In contrast, Sarat's dark skin, unruly curls, tomboy nature, and massive frame are the initial markers of rebellion and stigma within their community: an identity which she later fully adopts.

Sarat is aware of her stigmatization and social rejection. Initially, she wishes to assimilate the corporeal norms of identification that are attributed to conventional social identity groups. In her desire to belong or acquire membership to a particular group, she prizes the attributes that are valued in said group and yearns for her body to change so as to be more acceptable: "Sarat envied the malleability of boys' bodies […] she longed to have such a malleable, predictable body—one that could grow big and strong and yet not raise a single stranger's eyebrow" (157). According to Elizabeth Grosz, the body is of principal importance for identity because it acts as a mediator with the social world: "If the subject is to gain knowledge about the external world, have any chance of making itself understood by others, or be effective in the world on such a model, the body must be seen as an unresistant pliability […] [whose] corporeality must be reduced to a predictable, knowable transparency" (9–10). Thus, Sarat understands that for her to gain knowledge of the external world and be accepted as belonging to a group, her body must be "predictable", "knowable," and "malleable" without causing undue surprise or awareness to make herself more understood by others and better comprehend the external world. Yet, her figure is not that of a boy's nor is it like the traditional girl's body, and so this hinders her ability to fully comprehend social nuances as well as causes her rejection by society.

As an answer to her unalterable physique and consequent social stigmatization, Sarat rebels against social bodily expectations and repudiates those values considered more feminine or traditional. Her body and refusal to conform to socially acceptable standards make her resistant and unpredictable. Sarat becomes an outcast; a strange, isolated young woman, thus marking her social identity as Other. She is unable to identify with her peers; they are "alien to her—possessed of a dramatic concern for things that seemed inane and devoid of adventure: the color and style of skirts, the arrival of facial hair, the mysterious topology of flesh" (El Akkad, *American War* 86). Her fellow Southern refugees are concerned with bodily identity

markers and conformity to normative standards. They interact with the external world through appropriate corporeal media: self-presentation via attire and fashion; predictable physical maturity with the onset of facial hair; and a pliable topology of flesh and sexual discovery.

Sarat is initially renounced for her physical attributes, skin color, and body size, which, in turn, leads her to attempt to construct a new social identity adjusts to this erasure and Othering. According to Griffiths,

> If someone has been rejected—or has rejected herself—as a result of attributions of race, class, gender or disability, she finds it necessary to construct a new identity which accommodates the rejection. […] the wish for membership itself can be abandoned, and the attributions made correspondingly more powerful in the new self-identity. […] This is a process born of rejection and not to be confused with freely choosing such a group because she feels at home in it, however happy she feels later with her new group. (88)

In her attempt to "accommodate her rejection," her desire for membership into the feminine social group is abandoned. Due to her considerable stature, Sarat is forced to wear men's clothes at a young age because women's clothes do not fit her. The following excerpt indicates Sarat's acceptance of her social identity as a rebel and outcast as "she found it liberating to no longer be measured against the unbearable standard of her sister, who counted in her sprawling wardrobe not a single piece of clothing fit for adventures" (El Akkad, *American War* 98). Instead of conforming and attempting to fit in to the "unbearable" conventional body standards that glorify Dana while rejecting her corporeality, she rejoices in her difference. Just like her peers are alien to her because they are unconcerned with adventure, this new, unorthodox clothing is "fit for adventures." This desire for and fascination with adventures is what also marks Sarat as different and leads to her recruitment, since she was driven to consider fighting as a rebel insurrectionist against the North as adventurous. Thus, when Sarat is later accepted as a nationalist rebel or insurrectionist, she fully and radically adopts this social identity and displays features she considers "more powerful" within this new group. As will be later analyzed, although nationalist ideology makes her "feel at home" within the South, this social

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identity is not acquired through "free choosing" but is born from her previous rejection that labels her an outcast. This allows recruiters to target and enlist her via indoctrinating propaganda and offers of belonging to a social identity group.

In her defiance, Sarat repudiates any phenotypic markers of social identity and attempts to essentialize the body. She only grants importance to the body's material corporeality and physical functions in an attempt to eliminate any social influence. Thus, "Whenever she got to thinking about why Dana's skin was light and hers dark, or why Dana's hair fell straight and bright and hers […] was fuzzy, she told herself that these things didn't matter. What mattered was bones and blood" (127). In only giving credence to "bones and blood," she fails to recognize the importance of these markers as displaying social expectations and ties and rejects any affiliation to an ethnic group. Sarat participates in the erasure of any intersectional identity she could have by repudiating any possible markers that could grant her group membership to other social identities. What is thus portrayed is the radicalization of the individual in a dystopian society that allows only one, exclusive social identity to be of import to the characters. In the case of Sarat, this social identity is that of a Southern nationalist who defends neoliberal ideology.

The external, social world only manages to awaken Sarat's curiosity when it is mediated through and related to notions of adventure. Her desire for knowledge and intrepid explorations are intruded upon and informed by her surroundings: war, violence, and nature. She becomes obsessed with the South's combat efforts and keeps "a potpourri of war seeds—bullet casings and wild-toothed slivers of shrapnel. They were given to her as presents by the sullen grunts," (79) who considered her a curiosity, "a big-limbed, wild-haired girl who'd taken an insatiable interest in their slow, wartime metallurgy" (83). Her body—"big-limbed, wild-haired"—marks her as different, but she is tolerated by rebel soldiers, who, instead of disposing of this waste, give her "presents" or trinkets of battle that ignite her curiosity and yearning for adventure. This

casual acceptance amplifies her enchantment and obsession with this civil conflict, which, in addition to the stigma that Sarat faces, leads her to fail to adhere to a social identity based on normative corporeal regulations that could grant her a more nuanced and intersectional identity. Instead, she ends up rejecting these norms of identification.[16]

So far, this dissertation has established that throughout her youth, Sarat struggles with social rejection and, in turn, discards normative body markers. However, it is not until a defining instance of public humiliation and repudiation among her peers occurs that she fully embraces her newfound social role as a rebel. Sarat is dared to venture into an odorous and vile creek filled with refuse and excrement in front of her peers at Camp Patience, and she falls in. This moment—sunken in other people's waste matter—causes Sarat to feel deep shame and foulness, as though "trails of invisible ants marched through the fuzzy corkscrews of her hair" (110). To distance herself further from this instance of complete rejection and disgrace in which society's gaze and judgment crawl over her body like "trails of invisible ants," she displaces her humiliation onto that which has been completely rejected: her "fuzzy" hair that acts as a symbol of her physical otherness, Sarat cleanses herself by shaving her head entirely. In doing so, she adopts a new, distanced, and more powerful social identity:

> Sarat saw her reflection in the glass. With her hair shaved, her face looked fuller, rounded in a way that unveiled its symmetry. There was a smoothness in how the jaw became the skull, and the skull an almost polished half-mirror to the light. Sarat observed her new face a long time […] alone with her reflection, she felt new and impossibly light. (111)

She takes control of her body and its aesthetics, also shifting her social identity through her own agency and creating a sense of personal freedom allegedly valued within neoliberal policy. However, the text itself signals that this change is not socially supported. By referring to her face and head as "skull," El Akkad evokes notions of death and cadavers, as though this

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[16] Coupled with her rebellious tendencies, written on her body, this stigmatization eventually leads to her becoming a target for recruitment and radicalization, later discussed in the section on Ideology. In this dystopian setting, Sarat's failure to conform will later be exploited and result in her downfall.

liberation or deviation from social standards of beauty and corporeal norms foreshadows her own destruction. Of note, directly after this point of influx in Sarat's new social identity, she meets Albert Gaines, who will recruit her for the rebel cause and indoctrinate her with Southern propaganda. Whereas her previous slight rejection of standard group membership only initiated her interest in war and violence, this decisive moment put her on the path of radicalization, conflict, and torture.

3.1.2 Brutality and Pain

Sarat's social identity is also warped by the effects of violence and torture on her body. Throughout the rest of her stay in Camp Patience, Sarat is trained by rebel recruiter Albert Gaines. Her mind and body are transformed to become an efficient weapon to destroy the Northern enemy. Sarat's first experience of brutality occurs when the North attacks Camp Patience and slaughters almost all the refugees. Unable to continue hiding and feeling like she must act, Sarat ventures out during the massacre and sees a line of Southern men who have been executed. She hides among their bodies as she fears she might be caught when Northerners approach: "She wriggled into the mass of dead men, camouflaged herself within it. The heat that had touched her body now wrapped itself around her, sunk into her pores. She lay among the blood and sweat and shit and piss of the murdered. She thought nothing of the fluid that seeped into her clothes" (El Akkad, *American War* 165). This experience is of special significance in the novel. As previously examined, the first initial trigger for Sarat that limits and shifts her identity is that of public humiliation. This event, based more on violence and war, serves to cement her social identity by providing an enemy Other to seek revenge upon and a nationalist insurrectionist identity that accepts her and her exalts her body as a potential weapon. El Akkad depicts the scene above utilizing symbolism of rebirth. She is within a womb or "mass of dead man" floating in fluids of "blood and sweat and shit and piss." This womblike tomb is

a space of death and violence from which she emerges with a rigid identity. As a resident of the "Bible Belt" of the United States, this instance of rebirth can be connected to that of Christian Evangelical baptism in which the submersion of the believer or convert is considered a death of the prior soul. Upon lifting oneself out of the baptismal water, there occurs a birth of the restored, evangelized and "saved" soul. Therefore, the newness of her soul and body through this rebirth makes her vulnerable, which serves as Sarat's baptism or indoctrination into life as a Southern rebel: her spiritual soul and social identity are now complexly characterized and defined by her acceptance of rebel society and Southern ideology. She takes her revenge on a lone Northern soldier, and is reborn into a killer, completely radicalized by the violence she has endured and witnessed.

Along with the instance of the refuse creek,[17] El Akkad also describes the bodies in this scene with abject terms, portraying them as leaky bodies that discharge excrements and gore:

> The corpse (or cadaver: *cadere*, to fall), that which has irremediably come a cropper, is cesspool, and death; it upsets even more violently the one who confronts it as fragile and fallacious chance […] refuse and corpses show me what I permanently thrust aside in order to live. These body fluids, this defilement, this shit are what life withstands, hardly and with difficulty, on the part of death. There, I am at the border of my condition as a living being. My body extricates itself, as being alive, from that border. Such wastes drop so that I might live, until, from loss to loss, nothing remains in me and my entire body falls beyond the limit—*cadere*, cadaver. (Kristeva 3, emphasis in original)

Bodily fluids are both what "life withstands" but are also symbols of the body's permeability: the body serves to divide those good, life-giving fluids to those external, menacing, leaky fluids. However, one's physical form is a place for both, as such fluids reside within it, yet when externalized, serve as a threat and defilement. The body is, thus, fragile and vulnerable, depending on the external in which "wastes drop so that I might live" as well as on opposition since the "I" needs an "Other." However, there remains a fear a disintegration or "falling beyond the limit" into the external, abject Other, which Kristeva identifies as death. The fluids

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[17] Both experiences are instances of rebirth from the abject: fluids of refuse and death. As such, both episodes are also imbued with violence. Just as the abject fluids affect the material body, so too do these violent experiences affect Sarat's social identity.

in this scene permeate Sarat's body as they seep into her pores and clothes. This external violence and war fought between North and South enter her personal embodied experience. In death, the Southerners' bodies collapse into the outside and surround Sarat. Whereas Sarat previously envied boys' "malleable" or "permeable" bodies, she achieves this permeability when their body fluids, the brutality of war, and this violent experience seep into her and influence her social identity.

Just as body fluids signal the body's dependence on the outside, so too does social identity need or depend on an Other or "them" to define membership for the group "us." In her analysis of Kristeva's notion of abjection and death, Grosz considers bodily fluids as an affront to "a subject's aspiration toward autonomy and self-identity" (Grosz 194). In the case of *American War*, the South depends on the Northern enemy to define and delimit itself as well as provide a cause for war. In this scene, the body fluids—symbolizing death and external brutality—inhibit or affront Sarat's desire for "autonomy" and "self-identity," because this violent experience and rebirth places her within her rigid nationalist identity construct. Sarat is consumed by rebel indoctrination which inhibits any potential for self-identity construction and only allows space for an imposed, rigid social identity.

Her yearning for revenge inherently depends on the existence of an enemy Other on which she can enact her violent vengeance. This hinders her personal autonomy as she not only becomes a pawn in Southern rebel military plans, but she also loses the freedom to step away from the violence and seek more pacifist ideals. This loss of the capacity for self-government and independence is completed when she submits to the dystopian Southern secessionist society. Once her need to act and take revenge is fully cemented via the construction of her nationalist, insurrectionist identity, her body becomes a menace. The weaponization and danger of her physical form is complete when she finds a lone Northern soldier and beats and strangles him to death. Thus, her body's absorption of these body fluids—and social identity—forces it

to become leaky and so functions as a site of "danger and vulnerability" (Grosz 195): she is a danger to the external, enemy Northerner or Other, but she is also more vulnerable or susceptible to Southern indoctrination and a limited, exclusionary dystopian social identity.

After her recruitment and conditioning, Sarat's body fully becomes an agent of violence. Yet, upon her imprisonment in Sugarloaf Detainment Camp, her positions shifts as she becomes the victim of brutality and torture. Torture is the most corporeal form of violence in that both physical and psychological torture involve the body. As J. Jeremy Wisnewski states, "*all* torture leaves its mark on the body" through pain and brutality where "physical torture involves the use of violence against the body of the most overt kind; psychological torture involves the manipulation of an agent's inner world, usually by manipulating the body in various ways" (8-9). The body becomes not only the site of pain but also the cause of pain in which the objective of the torturer is to objectify the body and turn it "against the subject—to make it the very thing that will betray one – to make it one's fundamental adversary" (39). Any agency and identity that Sarat had acquired is annihilated through torture as her body is manipulated and turns against her. Her previous, original corporeal markers of social identity are erased, leaving behind only the marks and effects of torture on her body.[18] Sarat becomes unrecognizable after staying in Sugarloaf and experiencing torture for years. The pain and torment she endured caused drastic changes to her body and mind, which changed her social identity completely.

Once she manages to return to her family home and past life, there is a stark contrast between who Sarat was before and who she is now. As a youth that relished radicalized violence, she was "lean and bald-headed, a menacing smile on her face. But what stood in [the family's] driveway bore almost no resemblance to that image. This woman was fat, her gut

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[18] The objectification of victims of torture and mistreatment and turning their bodies against themselves, i.e., personal corporeal betrayal, to gain submission and obedience can be encountered throughout US history. Namely, the experiences of brutality and torture throughout the novel evoke the suffering of enslaved people throughout the beginning of American historical development and the Civil War as well as the ordeals of the detainees at Guantanamo Bay. These two prolonged occurrences inform El Akkad's dystopian writing and lend more nuance to Sarat's corporeal objectification and torture.

pressed against her dirty gray shirt. But it was more than that. All of her seemed oversized—
her limbs trunklike, her nose flattened and wide. She looked old" (El Akkad, *American War*
265). This bodily change directly reflects a transformation in social identity. Her bald head
symbolized her nationalist insurrectionist identity. Her body was forged as a lean weapon to
harm and kill Northerners. After her years of torture, she is no longer agile and menacing, but
oversized, old, and dirty. She is not the dangerous corporeal weapon she was trained to be
because her social identity does not remain that of an insurrectionist. According to Wisnewski,
"*the feeling of having a changed identity* is one of the most characteristic effects of torture" (73,
emphasis in original). Her body has been broken and is now defined by her wounds and trauma;
therefore, her previous identity has also been broken. As a result of her brokenness and
distortion, Sarat chooses to take vengeance on the entire nation, both North and South, and
spread a fatal plague across the United States. Once again, Sarat makes her body into a weapon.
However, this time, on a monumental scale, as she chooses to host the disease within herself,
effectively transforming her body into a weapon of mass destruction. The final metamorphosis
of her body, and thus her social identity, is of a biological "bomb" that attempts to dismantle
and destroy society. However, lasting effect of this counter-identification with society is that
she simply annihilates herself.

As seen with Sarat's metamorphosis, bodies are not only primarily markers of a social
identity group, but they can also be objects affected by lived experiences, cultural expectations,
and belief systems. In fact, throughout the novel, ideological differences between the warring
factions of Northerners and Southerners are the main markers of social groups. This dissertation
posits that as is common in dystopian fiction, Sarat is not permitted an intersectional identity,
and her defining category is solely based on ideological practices and being a Southerner, with
the Northerners as a common enemy. This ideology affects the way she interprets and constructs
bodies. She attributes physical differences to Northerners to further differentiate and distance

them when she tries "imagine what the killers looked like. She pictured them as the Northerners she'd seen on television who always appeared tall and muscular, their complexions ghostly. In her mind they were of a different breed, a different species" (El Akkad, *American War* 164). Sarat's only contact with this Other is through propagandized media. Her lacking in contact and experience with Northerners facilitates their establishment as her enemy, being that the only images available to her of their bodies do not—and must not—resemble hers. They must have ghostly complexions that contrast with her dark skin. The term "ghostly" used here also signals Sarat's notions of Northerners as harbingers of death and violence. The Other must be a different species or breed, imagining "them not as men, not even as human, bus as a dark, daylong season: a primal winter" (166), the connotations of winter being those of decline and decay in which humans must simply survive the elements. The individuals become masses, not human but a natural, unstoppable force causing death and destruction.

An excerpt of the novel depicts the interplay of notions of the body and of nationalist ideology and social identity within the Chestnut family, which causes them to belong to a rigid and limited identity group. Their social identity is imposed on the family because of society's notions of origins and the ideology behind blood and roots, implying that they will always be Southerners. One of the Chestnut's neighbors tells them:

> There's no sin in making a safer life for your children—and maybe when they're old enough to make decisions for themselves, they can come back to their own country— but you're not *of* them. You're still Southerners in your bones, you're still Southerners in your blood. That won't ever change. (28, emphasis in original)

The American identity has fractured and has been divided between North and South. One's social identity, thus, depends on place of birthplace and biology, and in doing so, the family carries their identity in their blood and bones. In this society, escaping such limiting notions of identity is insurmountable and "won't ever change." Emphasis is placed in the fact that the Chestnut family, regardless of their human desire for safety and shelter, will never belong to the Northern group, as their anatomy determines that they are "not *of* them."

In keeping with Kristeva's discussion of the body, the critic's analysis of internal and corporeal perception is quite apt in this excerpt: "internal perceptions of emotional and thought processes can be projected outwards in the same way as sense perceptions" so that the body is not the only signifier of meaning within the outside world but "a language of abstract thought", i.e., an ideology or ideologies, is also developed to better perceive, influence, and create a picture of said external world (60). Kristeva describes a convergence of the abstract or internal, psychic, and emotional perceptions with the sensory or material corporeal perceptions of the external world. As such, this confluence of the external and internal affects one's social identity and place within and perception of the outside world and society. Within *American War*, El Akkad describes the physical connection of Sarat's anatomy to the outside world and how this affects her social identity, but also links such understandings with a sentimental attachment to the characters' place of birth that influences their emotional and thought processes. Hence, the body is also linked to ideology or a "language of abstract thought." The characters situate their bodies according to physical markers as well as ideological determinations that also participate in the construction of their social identities via ideological practices of belonging.

3.2 Patriotism and Nationalist Ideology: Homeland and Heritage

Throughout *American War*, the question arises as to why, in the face of their exploitation and ecological demise, the citizens of the Free Southern State would continue to promote and expound neoliberal ideals. El Akkad does not provide an in-depth discussion of ideology himself, but his central query throughout the novel regards how lower-class citizens and refugees—who are affected firsthand by this armed conflict and loss of homes and normal life due to the climate crisis and warfare—can work against their best interests simply to maintain such a deregulated market and unsustainable energy source. This section analyzes how the maintenance and enhancement of traditional enmities and nationalist identities along with the

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promotion of "common sense" preserve and uphold these neoliberal ideals to the personal detriment of individuals.

This dissertation utilizes Terry Eagleton's interpretation of ideology in *Ideology: An Introduction,* which he states is defined by and stems from

> (a) the process of production of meanings, signs and values in social life; (b) a body of ideas characteristic of a particular social group or class; (c) ideas which help to legitimate a dominant political power; (d) false ideas which help to legitimate a dominant political power; (e) systematically distorted communication; (f) that which offers a position for a subject; (g) forms of thought motivated by social interest; (h) identity thinking; (i) socially necessary illusion; (j) the conjuncture of discourse and power; (k) the medium in which conscious social actors make sense of their world; (l) action-oriented sets of beliefs; (m) the confusion of linguistic and phenomenal reality; (n) semiotic closure; (o) the indispensable medium in which individuals live out their relation to a social structure; (p) the process whereby social life is converted to a natural reality. (1–2)

Employing Eagleton's observations, it is possible to extrapolate some common notions regarding ideology and social identity. Firstly, ideology plays a role in creating and producing meaning and values while becoming a specialized "body of ideas" for a particular group, thus defining the social identity or ideas pertaining to said group. Although ideology can be linked, then, to the construction of a social identity and self-image, it can also be used to create and express ideas about the Other and groups outside one's own. The ideas produced by ideology may be true, false, or consciously deceptive, and so can be a manipulation to create an illusion or transmit distorted meanings in order to gain power and superiority. Ideology can be regarded as the signification of a body of ideas used by forces or figures in power to reinforce, continue, or uphold specific notions that legitimate their power. And so, dystopias can utilize ideology or bodies of ideas to manufacture social identities that will support and legitimate the dystopian society. Thus, in dystopian fiction, ideology could also be considered an illusion or a body of falsified ideas with which identity is shaped under the control of a "structuring power of ideological fantasy" (Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology* 30).

Ideology manages to attract individuals via "instrumental rationality," which motivates citizens to promote specific ideologies because, in so doing, they while achieve advantages or material benefits. It is also accepted by functioning on the level of "personal or group value-rationality" in that "individuals uphold a particular set of beliefs because they consider these values as promoting certain symbolic benefits for them" basing themselves more on abstract, emblematic values or rewards (e.g.., rising social status or heavenly benefits) than material benefits (Malešević 73–74). According to Malešević, both instrumental rationality and value-rationality—i.e., material and symbolic advantages and assets—create a clearly defined ideal of action: a structured ideology that does not require an extensive knowledge of the workings and systems of values associated to such rewards. Additionally, ideologies can also work through "emotional appeal" and individuals act out of hatred, fear, love, or any affect, however, with no ideal of action: "This type of social action is more likely to take place in relatively short periods of time during or immediately after some dramatic social change (i.e. revolutions, wars, break-up of the state structure, natural disasters, pandemic diseases and so on)" and is most prevalent in nationalist propaganda with appeals to kinship relations (74).

Through the dystopian genre, El Akkad portrays the ways in which all three forms of ideology are present within the Free Southern State. Some Southerners promote rebellion and secession because they wish to maintain the forces of production under a neoliberal rule so that the continuance of fossil fuel usage provides economic benefits and resist the use of less efficient and less profitable renewable energy, whereas others fight as insurrectionists due to religious beliefs that this is a God-sanctioned conflict or due to a desire to raise their social status and social identity within the South. However, the recruitment and radicalization of "homicide bombers," such as Sarat, is enabled through the ideology of emotional appeal. Because their use is to sacrifice themselves for a cause, there is no need for a clearly defined ideal of action to follow for long-term benefits. Instead, nationalist recruiters focus on

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intensifying their targets' emotions, especially fear, hatred, and a hunger for revenge, so that they will react to Northern "oppression" and promote Southern propaganda for short periods of time. This compressed timespan, thus, does not grant them time to objectively consider other avenues of rebellion and only permits their focus on their visceral reaction and feelings so as to strengthen their resolve to become "homicide bombers." Sarat has witnessed many instances of what Malešević describes as "dramatic social changes:" revolutions or secession of the FSS, the ongoing Second Civil War, break-up of the state structure via secession and an inadequate or incompetent bureaucratic system, natural disasters and ecological crisis, and the epidemic disease of the Slow (and later the Quick). After experiencing such emotional traumatization and upheaval, Sarat is poised to adopt Malešević's third type of ideology and become a target for nationalist indoctrination and emotional manipulation to act in a self-sacrificial manner.

Bauman links the rise in nationalism with "*the erosion of state sovereignty*" (*Identity* 56, emphasis in original), which is a typical feature of neoliberal ideology. This allows for the neoliberal construction of common sense which manages to influence Southerners within the novel to ultimately act against their best interests. What Antonio Gramsci calls "common sense" is defined as the sense held in common or the "incoherent set of generally held assumptions and beliefs common to any given society" (233) and this can be linked to assertions of national identity functioning through common myths, mass public culture, and agencies of socialization. When incoherent, this set of beliefs can be misleading or manipulative by masking real problems using cultural biases. Thus, the use of the neoliberalized term freedom "resonates among all Americans because the economy in which they operate has given a sufficient number of Americans a sense of personal liberty and economic independence to make 'freedom' an important and functional symbol. It is a button that elites can press to open the door to the masses" (Rapley 55) and therefore justify any body of ideas or manipulate common sense with said trigger word. In *American War*, neoliberal strategies employ notions of freedom from

Northern oppression and a regulated market to advance nationalism and national pride by creating an environment in which nationalist ideals are normalized.

3.2.1 Southern Propaganda, the Other, and Historic Enmities

When discussing national identity, Elcheroth and Reicher state,

> It helps define the values and the ideology of the nation, who is included and who is excluded, how the nation relates to others and how others relate to it, who is seen as an ally and who a threat. The same is true the other way round. The way a nation prepares for potential threats from an outgroup serves to define the nation itself. To act as if our country could come under existential threat at any time is a powerful means of constraining social relations. That is, if the recollection and re-enactment of past violence can reconfigure identities as much as actual violence, the same is true of rehearsing for future violence. (112)

Within the novel, ideology is used to construct a Southern national identity that includes Southerners and excludes citizens of the North along geographical, cultural, and historic lines. By utilizing entrenched historic enmity stemming from the First American Civil War, the Southern ideology is able to "constrain social relations" by depicting the North and its Otherness as a threat to southern ways of life and identity. In fact, Slavoj Žižek identifies nationalism as based on a "national Cause" that is "nothing but the way subjects of a given ethnic community organize their enjoyment through national myths" and this enjoyment is constantly threatened by the Other, who wishes to steal it and ruin the group's way of life (202). However, the national Cause is based on a myth so that "'nation' is a fantasy" (232) that can never be achieved, meaning that the transmission of this nationalist ideology is pure propaganda or a body of lies. Nationalism becomes a "transcendental illusion, the illusion of a direct access to the Thing; as such, it epitomizes the principle of fanaticism in politics" (222).[19] This recollection and reenactment of past violence and wrongs has a considerable impact on the

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[19] Žižek's definition of "Thing" is a reference to the Cartesian subject, the inaccesible "I" that thinks or the "'thing' in me which thinks" that is originally lost (13-14). In the context of this dissertation, this could be considered access to self-definition or subject creation.

current civil war and strife and the configuration of a nationalist, neoliberal, and southern identity.[20]

Anthony D. Smith describes national identity as involving a political community with common institutions and codes of rights and obligations that incorporate a sense of defined social space and bounded territory with which members identify and to which they feel they belong. This includes a common culture and civic ideology as in "a set of common understandings and aspirations, sentiments and ideas" that unites its members through "agencies of popular socialization" and " common historical memories, myths, symbols and traditions" (Smith 11). Thus, according to Smith, the fundamental features of national identity include a historic territory known as homeland; common myths and historical memories; mass public culture; legal rights and duties for its members; and a common economy with territorial mobility for its members (14). In the Free Southern State of the novel, special importance is attributed to these features: notions of the South as home; the sharing of Southern history and traditions; the emphasis of a shared Southern culture; the rights of Southerners to self-determination and deregulation of the market as well as their duties to defend their homeland against Northern corruption; and the mobility established only within the FSS all serve to provide a Southern national identity and distance themselves from the Northern Other or enemy. Instilling these social bonds and shared features and values in the novel occurs through ideology. Ideology allows national identities to define and locate individuals within a collective cultural paradigm and participate in group membership regardless of race, gender, or class, as with the case of Sarat Chestnut. Moreover, the dystopian setting of the novel magnifies national identity to become nationalist identity. Whereas national identity can serve as a neutral differentiation between social groups, in the *American War* dystopia, this is radicalized: the

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[20] It is important to state that national identity cannot be confused with nationalism. However, this dissertation posits that in a dystopian setting that only legitimizes limited, rigid social identities, national identity leads to nationalist identity and nationalism.

dystopia only permits a sole, exclusionary social identity that emphasizes and enhances national pride and superiority as a demarcation and distinction from the Other or them of the North.

After declaring their secession from the Union, the Free Southern State understood the importance of ideological symbolism in creating a justified discourse and support among the people for their cause. However, El Akkad portrays the dishonesty behind these attempts and how ideological propaganda can be based on a falsified body of lies which can aspire to common sense only by manipulation and incoherence. For instance,

> in the first year after declaring independence, the Free Southerners scrambled to create a flag and compose an anthem. In their panic they botched the stars, and never could agree on an anthem. And so in his address at the revealing ceremony, President Kershaw made up the famous line about how the pained wail of the South's anguished people was the state's only song, and never mentioned the misdrawn stars. Sarat thought about how easy it would be to fix the mistake, to simply redraw the stars properly. But she knew that even broken history is history. The stars, cast wrong, must remain that way. It would be more wrong to change them. (El Akkad, *American War* 111)

This passage highlights the incompetence and inefficiency of the government of the Free Southern State. El Akkad mentions traditional nationalist neoliberal symbols—the flag and anthem—which tend to represent patriotic ideals of freedom and community within the US. With the "botching" of these emblems, the novel depicts how, instead of fixing these mistakes, politicians utilize nationalist ideology and propaganda to rewrite their actions. The anthem now becomes the Southerners' "pained wail" or outcry against oppression and Northern injustice while any mistakes made by Southerners are never mentioned and effectively erased from Southern consciousness. Sarat's acceptance of this broken history also signals the ways in which Southern nationalist ideology affects her perspective. Broken history does not have to be continually perpetuated and defended, and instead, one could choose to change and fix these mistakes. Instead, Sarat blindly supports these "botched" errors because they remain a source of pride in her distorted historical knowledge. With this excerpt, the reader can determine that Sarat's social identity enforces her acceptance and preservation of her dystopian society's errors and broken history. However, as will be later discussed, once her social identity changes, she

will counter-identify with southern society and attempt to influence and change it, which will ultimately lead only to her own individual destruction.

In the novel, adherence to the South's ideology is also perpetuated via notions of kinship and heritage through one's homeland and shared history. This is stated in a Biblical scripture (Jeremiah 12:9) in the epigraph of the novel: "Mine heritage is unto me as a speckled bird, the birds round about are against her; come ye, assemble all the beasts of the field, come to devour" (i). This is the first quote of the novel, and clearly indicates the main ideological factor that comes into play: heritage and family origins, considered birds of prey and beasts of the field or predators, within a body of ideas as devouring the individual or individual rebellion is symbolized through the image of a "speckled" or multi-colored, different bird.[21] This multi-colored bird resembles an intersectional and diverse identity, however, just as the dystopian society in the novel, all the other birds and animals will turn against the rebellious, counter-identifying individual and devour her to create a more limited, mono-colored, social identity.

Initially, Sarat is able to form part of the group via the acquisition of a nationalist social identity through her recruitment as an insurrectionist. As a recruitment tactic, she feels part of a group but remains isolated so that she is indoctrinated to immediately accept and uphold the southern nationalist body of ideas that endorses their own superiority and oppression by the North. Albert Gaines, her recruiter, teaches Sarat the history and culture of the South and Sarat "gorged on it all, delighted not only that such a world existed but that she held to it some ancestral claim. How much of it was real and how much pleasant fantasy didn't matter. She believed every word" (135). Up until this point, Sarat is neither a nationalist nor a true FSS Southerner, as she was born in Louisiana, a purple state. However, Gaines recognizes Sarat's status as an outcast and her yearning to belong to a group and gain a social identity makes her more vulnerable and, thus, more malleable to his manipulation. So, he provides her with an

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[21] For further analysis of this Biblical passage, see John Gill's *Exposition of the Entire Bible* (2012).

"ancestral claim" of kinship to a Southern history and culture, which, as Eagleton previously stated, is a function of ideology. This awakens Sarat's concern and outrage at perceived injustices and crimes committed against the South, and by starting to care, she starts to identify herself with such things and form part of a social identity. Speaking to the history of one's people and creating a sense of nationalist pride around such history allow members of the nationalist group to blame society's misfortunes on the Other and promote a radicalized social ideology linked to one's sense of belonging and national or ancestral pride, which emphasized the inheritance of an ancient culture and a deep sense of dignity, pride, and connection to fellow group members that were also being attacked by the enemy Other. As Eagleton previously identifies with ideology, it can contain "false ideas which help to legitimate a dominant political power." These notions can be misleading and manipulative, leading Sarat to disregard the truth of these claims and only preoccupy herself with her acceptance and claim to group membership.

According to Gary Johnson, kinship recognition markers are linked to both common history and culture as well as place by creating a tendency to hold certain locations— hometowns, states, nations—in particular esteem because of their ties to one's family. Sentiments over locations can, in turn, create kinship links with others who hail from the same region and can be "relatively powerful evokers of altruistic disposition" (65).[22] Thus, another material circumstance in the construction of social identity through ideological practice is the importance placed on place: "Just as people grow up in particular bodies, people grow up in particular places and their selves and subjectivities develop accordingly" (Griffiths 82). The novel states how some Southerners "as a form of protest had taken on their states of birth as family names" (El Akkad, *American War* 179). Their state or homeland locations take the place of their family and familial, interpersonal ties. This ideological kinship according to place or homeland has been raised above genetic ties in the construction of nationalist social identity.

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[22] Note that in his article, Johnson describes patriotism as a "brand of altruism" and is therefore connoting patriotic ideals in this excerpt.

Sarat is a "dislocated" person: she has no true home, and throughout the novel, we see her constantly move around the South and to different homes.

Although born and raised in a neutral territory, the Chestnuts' social identity is defined by their place of birth: the geographical expanse of the South. To Sarat, national identity and unity are more powerful and more important than her racial identity. She considers people of a different race her own people but with different skin (236). Throughout the novel, this idea of inescapable social identity connected to your homeland is present as when mention is made that the "rebel red is in [their] blood" (3). As previously discussed, this notion of identity construction through kinship of place and biology, or blood, is reiterated. Ideology functions in the material realm to solidify southern nationalist ideals, i.e., the "rebel red," that circulate within one's "blood." One can correlate this notion of social identity being transmitted through blood or bodily fluid to the Chestnut family's connection to water. Both liquid elements seem to carry important symbolism within the novel: they are both social identity markers for the family and of special significance to them. Both blood and water can be considered life sources for humankind and nature as they circulate and are in continuous movement. However, in this novel, water levels are rising and drowning the world, like blood ties are drowning the individual through expectations related to social identity. The rigid identification of Southerners through their blood and homeland restricts their social identities, just as the ecological crisis exemplified through water limits citizens movement and free trade.

In discussing a geographically established homeland, one must discuss the meaning of home within the novel. Sarat's dislocation, however, is made evident through the recurrent symbolism of water and moving rivers. For the Chestnut family, who have moved around the South and resided in different areas, their home is unstable. The only defining characteristic of the various Chestnut households is their proximity to water, normally a river, so they associate water with home. Sarat learned that "The natural skin of the world was water, and all water on

earth was connected. […] For a brief moment she was home" (135). Similar to blood, water embodies this sense of movement and constant displacement the Chestnuts have faced, and this allows for a stability and connection to each other. Yet, none of the places in which Sarat resides are her true homes. This dislocation is maintained throughout the novel and the different areas she moves to. In essence, Sarat has no roots and location does not grant her any ties to nationalism and kinship. Instead, it is Gaines through ideological propaganda via an emotional appeals ideology that manipulates and creates such ties or notions of origin to the South.

In fact, in the setting of the novel, water does not only symbolize life but also death and destruction due to the ecological crisis. Sarat's ancestors "were once buried near the banks of the Mississippi River, back when it was still corseted with levees. But eventually the river broke loose and took all the nearby houses and the farmland and even the dead in their graves. The river moves, he said, and as it moves it takes" (197). Water's constant movement and power are not always beneficial. They also contribute to a sense of entrapment due to encroaching water levels and lack of land. It is not merely a traditional symbol of life and motion, but also of devastation and the power of nature over mankind.

It seems that the Chestnut family, to an extent, is aware of this in that "all their lives the Chestnuts had lived at the feet of rivers and walls. Always bounded, always trapped—trapped by movement, trapped by stillness" (176). The Chestnuts migrate across the South, yet this is not true mobility as they have no freedom to actually leave the FSS. Their movement does not reflect any progress as the contextual, social circumstances of the South do not improve, and so they remain trapped. They are confined behind walls and borders or "stillness" as well as stuck in "movement" that holds no progress or beneficial change. According to Bauman, "the degree of immobility is today the main measure of social deprivation and the principal dimension of unfreedom" (*The Individualized Society* 38). Ideas of neoliberal liberty, thus, are truncated by the Chestnut's lack of physical mobility, progress, and freedom.

The historic enmity between the North and South also seems to take on geographical weight, as if ideology and identity can be transmuted onto land. "The world, Blue to the north, Red to the south, spread out before them. […] To the north the land looked the same but she knew there existed some invisible fissure in the earth where her people's country ended and the enemy's began" (133). Just as Sarat imagines Northerners to have different bodies and be a different breed, she also imagines their land separate and fissured. Sarat considers this different between the Northerner and the Southerner so insurmountable that even the (home)land itself reflects such a division. By spatially distancing the Southern in-group from the Northern Other, it is easier for antipathy between the two social identity groups to flourish and allows for antipathetic actions such as discrimination, violence, and even destruction.[23]

Throughout the novel, Sarat and Karina—Simon Chestnut's caretaker and later wife—are at odds. Karina represents peace and life as a healer and a gardener. She cares for Simon and helps him progress and recuperate from his head trauma, which he suffers from after the Camp Patience massacre. Karina also promotes the use of sustainable solar power within the home. In contrast, after Camp Patience, Sarat has become the harbinger of death and destruction. She only runs the house on "prohibition fuel" and has "no interest in compromise" (178), meaning she has become radicalized. The enmity between both women stems from the fact that Karina is a stranger and a foreigner who has no stake in the war. She is not from the South and is not part of the family. When speaking to Simon, Sarat says "'She might treat you nice, but she's not family. She's a stranger, and you know full well what strangers can do'" (239). Sarat's statement reflects Southerners' general distrust of individuals outside their national group identity. Those who are outsiders or "thems" are considered dangerous to the group or "us" because they are not family. Karina's homeland is not in the South, and she has no ideological connection to events of the war; thus, Sarat rejects her.

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[23] See Gregroy Claeys' *Dystopia: A Natural History. A Study of Modern Despotism, Its Antecedents, and Its Literary Diffractions* for further information on antipathetic action against the Other.

As a neoliberal dystopia, the free market in the novel must be defended, and fossil fuels must continue to be consumed. However, as Girard et al. state, in a neoliberal society "the question isn't having the object but constantly shifting it. The consumption society has simply become a system of exchange of signs, rather than an exchange of actual objects" (80). Fossil fuels, then, are consumed as signs of freedom, especially market freedom, and of the South's identity. This, in turn, further aggravates climate change and creates negative environmental changes. In contrast to Sarat's neoliberal southern nationalist ideology, the narrator clearly states that these images of fossil fuels and southern dogma – oil drums, secessionist flags, and muscle cars – are "impotent trinkets of rebellion, touchstones of a ruined and ruinous past" (El Akkad, *American War* 3). The south decides to wage war rather than stop using resources or the "illicit fuel responsible for so much of the country's misfortune" (18). Although incredibly harmful or "ruinous," they are not actual objects, simply an "exchange of signs" or "impotent trinkets" used to foment rebellion and defend neoliberalism. This illicit fuel, oil, has historically been a cause of armed conflict that "harms economic performance, makes governments frail and less accountable, and provides incentives to set up independent states" (Baquero Melo 54). So, in the novel, instead of opting for peace and sustainable practices, the South's neoliberal, nationalist ideology chooses civil strife and rigid social identification. Adhering to these neoliberal myths and trinkets only results in a deteriorated economy, a frail central government, and a desire to establish an independent national identity, which, according to the narrator, only lead to the "country's misfortune" and Sarat's ultimate downfall.

However, the neoliberal dystopia must be maintained, thus southern citizens are prevented from easily recognizing the ruinous nature of neoliberal signs and trinkets. Southern nationalist ideology creates supporting propaganda that blames the "country's misfortunes" on the Other, i.e., the Northern enemy or "them", while simultaneously defending and endorsing a southern nationalist social identity or "us." Thus, since "identity is dependent on the context

and interaction with others" (Greenfield 80), southern ideology within the novel legitimates its nationalist social identity by constructing an Other or rival with which to be contrasted and, in doing so, gain justification for the secession. Southerners must contrive a narrative of "us vs. them" or South vs. North. This social interaction is driven by conflict and enmity, so it remains the "sometimes painful space where 'I' is defined by 'you'" (Sánchez-Arce 5): this "you" is the Northern enemy or villain, and the "I" is the Southern hero full of nationalist pride.

Throughout her upbringing, Sarat is solely surrounded by Southerners and southern propaganda. She lacks a nuanced, diversified perspective of society and the world around her. So, in forming her social identity, she draws "on the kinds of person available in one's society" and the notions on how one must behave if one belongs to certain groups (Appiah, *The Ethics of Identity* 21–22). In order to belong to the social group of nationalist Southerners, the past must be idealized and propaganda spread about the free market and southern liberty. Sarat, among others, blames the Union for the Civil War, and believes that everything would be easier "if all these would-be statelets were simply allowed to break free from the Union, to form their own miniature nations along the fault lines of region or creed or race or ideology" (El Akkad, *American War* 18). In the novel, these fault lines of creed, gender, race, and class are all fused to create a macro social group: Southerners. Moreover, instead of promoting unity in the face of a global ecological crisis, and recognizing commonalities with Northerners and fellow Americans, she considers the divided factions deeply different, which further supports the ideological schism.

The First Civil War is utilized as a leitmotif throughout the novel, in that El Akkad considers American culture to be heavily influenced by this conflict. In an interview, El Akkad identifies the spoils of victory as the ability to shut down the other side's stories. Yet, the First Civil War in the United States never ended because Southern Confederate stories were left untouched (Oregon Humanities). The parallelisms between the historical First Civil War and

the "American War" of the novel are quite evident. As such, the dystopian nature of the novel uses this historical symmetry to provide a commentary of contemporary US culture and current affairs where Southern states' education programs teach students the "Lost Cause narrative" that the Civil War was a result of states' rights and anti-federal freedoms while glorifying the Confederacy and its citizens get married in old plantations refurbished as wedding venues, continue fly Confederate flags, and disbelieve the scientific facts regarding climate change.[24] Both the Confederacy and the Free Southern State used economic and political freedom as a justification for civil conflict to screen less altruistic motives: a desire for a freedom of the market to empower, legitimize, and economically benefit those with privilege and authority at the expense of the communal good. While the historical South reified its ideology in the bodies of the African American enslaved people, the FSS rebels did so with its refugees and its vulnerable citizens. Both demonized their enemy Other to stimulate fear and hatred and utilized mechanisms of power to manipulate the lay people to fight in a war that is purely based on economic interests: in the case of the Confederacy, the war was fought in the interests of prominent plantation owners and enslavers, while in the FSS, those inciting war are the ones who profit from the use of fossil fuels. However, El Akkad does not seek to glorify Northerners in his criticism and commentary of Southern culture. He provides very little information on these citizens, and the few who are depicted are neither protagonists nor heroes.

Kwame Anthony Appiah studies how the identity of a group who believes itself the victim of social injustice can lead to nationalist or patriotic inclinations. Like the Southerners

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[24] For more information on these elements present within Southern and general American culture see: Jason Daley's article in the *Smithsonian Magazine*, "Texas Will Finally Teach That Slavery Was Main Cause of the Civil War" (https://www.smithsonianmag.com/smart-news/texas-will-finally-teach-slavery-was-main-cause-civil-war-180970851/); Jennifer Rainey Marquez's interview with Chara Bohan, "Rewriting History" in the *Georgia State University Research Magazine* (https://news.gsu.edu/research-magazine/rewriting-history-civil-war-textbooks), and Jacksonville.com Associated Press article, "How is the Civil War taught in school? Depends on where you live" (https://eu.jacksonville.com/story/news/nation-world/2017/08/22/how-civil-war-taught-school-depends-where-you-live/15766977007/). See also "The Southern Mist: The Shaping of American Culture and Politics" by William M. Reynolds in *Counterpoints* and "It Was Never Ok to Get Married at a Plantation. Here's Why" by Olivia Hosken for *Town&Country* (https://www.townandcountrymag.com/the-scene/weddings/a33446093/plantation-wedding-controversy-ryan-reynolds-blake-lively/).

in *American War,* nationalists "are infused with a sense of […] solidarity, a form of partiality" in which they participate in projects to uplift each other because it is important that their group members should do well as a sign of pride and superiority (Appiah, *The Ethics of Identity* 186). However, nationalist egoism is also linked to feelings of oppression and injury. If they ceased to consider themselves "victims of unrecompensed injustice" they would cease to identify with their social group (186). In essence, there needs to be a sentiment of injustice and persecution on behalf of one group or "them" over another or "us" for nationalist ideology to be perpetually reinforced. This leads to the establishment of monolithic binaries: either a collective or an individual is with "us" or against "us."[25] Through the use of conflict and war, neoliberal ideology exploits these nationalist sentiments because "the neoliberal state needs nationalism of a certain sort to survive. Forced to operate as a competitive agent in the world market and seeking to establish the best possible business climate, it mobilizes nationalism in its effort to succeed" (D. Harvey 85).

Within the novel, the neoliberal desire to maintain economic independence and continue the use of fossil fuels must rely on and enhance southern nationalism to establish "the best possible business climate." In doing so, the market must eliminate its competitors, i.e. the North, by endorsing faction rivalry. Thus, members of the Chestnut family believe that the North does not care about its citizens in the South, which eliminates any sense of identification or inclusion with this group. According to Martina; "they'll do what they always do and turn us back. That's their way, don't give a damn about nobody south of the Mag line. It's like we aren't human, aren't animal even, like we're something else entirely" (El Akkad, *American War* 16). Just as Sarat's rigid nationalist social identity does not permit her to recognize Northern humanity and similarities with this group, so too does the North abuse or mistreat the South. The historic

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[25] In his interview with Oregon Humanities, El Akkad states that his incorporation of this binary notion stems from his experience of the post-9/11 age as he specifically references George W. Bush's anti-terrorist campaign declaration: "Every nation, in every region, now has a decision to make. Either you are with us, or you are with the terrorists."

enmity between these two groups is mutual. This dystopian neoliberal nationalist ideology of the novel does not simply originate from or is exclusive to the South; it is also present in North in that it also views the opposing social group as an enemy Other.

One of the events that set off the Second Civil War was the killing of protestors in Fort Jackson, Mississippi. The novel includes an excerpt from a book that has taken journalistic accounts of the event. While witnesses say protestors were unarmed, soldiers claim otherwise, stating that a protestor tried to shoot a lock and it ricocheted backward. The statements are mostly "he said, she said," and it is difficult to decipher the truth. This is the Union's first assault on the southern secessionists who proclaimed this event a slaughter. Although blame is unclear, this event is distorted by political propaganda and employed as part of an ideological agenda to instill sentiments of injustice and righteousness within the southern population. For instance, southern governors stated "Every Southern patriot, upon hearing the news of the massacre at Fort Jackson, will know now as a fact that the federal government in Columbus considers Southern lives to be less than worthless" (49). This statement legitimates nationalist ideology and incites secessionist practices. It speaks to the ways such bodies of ideas warp social identity to make people feel undervalued and want to rebel and fight against the "enemy." This event made the fighting not solely about the Sustainable Future Act and the free market, but more personal, based on vengeance and identity politics. [26]

In *American War*, Southern nationalist ideology motivates Southerners, especially men, to join war efforts. The novel states that those originating from the purple states (Arkansas, Kansas, and Tennesse) were "either broke or jobless or on the lam back home" and were simply looking for food and wages or were influenced by neoliberal ideals and "were genuinely angry that their home states went along with Columbus and the fuel prohibition, so they were looking

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[26] Of note, neoliberal ideology and practices are also present within the North. However, the novel only provides brief glimpses that portray similarities in the dominant discourse of both factions. This is to say, the neoliberal dystopia is established both in the North and South, but due to the scope of this dissertation, focus is especially paid to the FSS.

for a fight" (65). Those soldiers from the FSS were mostly rebel militia and completely consumed by nationalist ideology in that "any chance they got, they'd talk your ear off about the righteousness of the Southern cause" and truly "believed they were doing the Lord's work" (66). Indicative of Malešević functions of ideology, nationalist neoliberal ideology manages to gain acceptance through instrumental rationality, personal or group value-rationality, and emotional appeal. That is, Southern soldiers believed that by joining the cause and being victorious, they would acquire advantages and material benefits by continuing the fossil fuel market. Southerners also promoted symbolic values or rewards through the notion of fighting for righteousness and (neoliberal) freedom. The final function of ideology through emotional appeal is illustrated in Southerners' traditional enmity and hatred of the Northern Other which is disseminated through propaganda. Ideological propaganda also functions through concealment of realities that threaten said propaganda or of humanizing characteristics of the Other which would cease Othering and the creation of enemies that better establishes a strong, rigid "us." El Akkad reflects this method of concealment as well within the narrative of the novel. The North, both spatially and via perspectival depiction is never shown. Neither the reader nor the novel's characteristic have any neutral or positive meaningful contact with the North or its citizens, except in situations that are violent and contribute to its Othering. All of these ideological motivations contribute to the cementation of a rigid national identity whose membership requires the espousal of neoliberal values, patriotism, and nationalism.

Southern propaganda and neoliberal ideology are also entwined with religious beliefs. Throughout the territory of the FSS, propaganda is used to support the Reds and the war by use of advertisements and posters: "There were strange billboards on the side of the road. They bore images of destruction and carnage: city blocks reduced to rubble; the dust-lacquered corpses of children; soldiers from the Free Southern State assisting the destitute families who lived in the border towns. Affixed to all these images were no words except: Nehemiah 4:14" (58). Already

suffering from trauma and the effects of a civil war, these billboards marketed further destruction at the hands of the North. The message here is that things could be worse, so the South must continue to fight for its independence. As opposed to the images of Northern-inflicted ruin, the ads portrayed the FSS as saviors and defenders of the South. In these representations, the FSS soldiers do not contribute to the war and violence but save southern families instead. This propaganda is not only linked to visual images of imaginary destruction and vilification of Northerners, but also to elements of Christian religion. This citation from the Bible is "And I looked, and rose up, and said unto the nobles, and to the rulers, and to the rest of the people, Be not ye afraid of them: remember the Lord, which is great and terrible, and fight for your brethren, your sons, and your daughters, your wives, and your houses" (*The Bible* Nehem. 4:14). The billboard insinuates that the Southern cause is supported and defended by God, and Southerners must fight for their people, families, and home. They must rise up from their oppressive yokes and face the Northern "rulers" and Others and remember their righteous cause of freedom. They must fight for their group, which is marked by kinship and homeland. This conflict is honorable and holy.

After the Camp Patience massacre, Simon survives but is left with a serious head injury and trauma from being shot. His survival transforms him into a religious idol to many Southerners:

> There was a mark where the devil left him. They came from miles to touch it, to kiss and caress the fissure in the forehead, to see the broken Miracle Boy. Sometimes they sat in silence, […] And sometimes in the grip of paroxysm they cried and called him by their own children's names. The boy let himself be their vessel. He sat unspeaking, the shivering hand upon him, serene as a cloud. (El Akkad, *American War* 175)

The Northern "devil" left him broken but alive, a symbol of southern morality and marvel. His individual identity is consumed by this new status as he becomes a vessel for southern nationalism and devotion. Simon is treated like an object of worship. These objects "inherit and emit emotional intensity like radiation. The desire to touch is evidently one of the most

elemental of all: think of how 'faith healing' by touching works. Its inversion, in a phobia of foreign 'infection', is at the heart of dystopian collectivism" (Claeys, *Dystopia: A Natural History* 47). In the novel, Simon is touched, kissed, and caressed. The "grip of paroxysm" to which his visitors fall indicate the "emotional intensity" that Simon radiates as such an object or vessel of worship. As this idol, Simon also contributes to Malešević's notions of ideology functioning via personal or group value-rationality and emotional appeal. Simon not only becomes a symbol of southern survival whose touch can provide divine benefits, but a connection to him also provokes an intense emotional reaction based on love, healing, and fear of "foreign infection."[27] He is a Southerner, a member of the southern nationalist social identity, but he is also a miracle survivor, blessed by God. Thus, for Southerners, Simon—and his touch—act as a potent blessing of God's favor of the southern cause: a neoliberal, nationalist ideology.

3.2.2 Recruitment Techniques: Radicalization and Indoctrination

Rebel recruiters visit refugee camps, like Camp Patience, to seek new members who fit two different profiles: rebel militia soldier or "homicide-bomber" insurrectionist. Recruitment is imbued with the nationalist pride that pervades Southern ideology, and a key notion is that of martyrdom: of Southerners giving their lives for their country or ending in the crossfires of Northerners. This is reminiscent of Francis Fukuyama's notion of social dignity bestowed on soldiers: "honor or esteem was not due to everyone, but only to the class of people who risked their lives. An echo of that feeling still exists in the respect we citizens of modern democratic societies typically pay to soldiers who die for their country" (Fukuyama 27). Young trainees are enlisted and mobilized with promises of honor, esteem, and respect as belonging to a highly

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[27] One can say that after Sarat's return from Sugarloaf Detainment Camp, she becomes a symbol of foreign infection for Southerners, and so is rejected.

valued social identity group. Thus, high social value or group value-rationality is attributed to rebel fighters who are influenced by this Southern neoliberal nationalist ideology.

Rebels achieve even higher social value and benefits if they are brave men who die in battle or are figures referred to in the novel as "homicide bombers." This term is quite intriguing as it reverses the common term "suicide" for "homicide," indicating some sort of agency and patriotism. The goal of these figures is not to kill themselves, but to kill others, and thus their objective is homicide. By labelling them as such in common parlance, it manages to lure more people to do so for the cause. The use of homicide removes notions about one's own demise and places the focus on the objective of hurting the enemy, or Northern Other, for a patriotic cause and further acceptance of nationalist identity or group membership. These acts of terrorism can be considered "more personal and psychological than religious and [reflect] the acute problem of identity that certain individuals face" by being offered "community, acceptance, and dignity" (68). Neoliberalism increases the sense of "fanatical individualism" terrorists face, along with the opportunity to "exhibit their new almighty selves, their desire for revenge for their suppressed frustrations, the pleasure they derive from the new power lent them by their willingness to kill, and their fascination with their own death" (Roy, "France's Oedipal Islamist Complex," para.16). Becoming a homicide bomber and forming part of the South's rebellion allows members of the Southern nationalist identity to integrate more permanently within the group's consciousness while falsely promises that they will maintain a "fanatic individualism."

The Free Southern State region is filled with ideological propaganda: stories are told of famous homicide-bombers' feats and paintings and murals of martyrs who are commemorated in public spaces and imagery. This serves as a tool to urge those who wish to establish their social identities as Southerners to participate in the conflict through the promise of collective immortality and esteem. As Gottlieb states, "[p]eople are drawn to the security offered by

belonging to the community, to the implicit promise of sharing in a collective immortality"
(39). With this, they can transcend individual mortality to form part of a social collective of
remembrance and martyrdom, fueling the novel's neoliberal nationalist ideology and cultural
history.

Homicide bombers are carefully selected according to their emotional vulnerability and
social identity. Ideological influences allow them to change their social status from an unstable,
vulnerable person to an agent, a patriot, and important figure in the cause. For instance, the
most famous homicide bomber, Julia Templestowe, was mentally ill and on suicide watch
before she "became the rebel South's first martyr, its first killer, the patron saint of its war" (El
Akkad, *American War* 32). Recruiters took advantage of such vulnerability and suicidal
disposition and elevated her as a national champion once she fulfilled her patriotic obligations.
El Akkad describes how she was recruited:

> the bandages still fresh around her wrists. […] She was wearing a stranger's throwaway
> dress, given to her by one of the nurses. She was drunk and alone once again with the
> terrible illness in her brain. They knew how to find the ones who were most likely to do
> it. They kept watchers in the hospitals, where they looked for suicide attempts, and in
> the schools, where they looked for outcasts, and in the churches, where they looked for
> hard-boiled extremists feverish with the spell of the Lord. From these, they forged
> weapons. (32)

Out of vulnerable, isolated, or fanatic individuals, new beings—weapons—are created by
providing a new social identity influenced by nationalist conceptions. With Templestowe's
initial success, this recruitment model was normalized. According to Sen, "If a sense of identity
leads to group success […] then those identity-sensitive behavioral modes may end up being
multiplied and promoted" (37). Thus, the South's ideological practices promote and legitimate
this method of guerrilla warfare and self-sacrifice.

Although none will ever reach the level of fame of Julia Templestowe, her fame acts to
incite others. Homicide bombers acquire social identities inscribed with honor, esteem, and
dignity, and if they perform their duties correctly and with massive repercussions, they might

achieve the same level of repute as "the patron saint of war" herself. As will be analyzed later with Gaines insisting to Sarat that she fits a special profile, by participating in this civil conflict, people previously labelled as outcasts and vulnerable persons now are told that they are special. These inductees have a sense of purpose, of belonging to a collective, and of immortality by remaining in collective memory as heroes when they die. Recruitment techniques in the novel revolve around these notions of Southern pride, group memory, and ideological discourse convince individuals, like Julia Templestowe, that "They'll remember you forever, they told her. When this is over they'll build cities in your name" (El Akkad, *American War* 32). Of course, this level of immortality and glory is practically unattainable, yet new recruits are predisposed to believe it is possible because this occurred with Julia Templestowe and because they are desperate to belong.

Sarat also becomes a victim of rebel recruitment and indoctrination. She meets Albert Gaines, a rebel homicide bomber recruiter, at the age of twelve, after being humiliated in front of her peers and being marked as an outcast. Gaines first begins by offering her a job delivering a letter to the South Carolina sector of the camp known for its violent inhabitants and dangerous atmosphere. Although Sarat should find this frightening, she is, instead, excited by the opportunity. For Sarat, the world outside her lived experience, the unknown world, is "an abstraction, an idea, nothing more" (114). This shows that she does not realize the material impact of her actions: a good characteristic for a homicide bomber.

Upon entering the South Carolina sector, she comes across a boy who tries to chase her off and pushes her. "It was then that something deep within her snapped. She felt a searing inflammation, a fire in the cavities behind her eyes. With a guttural roar she leaped for the boy, palms turned to vises around his throat" and beats him "until her limbs felt as though they were not her own" (114). This excerpt shows how Sarat unleashes her perceived injustices onto innocent people, a foreshadowing of her final terrorist act. She was primed to snap because she

was already vulnerable and humiliated by her experience with her peers; she wanted revenge for being ridiculed and duped into feeling inferior. However, beating a boy bloody is an incredibly exaggerated reaction, which indicates that she is willing to exponentially escalate conflict when it affects her perceived social identity and group membership.

Gaines starts educating and teaching Sarat; he becomes her mentor. Because Sarat ran the initial errand for him and implicitly trusts him, Gaines decides to tell her a "secret" and, thus, manipulate her into feeling welcomed within an exclusive group.

> What I do is travel around the Southern State—sometimes to camps like this, or towns along the border where the Blues and their Birds have caused terrible carnage, and I look for special people […] people who, if given the chance and the necessary tools, would stand up and face the enemy on behalf of those who can't. I seek out people who would do this even if they knew for certain that it would cost them dearly, maybe even cost them their lives. And then I do everything in my power to give them the tools, to give them their chance. (121)

He looks for courageous and angry people, to groom them into being homicide bombers. They must fit a "special" profile, and he believes Sarat does. With this statement, Gaines is using nationalist ideology and ideas of collective immortality and injustice to state that these acts of violence are for the common good: to stand up for those who cannot. He searches for "special" individuals who could face the Northern enemy and sacrifice themselves for the collective good of their national social group. This notion of self-sacrifice is similar to what Claeys encounters within the collectives of dystopia which exhibit "an extreme ethos of sociability centring on a fervent devotion to the common good" via sacrifice of the individual and is "often linked with dystopia's obsession with enemies, and its determination to eliminate them, or at least neutralize their threat" (8–9). Within *American War*, notions of individualism are warped to incite immortality through sacrificial martyrdom whose objective is to defend Southern nationalist ideology and thus be recognized within a neoliberal nationalist social identity.

Knowing Sarat has few companions, Gaines enchants her by stating he wants to educate her and become friends. The fact that Sarat is a child, twelve years old, indicates how

influencing children is of utmost importance to maintain ideological values. Society and education mold "children into the kind of people who will want to maintain our values, beliefs, and customs" (Appiah, *The Ethics of Identity* 136–37). In a dystopian society, education is another ideological apparatus that enforces its body of ideas on the individual through indoctrination.

The training Gaines provides is filled with bias and propaganda. He teaches her "'About all the things they've done to us over the years. All the times they've put what's good for them ahead of what's good for us. You can go to school a million years down here and they won't have the guts to tell you a single thing about Northerners. Now I'm learning what they're really like'" (El Akkad, *American War* 134). Once again, El Akkad depicts these historic enmities based on Southern nationalist feelings of injustice. Sarat values bravery so she values that Gaines "has the guts" to tell her the "truth," though that truth is not completely accurate or an actual reality. Her willingness to believe anything Gaines says is a sign of her indoctrination, which, paired with the sensationalist content of Southern enslavement to the North, contribute to Sarat's radicalization and blind acceptance of nationalist ideology that influences her social identity.

Gaines introduces Sarat to Joe, a Bouazizi Empire agent, so that when she realizes what she wants to do for her people in the future, Joe can help her by procuring hard-to-obtain things. "'So I want you and him to be friends, and I want you to keep your friendship a secret, because there are lots of people who would want to hurt him if they found out he was helping Southerners'" (140). As another form of grooming and indoctrination, Gaines provides Sarat a deeper sense of inclusion and belonging within the group. He introduces her to important figures but makes this a secret that could be dangerous for the Southern cause it revealed. As Sarat has already radically adopted such ideology, she is concerned with Joe's safety because of his alliance with the South. Gaines is establishing relationships with powerful people that

will help Sarat become a homicide bomber or insurrectionist. They both are grooming her to

become an object or tool for the rebels and the Bouazizi Empire. This can be reminiscent of a

neoliberal consumerist society that "functions primarily by means of reification and

exploitation – that transformation of human relations and unrestricted nature into the

appearance of relationships between things that can then be produced and consumed" (Moylan,

Demand the Impossible 16). In this case, these foreign powers and neoliberal society are

functioning to exploit Sarat and turns her into an object that can be produced and constructed

into a weapon.

In further trying to differentiate and elevate Southern patriotism and identity, Gaines

tells Sarat that he supports the Southern cause:

> because when a Southerner tells you what they're fighting for—be it tradition, pride, or
> just mule-headed stubbornness—you can agree or disagree, but you can't call it a lie.
> When a Northerner tells you what they're fighting for, they'll use words like democracy
> and freedom and equality and the whole time both you and they know that the meaning
> of those words changes by the day, changes like the weather. I'd had enough of all that.
> You pick up a gun and fight for something, you best never change your mind. Right or
> wrong, you own your cause and you never, ever change your mind. (El Akkad, *American
> War* 142)

This is said to incite extremism, and the belief that the South's cause is righteous and factual.

She is made to believe that Southerners never lie, while Northerners use abstract terms that are

ephemeral and lack conviction and truth. He emphasizes the trustworthiness of Southern

nationalists, while simultaneously promoting the conviction that regardless of whether the

cause is right or wrong, it must never be abandoned. With this statement, Gaines engrains in

Sarat notions of radicalism and staunch support of said ideology: if she truly desires to be part

of the group with a corresponding social identity, she must never abandon the cause, or, in other

words, the ideology. Gaines goads Sarat into stating that even if she knew for a fact that the

South was wrong, she would not turn against her people. This notion of solidarity, kinship, and

righteousness in the novel, thus, is linked to Sarat's social identity. As Appiah states, "identities

also create forms of solidarity: if I think of myself as an X, then, sometimes, the mere fact that

somebody else is an X, too, may incline me to do something with or for them" (*The Ethics of Identity* 24). Gaines radicalizes this notion of solidarity to make the individual—Sarat—adhere to the group's cause. No matter if the rebellion is right or wrong, Sarat must conform and support it because she must be in solidarity with her social group.

Ironically, to further inculcate Sarat with this message, Gaines rewards her form of thinking by gifting her a weapon, a folding knife, linking his message of the Southern cause with notions of violence and war, not simply national pride in ancestral history or culture. He teaches her to sharpen this knife using resistance and stress, which can be considered a metaphor for Sarat being sharpened into a weapon for the cause. Her social identity is formed from episodes of public humiliation, violence, and extreme stress, while she becomes hardened and resistant to any intersectionality or desire for peace. Sarat sharpens her knife every single night. "When she first received it the blade was dull, but she had scraped it against the sharpening stone night after night. Now the blade was rough and uneven from being overworked, but Sarat mistook this for sharpness" (El Akkad, *American War* 149). Once more, this can be considered another metaphor for Sarat. She believes herself sharp and educated by working daily with Albert Gaines and learning to fight and become a rebel, but she is actually warped by propaganda and nationalist ideology as her mind becomes overworked by Gaines' manipulation. In fact, Gaines gives her these weapons but never explains how to properly use them on purpose. Their proper use, for him, is irrelevant, all that is necessary is just pure destruction and annihilation, not strategy or critical thinking.

With this indoctrination, Sarat loses her capacity and skill for objective analysis, her individuality, and her sense of self. When gifting her a necklace that supposedly belonged to Gaines' daughter, Sarat looks at herself in the mirror and doesn't see her own reflection, only his hands on her shoulder. It is a symbol of losing her own individuality to his desires, influence, and impositions. She has fully adopted Gaines' messages and been absorbed by the group: her

individuality lost to Southern insurrectionist society and social identity. This passage signals that she is primed to be fully radicalized, which happens after the Camp Patience massacre. She screams at Albert Gaines, "'I don't wanna hear about them anymore. I don't wanna read about them or memorize their capitals or learn how they did us wrong.' 'Then what do you want to do?' Gaines asked. 'I want to kill them.' Sarat buried her head in her hands. She never saw the faint smile that, in that moment, crossed her teacher's lips" (170). Sarat is focused on revenge and abhors any more knowledge or discussion of the North. Her only goal now is to kill them, which is exactly what Gaines wished to achieve. After this expression of revenge, Gaines teaches Sarat how to shoot and fully forges her into a weapon and completes the construction of her neoliberal nationalist identity.

El Akkad's portrayal of Sarat's radicalization depicts the process of her social identity construction with layers of nuance. Due to her circumstances of poverty and desolation, Sarat sometimes would dream of safety and a better life in the North.

> It seemed sensible to crave safety, to crave shelter from the bombs and the Birds and the daily depravity of war. But somewhere deep in her mind an idea had begun to fester—perhaps the longing for safety was itself just another kind of violence—a violence of cowardice, silence, submission. What was safety, anyway, but the sound of a bomb falling on someone else's home. (134)

Sarat has already been fully immersed in the Southern collective nationalist mindset. If she is safe, somebody else belonging to her group is not. Although she craves safety, her indoctrination does not permit her to imagine a world with peace. Such desires for security and shelter trigger brainwashed responses of violence and harm. Violence committed through cowardice, submission, or inaction are significant identity markers for Sarat. She defines her social identity and group according to these principles and considers that social power can be achieved through courageous action.

3.3 Invisible Power and the Futility of the Individual

So far, this dissertation has analyzed neoliberal dystopian social identity on an individual material level in the body and on an abstract ideological level. In this section, these two elements will come together as power will be discussed. In the case of *American War,* power is acquired through strength in material action, especially violent action, and by a sense of ideological authority. The ability to act and influence provided by obtaining power is a main pillar for maintaining a group identity, in that "a set of people will only perceive themselves as being bound together by a common identity if they can concretely act together in the terms defined by that identity. That is, identity is fundamentally about *doing*, not just about *thinking*" (Elcheroth and Reicher 99, emphasis in original). And in dystopian settings, which grant significance to conflict and violence, violence becomes "a dreadfully effective way of reshaping shared action" and it "affects identity to the extent that it re-patterns the social practices through which a group of people perform and uphold their common identities" (99). Thus, when defending notions of neoliberal freedom, this term simply "degenerates into a mere advocacy of free enterprise" (Polanyi 256) which must be upheld and sustained using force or violence because "no society is possible in which power and compulsion are absent" (266).

The epigraph quote above establishes the reasons behind such violence are ideological, as stated in the previous section, but personal notions of revenge cannot be written off. "The one you must punish is the one who punishes you" (El Akkad, *American War* i). This notion of an eye for an eye creates a vicious cycle of violence and revenge, and while the characters are busy killing each other and fighting, corporate powers are taking advantage and gaining more leverage.

3.3.1 Politics and Institutional Authority

In dystopian literature, institutional power is fundamental to the maintenance of its social structure. However, in *American War*, the Bouazizi Empire, the most potent source of institutional power remains invisible for most of the FSS and Northern citizens. This fictional empire is an ironic, even oxymoronic, state power. Named after Mohamed Bouazizi, the Tunisian street vendor whose self-immolation after constant harassment from government authorities ignited the Tunisian Revolution and Arab Spring, the Bouazizi Empire is not the land of the individual but acts as its second name indicates: an empire with colonialist and despotic objectives. As El Akkad has previously stated, *American War* provides a role reversal in the power dynamics of the world in its temporal and geopolitical setting. He writes from a post-9/11 perspective in which the Middle East has been subjected to international conflict by the US and NATO forces with the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq as well as internal, civil conflicts in Syria and Egypt with the Arab Spring.

Yet, in the novel, the Middle East has now been restructured as one of the world's superpowers: it has adopted the name Bouazizi Empire and is comprised of the Middle East and North Africa, united during the 5th Spring Revolution. Similar to the First Civil War in which the South depended on the British Empire for aid and resources, in this fictional Second Civil War, the FSS begins losing the conflict and its resources run dry. In turn, it depends on the Bouazizi Empire for aid through the "Red Crescent" in its fight against the Union. In *American War*, it is the Middle East that disguises its influence in foreign politics and pushes for civil unrest within American borders, because a weakened United States allows for a more prolific rise in Bouazizi power. To maintain its empire, it must destroy the rest. Sarat's concept of constant revenge and "violation" by and of the enemy would lead to an eternal war within the US, which seems to be the Bouazizi Empire's design. Thus, although the homicide bombers

believe that are performing acts of individual power through their self-immolation, both their bodies and the weapons they use are tools of the Bouazizi Empire's interests.

The fact that the individual power enacted through these acts of domestic terrorism is, indeed, controlled by the foreign institution is made evident in Albert Gaines' ties to the empire. Sarat first meets Joe—an agent of the Bouazizi Empire—through her recruitment with Albert Gaines, who calls him a friend. Joe utilizes discourse similar to that prevalent in the US today and explains that he is in Camp Patience because his country supports those who fight for freedom everywhere around the world. Thus, he immediately brands the Second Civil War as one of liberation. This notion of freedom, ultimately, is defined by the neoliberal ideal of free markets, and Joe provides a reductionist view of the Bouazizi Empire's interests so as to further manipulate Sarat.

In an excerpt from a speech delivered by the President of the Bouazizi Empire, he states that the empire does not want to impose its will on foreign nations. However, the reader knows this to be misleading. Not only have the agents of the Bouazizi Empire had a hand in providing arms and bombs to Southern insurrectionists to prolong the fighting and massacre more American citizens, but the text reflects the message of real-world international superpowers. The Bouazizi president's speech echoes those made by US presidents, whose actions did not align with their words. The US's influence in Latin American countries to avoid the rise powerful socialist governments and maintain neoliberal policies that benefitted the American economy allowed the rise of civil strife and dictators such as Pinochet.[28] In the early 21st century, the war and occupation of Iraq by American soldiers and administrations not only led to the weakening of the country's government but to the privatization of previously public businesses. Such instances of institutional will imposed on individual lives are also present within *American War*. Joe and the Bouazizi Empire espouse neoliberal ideals of liberty,

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[28] See Naomi Klein's *The Shock Doctrine* (2007) for her analysis on the US's international neoliberal free market policies.

democracy and self-determination as they praise both the South and North for their overpowering dedication to liberty. Ironically, the Bouazizi president concludes that they are allies of the US, and that all people are "drawn instinctively to peace" (El Akkad, *American War* 145) when it seems quite the opposite.

> The characters' personal experience of war refutes this claim in that
>
> the misery of war represented the world's only true universal language. […] War broke them the same way, made them scared and angry and vengeful the same way. In times of peace and good fortune they were nothing alike, but stripped of these things they were kin. The universal slogan of war, she'd learned, was simple: If it had been you, you'd have done no different. (184)

In essence, there is no difference between Northerners and Southerners, since war is an equalizer, a universalizer, a massifier that erases individual distinctions. In erasing this individuality, war grants power to the public above the private needs of individuals. War and violence are inherent to humanity and are "tied to collective identities" because violence "is pursued and legitimated in the name of collective interests, not personal gain; it is targeted against collective enemies, not personal foes" (Elcheroth and Reicher 7). Thus, although individuals are the ones who suffer the effects of violence and war, these phenomena are connected to social identities and can be linked to desire for communal power and supremacy.

In the novel, power is achieved through collective violent action during the war. The World Health Organization defines violence as the "intentional use of physical force or power, threatened or actual, against oneself, another person, or against a group or community, that either results in or has a high likelihood of resulting in injury, death, psychological harm, maldevelopment or deprivation" (Krug et al. 5). This definition associates violent acts with intentionality and includes the term "power" to broaden the scope of violence to also encompass acts of neglect, omission, and commission: "all types of physical, sexual and psychological abuse, as well as suicide and other self-abusive acts" (5).

According to Christina Braid, violence in utopian and dystopian fiction is often masked as justice or the alleged struggle for justice. She questions the nuances of said struggle, wondering "Whose justice will determine or influence the identity, security, and the overall happiness of the many?" (Braid 49). Thus, dystopias examine the ways in which the state, or individuals mimicking the state, impose violence to achieve certain ends or how the presence of power informs the creation of communities. Braid wonders, "How might individual consciousness be manipulated by a collective conscience formed by those in power to serve the will of power?" and ascertains that dystopian fiction warns of "the kinds of violence disguised as justice" that operate "upon the individual through both the individual and the state" (49–50). Thus, this section seeks to analyze the effects of power and war on Sarat's social identity and individuality, and how, as a result, she is destroyed by violence.

The weaponry used in the Second Civil War symbolizes both power and lack thereof. The North's principal weapon at the start of the war were drones called Birds. El Akkad describes them as

> soundless warring craft designed to spy and to kill from great distance, their movement and intent once controlled by men in faraway places, who had only the grainy, pixelated footage of vaporized targets to gnaw on their conscience. Early in the war, the Birds were the Union's most effective weapon, until a group of rebels detonated a bomb at the military server farm that kept the drones under the control of their remote pilots. Now the machines, powered by the solar panels that lined their wings, flew rogue, abandoned to the skies, their targets and trajectories random. (*American War* 41)

The Birds are incredibly powerful weapons capable of decimating large numbers of individuals. As weapons that can be operated remotely, they also allow for the massification of their victims. Individuals became faceless, nameless, and distant, losing any individuality or social identity. Birds provided the dehumanization or Othering of its Southern victims. Due to their distanced, non-personal utilization, the individuals' identities are subsumed into anonymous, mass "targets," leaving those controlling the drones feeling less guilty for their destructive, homicidal forces. However, the North lost this lethal power, and Bird attacks have, ironically, become

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random and senseless. Both the North and South deny responsibility for the loss of control over the drones, yet they are both liable: the North originally created the Birds and utilized them as weapons against its Southern citizens, and the South managed to blunder its operation and caused them to go rogue. Now, these solar-powered machines are loose and do not stop until they randomly detonate. The discourse surrounding these rogue attacks deflects blame from both North and South: the North does not take responsibility for the Birds' creation and the South does not take responsibility for their blunder and loss of control. As such, when these Birds randomly explode and kill innocent civilians, their senseless deaths and tragedies are ignored by both governments. So as to maintain the notion of blamelessness, for ethical and economic detachment, the social identity of these victims are displaced and dehumanized to become faceless, random targets instead of individual citizens with social status whose are owed governmental reparations and accountability.

As opposed to the North's centralized power, the South's institutional power is disseminated and divided into two factions who wish to lead: the United Rebels, consisting of the unification of a conglomeration of minor rebel groups, and the Free Southern State government. Sarat believes the conflict between these factions to be pointless: "the petty turf wars of insecure men […] disputes over who should run the schools, collect the taxes; whose dead should place first on the murals" (El Akkad, *American War* 204). Similar to the North, the Southern government is enmeshed in bureaucracy and attempting to gain administrative control over the territories. This seems antithetical to neoliberal ideology, yet, according to Moylan, bureaucracy and a strengthening of the state is actually

> the contradictory secret of neoliberalism: economic viability is not a matter of eliminating the state but rather restricting its activities to those that aid capital and not society. Indeed, *more* state intervention (to protect trade, subsidize infrastructure development, bail out failing firms, and deliver military protection) is required by the neoliberal order, not less. ("The Moment Is Here" 141)

Sarat's rigid nationalist indoctrination blinds her to the nuances of the neoliberal ideology as she is unable to identify the hypocrisy of strengthening state intervention. She believes these bureaucratic procedures to be "petty" and unrelated to the larger conflict of seeking freedom from Northern dominion. The Free Southern State government recognizes the neoliberal necessity of these administrative "turf wars" so as to protect their economic interests or "capital," instead of Southern society as a whole. By controlling the schools, taxes, and the martyr rhetoric, they also have control over the economy and can influence discourse in these ideological apparatuses—schools and general cultural memorials—to further support their economic and administrative dominion.

> She is disgusted by these politicians, considering them
>
> nothing more than prideful, opportunistic captains, arguing over the boundaries of long-obsolete star maps as all the while the opposing armada's cannonballs tore their hulls to shreds. For Sarat Chestnut, the calculus was simple: the enemy had violated her people, and for that she would violate the enemy. There could be no other way, she knew it. Blood can never be unspilled. (El Akkad, *American War* 204)

Sarat's radicalization leads to a reductionist view of society and identity: people are violated by the enemy, so she must, in turn, violate the enemy. Notions of nationalism, retaliation, and death, i.e., spilled blood, are central to nihilism in that all other social or governmental organisms are superfluous. This is comparable to Roy's analysis of contemporary suicide bombers and jihadis whose "systematic association with death is one of the keys to understanding today's radicalisation: the nihilist dimension is central. What seduces and fascinates is the idea of pure revolt. Violence is not a means. It is an end in itself" (Roy, "Who Are the New Jihadis?," para.10). Sarat's radicalization only allows her to understand violence and revenge as an "end" or the only possible way of being for Southern neoliberal nationalists.

This lack of understanding will eventually lead to Sarat's "counter-identification" with the dystopian society and the suppression of herself and her social identity.[29] Her clear disdain

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[29] As discussed in Chapter One, the term "counter-identification" is taken from Michel Pêcheux's *Language, Semantics and Ideology: Stating the Obvious* (1982) who defines this term as the act of the "bad subject" or

for political and administrative power coupled with her obsession with revenge leads to a social and personal nihilism. As a result, this culminates in her anonymity and self-destruction as she is unable to assimilate and accept this dystopian social authority. Although she is successfully indoctrinated with nationalist ideology, her all-consuming desire for revenge and her radical notion of cyclical violence in which blood can never be unspilled prohibit her from understanding, and therefore promoting, more productive social nuances that do not result in nihilism. She simplistically equates power with revenge and violent agency, ignoring the importance of institutional and political power, which blinds her to the true power dynamics of her society. On the governmental or jurisdictional level, this civil war is not truly fought for an ideological cause, but for control: the North wants to maintain authority and dominion over the entire nation while the South wants to gain influence and economic command over that which was previously under Northern control.

3.3.2 Individual Power through Violence, Torture, and Revenge

Sarat's first personal experience of war and violence is the massacre at Camp Patience, and, as previously mentioned, this serves to determine and fix her social identity. This event impacts her so greatly, along with the previously analyzed rebirth within the men's dead bodies, that she becomes enraged and seeks revenge against the North. As a witness, she is powerless to stop the carnage, but once she takes action and kills a Northern soldier, she gains power through violence and slaughter: "She was no longer afraid. She moved as a wraith, a cold conflagration in the skin of a girl. She approached the man and when she was upon him she reached around his neck and slashed open his throat" (El Akkad, *American War* 166). Through this experience, El Akkad portrays how the individual within a dystopian society assumed power, and how Sarat

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"trouble maker" who rebels against, challenges, or questions "the discursive formation imposed on him" only within the boundaries of the dominant ideology they are struggling against (157).

converts herself into a fighter and domestic terrorist. Her social identity becomes cemented as a Southern nationalist insurrectionist—a "wraith" and "cold conflagration" of righteous fury and vengeance. For Sarat, this violent vengeance centered on defeating the enemy Other signals her power, yet the reader is able to identify that this is, in fact, a submission to the ideas that have been influencing and indoctrinating her. With this, El Akkad is able to reflect how in the real world, power is imperceptible. Due to her lack of experience (her only sources of information being propaganda and distorted versions of history), Sarat is not capable of perceiving who is in control and what mechanisms of power are in place to maintain the dystopian system.

This brutal experience and those that follow have lasting effects on Sarat's identity. According to Elcheroth and Reicher, "violence doesn't just change the identities we use; it closes down the possibilities of social practice and thereby limits the identities we can enact. Violence is therefore something that limits us, which takes particular identities that correspond to one mode of being and freezes them into our only possible ways of being" (124). Thus, Sarat's social identity freezes in this violent dystopian episode. She perpetuates this brutality and can only ever be a nationalist who equates power with revenge and Southern victory, attempting to enact her own invisible power through vengeance and retaliation.

Similar to other characters in dystopian novels, Sarat does not have plural, intersectional social identities: she only recognizes and is recognized by the solitary and exclusive social identity of belonging to the Southerners, specifically Southern insurrectionists. According to Sen, "violence is promoted by the cultivation of a sense of inevitability about some allegedly unique—often belligerent—identity that we are supposed to have and which apparently makes extensive demands on us" such as "fomenting sectarian confrontation" and a "perceived absence of choice about our identities" (13). Thus, in the novel, the enmity between the North and South and Sarat's constant quest for revenge is a result of her violent dystopian experiences,

which make her adhere to only one social identity group and force her believe she has no choice. In essence, violence sustains and is sustained by a supposed lack of plurality of social identities. Instead of moving forward and seeking peace, Sarat focuses on the injustices done to her and her people. She "turned her attention to the only thing that still mattered: revenge, the unsettled score" (El Akkad, *American War* 189). Sarat is sustained by violence and her unsettled score. Her actions become defined by a sole, exclusive social identity, which equates power and control over identity with violence and revenge.

Through later individual acts of violence, Sarat manages to influence the greater public. In one of her missions, Sarat kills General Joseph Weiland, whose son, the reader knows, will later become president of the Union. This marks a turning point in the Second Civil War. Although it's a temporary victory for the South, it causes their eventual demise. Previously, Northern popular opinion called for compromise and reunification, but, after this assassination, they harden and seek revenge. Joseph Weiland Jr. becomes the Director of the War Office and intensifies incursions and rebel captures, paving the way for the "eventual eradication of the rebel menace" (194). This also has personal implications for Sarat as she is sent to Sugarloaf Detainment Camp as a result of her actions. Although, as an individual, Sarat assumed great influence over the public, the consequences of her actions were catastrophic for her, personally, and for her people.

After this scene, El Akkad includes an excerpt of a state document that outlines the effects of this action in history. This enables the reader to understand Sarat's folly and manipulation. An individual's attempt to influence society proves detrimental: the South will not win; the North has newfound fury and seeks vengeance. Secessionist violence has abated, as the North captures and interrogates known and suspected insurrectionists who are considered guilty before proven innocent. As Joseph Weiland Jr. states in the excerpted document, "the people we target are no angels. We have focused our efforts intently on rebel recruiters—the

cowardly men and women who have for years brainwashed young Southerners into violent, suicidal acts to further the cause of treason" (225–26). There is a repetition of the themes of cowardice as an excuse for violence and torture. Recruiters never take up arms themselves or commit crimes, so prosecution is difficult to prove. Thus, the North attempts to extract information instead through torture.

Weiland Jr. defends the use of torture by saying that the information extracted has saved American lives:

> We [the Union] do not act as monsters, Madam Chairwoman, even though we are often pitted against them. As is the case in any war, we use the tools available to us under the constraints of time and urgency to which we are subject. And in cases where information from insurrectionist recruiters has subsequently proven false or unreliable, we have responded accordingly. The mission of the War Office, above all else, is to protect our nation. (226)

As previously analyzed, the use of violence has reduced and frozen social identity along the lines of "sectarian confrontation." In this case, the North has exclusively adopted the Northern nationalist social identity and has identified its enemy Other as the South. Gottlieb considers that "acts of ferocious violence against the 'enemy'" or outsider/Other through torture, violence, and execution become "an essential part of the dystopian system" in that they place the enemy, scapegoat Other outside the effects of the law and effectively segregate them (Gottlieb 35). In this case, by identifying Southerners as cowardly monsters and their enemies, the Union can now place them outside the boundaries of the law so as to torture them with impunity. Torture, hence, is used as a means of exerting force, power, or control over others.

This notion of lawlessness comes to be represented in the novel through the acts of torture inflicted on detainees in Sugarloaf Detainment Camp. Although there are mentions of Sugarloaf scattered throughout the novel, the first excerpt El Akkad provides is of censored letters written by inmates detailing their experiences: things have gotten worse, with everything "that reminded us we're still human beings" being removed (243). Torture happens at all hours with no reason or excuse. People are blamed for crimes they never committed. The letter writer

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hopes for peace, but they're a lost cause because "Whatever we were before this is all gone" (244). The function of torture is to display power and "to control the *agency* of the subject" or control "*subjectivity itself*" (Wisnewski 42). With this first excerpt, one can understand the power of torture to mold identities or erase them completely. Those who enter Sugarloaf, if they leave, do not escape unchanged. Whatever, or whoever, they were is gone. And this is especially the case with Sarat.

Sarat's stay in Sugarloaf marks a point of inflection for her and her social identity construction and showcases her ultimate lack of individual power. Prisoners, like Sarat, are taken to Sugarloaf with eye-masks and earmuffs, the only information available to them is through their skin and pores: "When the mouths opened to beg for water or relief from the chains, the skin felt other things—the hardness of a rifle butt, the steel-backed tip of a boot. The mouths closed. The bodies flew, dumb as idols" (El Akkad, *American War* 245). By referring to individuals as body parts—"mouths," "skin," and "bodies"—El Akkad shows how they have been stripped of any individuality and humanity and become numb and "dumb as idols" or inanimate objects. According to Sen, "Unrestrained power over the lives of suspected enemy combatants, or presumed miscreants, sharply bifurcates the prisoners and the custodians across a hardened line of divisive identities ('they are a separate breed from us')" (23). This allows for further mistreatment of the detainees. The power the guards have over the detainees, considered their enemies, marks a sharp contrast in the prisoners' social identities.

Initially, Sarat resists this change and authority over her social identity. When interrogated, she refuses to speak or answer any questions and is defiant of the authority the guards have over her. Silence "articulates a resistance to the question: 'You have no right to ask such a question,' or 'I will not dignify this allegation with a response,'" in that it "calls into question the legitimacy of the authority invoked by the question and the questioner or attempts to circumscribe a domain of autonomy that cannot or should not be intruded upon by the

questioner" (Butler 12). Sarat's silence is her attempt to maintain the agency and dignity she was previously given as a Southern neoliberal nationalist insurrectionist. Through her silent defiance, she refuses to acknowledge Northern authority and clings to said social identity. She attempts to delegitimize the officers while maintaining her own sense of personal authority and power. However, she is a prisoner, she does not have actual power, and her acts of defiance and silence are met with torture.

Sarat is intermittently taken to the Sound Room with incessant and shrill noises, or the Light Room with large white floodlights where she is chained to the floor and the lights turn on:

> Then the floodlights came alive with a loud electric pop, and the room was drowned in eviscerating whiteness. Sarat closed her eyes. The white light now turned a hot red against her eyelids. She lowered her head and for a while the onslaught was bearable. But soon the room began to grow warmer. Sweat dripped from her skin, her knees burned with the weight of her body. (El Akkad, *American War* 250)

Sarat is held in the Light Room for days and made to eat off the floor like an animal. She feels the effects of this sensory overload and the continuing stress positions her body is forced into: "the throbbing in her head and her knees consumed her. The room filled with her shrieking, and the small red darkness she lived in while her eyes were closed now seemed to exist even when her eyes were open" (250). Her vision becomes damaged and a marker of her changed identity—her bald head—is no longer; her fuzzy hair has regrown. Her body is morphing and her identity evolving as a result of such torture.

"Still, she resisted" (252) is repeated throughout the text. Her torture sessions (light, sound, interrogation) are random in frequency and duration. Her body is distorted and warped due to stressful positions "in which they shackled her [that] slowly wore the cartilage from her knees and warped her back into a curving column of pain. Still, she resisted" (252). With torture, pain is all-consuming and becomes a visible manifestation of the power the torturers have over the prisoner. According to Elaine Scarry, the processes used "to produce pain within the body

of the prisoner" confer pain visibility (27). This vision of suffering is then converted into a "spectacle of power" because the "physical pain is so incontestably real that it seems to confer its quality of 'incontestable reality' on that power that has brought it into being" (Scarry 27). Sarat attempts to resist this incontestable reality of Northern power, assigning guards "names of her own invention" (El Akkad, *American War* 251) and therefore gaining authority of her own by participating in the construction of social identity of others through name assignation.

For instance, Sarat learns of her fellow female prisoners participating in a hunger strike. They demand freedom, to see loved ones, to be represented by a Southern lawyer, time in a communal yard, a chance to see the sun, etc. However, Sarat made no demands because her "silence was the one weapon they could not pry from her; to hand it to them in the form of hopeless appeals seemed to her an act of high cowardice, a tacit admission that the brutal kinetics of Sugarloaf obeyed some kind of law […] In starvation she took the levers of torture out of torturers' hands and placed them in her own. In starvation she found agency, control" (253). After three years at Sugarloaf, Sarat adheres to her previous notions that cowardice indicated a submission and inability to act, which, in turn, represent a lack of power and agency. In this passage, her silence becomes her weapon and her defiance is manifested by attempting to appropriate the pains of torture (i.e. hunger) and make her own the ensuing spectacle of power that comes from suffering. Her own pain at her own hands grants her this agency and control that are inherent with power. However, this act of resistance does not work. She is taken to a medical facility and force-fed without lubrication via feeding tube: another form of torture. With this, the power of the torturers becomes incontestable for Sarat, and one can recognize how her resistance begins to weaken.

Sarat's protest diminishes once she begins to break her silence and starts speaking to her fellow inmates. She creates elaborate lies about her origins, saying she was from South Carolina and had escaped illness. She enjoys lying after being tortured because she could retreat

into a "wholly fabricated existence" (252), or, in other words, a different identity. Thus, by adopting histories and "existences" that were not her own, she starts relinquishing her "true" previous social identity and surrendering to the dehumanizing power of torture.

Sarat fully breaks when they torture her using water. Bud Baker, her cruel torturer, reminds Sarat of her first months in Sugarloaf and how she used to press her "face against the cage like a dog, trying to get a look at the water[.] Well, guess what, Sara Chestnut? We're going to take you to the water" (255–56). And so, Sarat is waterboarded. This method of torture is further dehumanizing and potent because it is done using water, an element that symbolized a natural connection to kin, homeland, and vitality for the Chestnut family: "Sarat was drowning. The water moved, endless. She entered and exited death, her body no longer hers. Spasms of light and heat encased her; the mind seized with fear and panic. She drowned yet death would not come. It was in this way her captors finally broke her" (256). As previously discussed, water and its movement can also cause entrapment and destruction. And, in this passage, this movement of water traps Sarat and leads to the "death" of her nationalist social identity.

The purpose of torture "is not confession; rather, its aim is the dissolution of personal identity. The greater the horrors portrayed, the more fragile the remnants of identity, the greater the likelihood the victim will lack credibility" (Graessner 166). Similarly, Sarat lacks any credibility as she admits to everything, even things she never did or knew anything about. She lists everyone she knows and lies about those she does not. This method of torture quite literally opens the floodgates for Sarat and dissolves her previous social identity.

After her confession, she finds relief. She's given amenities, books, shades for the light, painkillers, time outside in the sun. She becomes "content like a house cat" (El Akkad, *American War* 257) and starts eating food and growing fat. Sarat is reconstructed as a result of the torture she has endured. Bud Baker, the most-hated guard, leaves Sugarloaf, but Sarat does

not care because "the girl whose soul the thick-necked guard had slowly strangled was also gone" (257). She is not the same person: her social identity has changed. When they finally release her, she returns to her family home. However, due to her stay in Sugarloaf, people now consider her a traitor. As previously mentioned, they fear her "foreign infection" after her association and perceived fraternization with Northerners. Thus, she is rejected by Southern nationalists, the group to which she once fully belonged.

Once Sarat returns to her family, she slowly attempts to regain her power through the only method she knows: violence and revenge. First, she starts inflicting self-harm, then she seeks retribution from Bud Baker. She attempts to change her social identity from oppressed victim to oppressor since the " 'fear of freedom' which afflicts the oppressed" leads many victims to "desire the role of oppressor" (Freire 46). By flipping the roles she once had in Sugarloaf, Sarat becomes the torturer and Bud Baker becomes the victim. When she inflicts pain on Bud, she is consumed by this act of regaining power and identity and "the surrounding world evaporated and with it the screaming that filled the room. Only her wrath remained, her unquenchable want. She wanted the blood inside him. […] She took it all. Rising, she looked at the hollowed remains of the guard and she felt the inverse of fulfillment—the empty undoing of a castaway who, rabid with thirst, resorts to drinking from the ocean" (El Akkad, *American War* 276). However, this personal revenge leaves Sarat unsatisfied and her thirst for power unquenched. Inflicting pain on a single individual is not enough to create a sufficient "spectacle of power" that will allow Sarat to regain her previous social identity. The damage inflicted on her through violence is too great and systemic, so the violence she inflicts on this individual level is insufficient revenge.

She only hurt one man, but when Joe seeks her after her return, Sarat asks him, "'do you think it was just one man who hurt me?'" (305). Instead of recovering and overcoming her violent and traumatic experiences, she seeks to reproduce them on a grander scale. She states

that if Joe can "line up every man who made me what I am: the ones who killed my father, the ones who killed my sister, the ones who killed my mother, the ones who made it so my brother will never be whole again, the ones who drove us from our home, the ones who slaughtered all those people in Patience. You line up the whole lot of them for me, Joe. Then I'll have my revenge'" (305). Sarat will never be content until she exterminates and enacts revenge on all those who "made her what she is." The violence inflicted upon her has left her powerless to construct her social identity, and instead it has been constructed for her by mass violence and society. This excerpt summarizes the futility of the individual fighting against the masses and all those faceless people who shape one's experiences and social identity since "society exists outside the individual, a mass of rules, relationships, injunctions, and customs that is itself the chief obstacle to the realization of human potential, and hence of human happiness" (Fukuyama 36). As an individual, Sarat will never achieve happiness, personal fulfillment, or agency, because in this neoliberal dystopian society, she is consumed by the group.

According to Wisnewski, torture destroys "our ability to be agents in the world" (3) and uses the body as "*another instrument of torture* – something else which the state can use against the person being tortured" (38). So Sarat decides to use her body as a weapon of mass destruction, thus reversing the instrumentalization of her flesh for her individual goals: she uses herself as a tool to torture society and the state. In this way, Sarat resorts to a counter-identification with society in an attempt to regain agency and power through the use of bioweaponry.

As an agent of the Bouazizi Empire, Joe's objective is to sustain the Second Civil War and keep the US weak. After Sarat's return from Sugarloaf, the war is finally dying down and both sides have reached an agreement to "reunify" peacefully. To stop this, Joe offers Sarat the chance to infect herself with a newly created disease called the Quick and spread the illness at the Reunification Day ceremony, stating that this "would change the tide of the war, change the

victor, change everything" (El Akkad, *American War* 306). He offers it like a favor, because she has suffered and fought so much, and this is the "size of [her] vengeance'" (306). Her need for counter-identification with her current dystopian society is so explicit that Joe recognizes the magnitude of her desire for revenge. He is not explicit in how this could actually "change the tide of war" and make the South the victor. As Sarat is no longer blinded by her radicalized nationalist ideology, she finally understands that it does not matter to Joe who actually wins the war. "'My people have created an empire. It is young now, but we intend it to be the most powerful empire in the world. For that to happen, other empires must fail. I think by now you understand that, if it were the other way around—if the South was on the verge of winning— perhaps I would be having this conversation in Pittsburgh or Columbus'" (306). With this, Sarat finally understands that the war was not fought and supported because of a nationalist sentimental, but because of the desire for neoliberal power.

When pondering whether to go ahead with Joe's plan, Sarat understands that the sickness will kill millions of people, including her. She also comprehends that this will occur regardless of her own desires; if she refuses, Joe will find somebody else. However, if she accepts, Sarat will not only have her mass vengeance, but will gain some control, power, and agency. She will be able to instrumentalize her body and have the opportunity to plan and save those she loves. What Sarat does not realize is that the idea of agency as "the capacity to choose for oneself and the capacity to act upon one's choices" is compromised in dystopia, and, therefore, in this novel, because "the spheres of thought and of action are so severely constrained" and its "social formation so powerful" that its citizens are either unaware of their lack of agency and freedom or will attempt an impossible rebellion that will result in their individual annihilation (Jacobs 92). Thus, Sarat's desire for individuality as personal vengeance and agency to act against her dystopian society is warped and futile: her counter-identification will lead only to her personal destruction.

Sarat knows how her body-turned-weapon will destroy masses: it will kill Northerners, Southern traitors, and Southern patriots alike. To convince her, Joe plays on the ideological adage that she will be remembered and will achieve collective memorial immortality. "You'll be a hero to the Southern cause for as long as the South exists. When this is over they'll build cities in your name" and she replies "Fuck the South and everything it stands for" (El Akkad, *American War* 313). Sarat is no longer blinded by radical nationalist ideology, and what was once a useful recruitment technique no longer has power over her actions. After making the decision to carry the Quick and attempt to annihilate the U.S., Sarat starts making personal plans: she saves her nephew Benjamin, Simon and Karina's son, by sending him off to New Anchorage, Alaska, far away from the U.S. mainland and spread of the disease, and she writes her life story in a set of journals she hides for Benjamin to later find.

Benjamin, a historian and the narrator of the novel, recounts his own experience and the discovery of Sarat's actions. As was predicted, the insurrectionist who brought about the Quick pandemic was unknown until Benjamin learns of it through Sarat's journals after he becomes an adult. Through her diaries, it seems that Sarat attempts not only to explain the reasons for her actions, but also create her own agency via the act of narrating. In this way, Sarat writes herself into being so as to heal her destabilized identity. The act of narration allows one to "engender a whole, solid sense of self through the autobiographical act, the tension between self as either fragmented and discontinuous or whole and continuous" (Prodromou 195). Throughout the novel, the construction of Sarat's social identity has been rigid and limited to that of a radicalized Southern nationalist. After years of torture, this social identity has been destroyed and fragmented as violence and institutional power manage to dehumanize her. By seeking vengeance and agency, and through a counter-identification with the neoliberal dystopian society, she attempts to recover a "solid sense of self." And, according to Prodromou, writing allows one "to makes sense of things, construct themselves, discover what they are

thinking and feeling, find themselves and their lives—in short, it is 'a weapon for the preservation of the self'" (195). For Sarat, writing her journals is another "weapon" in her arsenal to fight back against her dystopian society and its consumption of individuality. Ultimately, as an individual, although she managed to greatly impact society, her identity was eliminated. The US eventually recovered and maintained its dystopian society, and Sarat the individual was forgotten completely.

After reading her journals, instead of publishing them and revealing Sarat as one of the most important actors in the Second Civil War and allowing her to achieve individual prominence and immortality, Benjamin burns them. With this destruction of Sarat's journals, Benjamin essentially destroys any possible counter-narrative or threat to neoliberal dystopian hegemony and its dominant discourse. The conclusion of the novel cements the notion that any counter-identification or resistance is quickly eliminated. Human individuality and rebellious agency are then incompatible with the novel's neoliberal, dystopian society. Ultimately, Sarat self-destructs while trying to negotiate and implement change in society, and her social identity is annihilated in favor of maintaining the social status quo.

4. *The Power* by Naomi Alderman

British writer Naomi Alderman published in 2016 her dystopian novel, *The Power*, influenced by her mentorship with Margaret Atwood as a response to *The Handmaid's Tale* and inspired by the #MeToo movement and fourth wave feminist questions. Alderman puts for the question of why society believes if women ruled, the world would be a better place. In an interview on her website, she explicitly makes reference to Margaret Thatcher's term in office, whose neoliberal policies were not characterized by "compassion, kindness and an open warmth toward suffering humanity" (Alderman, "Answers to Questions," para.2). As such, she wrote the novel to portray the nuances of the social power structure and the ways in which it can be abused by a minority in command against a powerless majority.

Alderman writes the novel as a narration within a narration that is encompassed by two epigraphs in epistolary format. These letters are written five thousand years in the future, where women are in power, between a fictional Naomi Alderman and Neil Adam Armon, a male writer who becomes the author of the "historical novel" titled *The Power*. The correspondence between these colleagues discusses Neil's attempts at researching and analyzing events that occurred five thousand years in the past, what is present-day twenty-first century, before what comes to be known as the Cataclysm.[30] Both Neil and Naomi question the origins of power and attempt to de-essentialize normative features of gender in their letters; Neil especially takes an Actonian approach by considering that power corrupts all. The narrative of *The Power* commences with the sudden development of electrical power within female bodies. This electricity stems from the newly awakened "skein" or biological organ that can solely be found in people with two X chromosomes. Initially, the skein's power surfaces involuntarily and abruptly in young women, but as the novel progresses, they can purposefully stimulate the organ in older women, so that, eventually, they all acquire this electrical energy. After the blossoming

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[30] The Cataclysm is an unknown apocalyptic event theorized as similar to the Big Bang. Alderman foreshadows this apocalypse via a countdown that divides the chapters within the novel.

of this electricity, or what some refer to as lightning, everything changes in society. The novel follows four main characters: Roxy, a British teenager and the illegitimate daughter of a London mob boss with three older brothers from his wife; Tunde a young Nigerian journalist who begins to document to female revolution and thus inserts himself into precarious situations; Allie, later known as Eve, who is abused by her foster father and escapes after killing him with her power to a Catholic convent where she eventually becomes her leader of her own religion; and finally, Margot, a middle-aged local politician who rises through public office after developing her electricity and political ambitions and creating a privatized army of powerful young women.

The reader is first introduced to the teenage Roxy as she is trapped in a cupboard while her mother is attacked by two hired men. In her attempt at self-defense, she awakens her power but is unable to save her mother, who is killed by these men. With the help of her father, she is introduced into the British mafia and kills her mother's supposed murderer, which forces her to escape to the United States to avoid retaliation. In the U.S., she meets Allie in a convent, who goes by the name Eve after she escapes her foster parents' house when she kills her foster father while he is sexually abusing her. In the safe haven of the convent, Allie reinvents herself and begins to use her power to manipulate and indoctrinate those around her to follow her revised, matriarchal Judeo-Christian religion. With the awakening of their power and their friendship, Roxy begins to gain more responsibilities and leadership within her father's crime family while Allie commences an evangelical, religious movement that subordinates Man and elevates Woman. Margot, as a low-level politician, slowly climbs the ladder to gain more economic and political power within the United States with new policies that grant women more authority. Tunde, a privileged youth from Lagos, takes advantage of his luck at being at the right place at the right time to record the awakening of young girls' skeins in public and have his video go viral. As a result, he becomes a journalist that covers this new shift in reality, and, as a man, must navigate his loss of power in increasingly volatile situations. Throughout the narrative,

the four characters' stories interact as they experience the social alteration from a patriarchal to a masculinist matriarchal dystopia as a battle of the sexes over social hierarchy ensues.

The analysis of the construction of social identities within this dystopian society portrays how given the chance to enact real institutional change with their newfound power, the women of the novel mostly continue to uphold the status quo of the normative patriarchal matrix, and merely reverse the roles of men and women but maintain the same essential values. Thus, women gain supremacy without enacting qualitative change to the system's ideological structure. The social identities of characters either shift to become what they once hated and fought against, in order to maintain or acquire social prominence and privilege, or they resist society by pursuing true equality and are forgotten and suppressed by the dystopia. Characters such as Margot and Allie initially consider the inheritance of this electrical power as an opportunity to change their conditions as oppressed women: Allie is a young teenager sexually abused in the foster system, and Margot is an ambitious politician is unable to rise in status due to resistance from her male bosses and the difficulties of balancing family and work. Their social identities shift and are constructed to maintain and acquire individual relevance and privilege and become hierarchy-enhancing forces. Characters such as Roxy or Tunde, who seek equality and parity by acting as hierarchy-attenuating forces, thus counter-identify with the collective and their social identities are oppressed and annihilated.

In her examination of dystopian fiction, Gottlieb considers that "each dystopian society contains within it seeds of a utopian dream" (8), and in the case of *The Power*, the opportunity to achieve authority and defend oneself against misogynistic violence can be aspirational. However, the characters' utopian dream becomes distorted. Instead of enacting significant change and dismantling the patriarchal neoliberal power structure, Margot and Allie— according to Michel Pêcheux's terminology—identify with dystopian system in order to acquire and maintain power and an elevated social identity. As part of their "identification" with the

social structure, they, as individuals, must change and yield to the dominant society and the public sphere. Simply put, they contribute to the maintenance of dystopian values that shift to grant power to women instead of men: a shift from patriarchy to masculinist matriarchy. Roxy and Tunde, on the other hand, seek true equality and parity, which leads them to counter-identify with the collective, like Sarat in *American War*. For this, they are punished, and their social identities become oppressed and weakened.

The Power explores what Levitas and Sargisson identify in feminist dystopia as "the danger that the 'wrong' utopia might be adopted: that, for instance, my feminism might evolve one day into a sexist totality of its own; that the things of which I accuse patriarchy might simply become inverted in my own ideal world" (16). As such, the novel follows the social shift in gender hierarchy from misogyny to misandry, depicting the ways in which neoliberal corporations and ideals influence global policies and utilize religious fervor, the traditional "battle of the sexes" enmity, as well as physical strength and power to liberate the market and impact politics.

4.1 The Sexed Body

According to Judith Butler, identity construction is based on a social injunction or command that "takes place in relation to an imposed set of norms. The norm does not produce the subject as its necessary effect, nor is the subject fully free to disregard the norm that inaugurates its reflexivity; one invariably struggles with conditions of one's own life that one could not have chosen" (18–19). In Alderman's novel, this imposed set of norms in society shifts due to a biological change within women: they awaken an electrical organ that allows them to shoot electricity from their hands and, therefore, acquire more corporeal power and strength over men. The terms of women's initial injunction into society as subjects must change to accommodate the corresponding inversion of social hierarchy that ensues as women acquire a

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physical advantage over men. *The Power* depicts the ways in which its four characters' social identities evolve and the resulting struggles they face due to these conditions. This social, normative change originates in the body, it is necessary to explore the ways in which the characters' bodies in the novel contribute to the construction of their social identity.

The "set of norms" that previously marked men's and women's sexed bodies has shifted with the awakening of the skein. Due to her occupation as a politician, Margot is the first to read reports on initial research into this solely female corporeal marker: a "strip of striated muscle across the girls' collarbones which they name the *organ of electricity*, or the *skein* for its twisted strands" (Alderman 21, emphasis in original) with which most, if not all, women are born. It becomes a natural feature of their physiological composition and is associated with their sex or genitalia. In *American War*, the body as a material factor in the construction of social identities played a more secondary role. The defining characteristic of the dystopian, rigidified identity was the characters' nationalism; the significance of the body in relation to the nationalist social identity was connected to kinship ties and place of origin. However, in *The Power*, the body is an incredibly influential determining factor within the dystopian system. The body is of primary importance in that participates in the rigidification of the sex/gender binary in this dystopian system by becoming exclusively defined by this new anatomical organ and the power it provides, which functions as a social trigger that ignites an inversion in neoliberal order. This focus on the sexed body as constitutive of a social identity in the limiting binary of the novel, thus, grounds the division and differentiation of humans according to anatomical sex within a socially constructed paradigm of gender and its attributes.

Initially, men's bodies were the dominant, normative model, due to their physical strength. In *The Power*, this connection between superiority and strength places higher social value on traits such as aggressiveness, dominance, violence, egotism, and competition and is associated with the male body and therefore masculinity. The preference for such qualities

serves to further link gender and sex and institute boundaries and differentiations along corporeal lines; i.e., those of lesser bodily strength cannot attain or be attributed these highly valued traits and, thus, are socially inferior. Because of this significance and desirability placed on the strong body and its consequent aggressive and bellicose attributes, the arrival of a stronger body with this recent power immediately leads to fighting as a means for dominance: a "strange new kind of fighting which leaves boys – mostly boys, sometimes girls – breathless and twitching, with scars like unfurling leaves winding up their arms or legs or across the soft flesh of their middles" (21). The awakening of the skein and the strengthening of the female body kindle a "strange new kind of fighting" in that girls are now the ones seeking and initiating violent interactions with boys because they can overpower them. Of note is the description of boys' bodies as "soft flesh" as they become the weaker sex in the face of a power that leaves them "breathless and twitching" and out of control. The result of this weakening is inscribed on their bodies through the scars and marks left by girls' electrical power.

4.1.1 Gender and Sex

Social identity is heavily influenced by one's sex and gender. Sidanius and Pratto's social dominance theory establishes that all social systems espouse hierarchies based on gender. Humans are predisposed to "form group-based social hierarchies" (38) which must be maintained through group conflicts with the Other. While hierarchy-attenuating forces seek "group-based social equality," ultimately, social systems are subject to hierarchy-enhancing forces that strive to produce and maintain "higher levels of group-based social inequality" (38). As will be discussed throughout this chapter, Margot and Allie can be considered hierarchy-enhancing forces, whereas Tunde, and especially Roxy, strive to be hierarchy-attenuating forces.

This social hierarchy within the novel continues to value and privilege ideals and traits associated with masculinity and valued by patriarchy. Women adopt and maintain masculinist values, aspirations, and codes to achieve superiority within the gendered group-based social hierarchy. In essence, they do not attempt to dismantle or reconstruct the system but instead create an inverted hierarchy. The existing academic literature that analyzes *The Power*, albeit limited, refers to this inverted dystopian system as patriarchal or matriarchal. However, this dissertation considers these terms to be insufficient to describe the complexities and nuances of Alderman's society.[31] The notion of patriarchy is extensive and cannot be easily disentangled from men and male rule. Although the term matriarchy sufficiently connotes female rule and power, such societies tend to value and uphold what is considered more femininity and feminine features, such as nurturance, passivity, modesty, tenderness, and devotion.[32] Thus, henceforth, this analysis proposes the term masculinist matriarchy to adequately define the novel's society, as it is ruled by women in power who endorse traditionally masculine attributes.

While *American War* highlights the traditional North and South binary within US culture, *The Power* portrays a more universal historical dualism and focuses on social groups and group-based hierarchies established and differentiated by the gender-sex system determined by the body. Benhabib defines this "gender-sex system" as "the social-historical, symbolic constitution, and interpretation of the anatomical differences of the sexes" or a grid "through which the self develops an embodied identity, a certain mode of being in one's body and of living the body" and through which "societies and cultures reproduce embodied individuals" (152). The dystopian system in the novel, characterized by unequal hierarchies, seeks to maintain such "group-based social inequality" based on the gender-sex system defined

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[31] See Yebra's "'Acheronta Movebo'" (2018); Miller's "'Day of the Girls'" (2020); Ross' "Becoming Woman in the Land of Women" (2020); and Gunderson's "'Who can do what to whom and get away with it'" (2021) for their classification of the novel's society.
[32] When referring to femininity and masculinity or feminine and masculine traits, this dissertation follows traditional, Western, socially-constructed ascriptions.

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by bodily identities which are determined by physical power. Thus, the characters' social identities are limited to their sexed bodies and consequent gender affiliations and traits which are bound to this hierarchy and system of differentiation and valuation. As Grosz contests, one's anatomy "must play a major role in" one's self-conception and "is directly linked to the social meaning and value of the sexed body" (58). In *The Power*, the gender-sex hierarchical system is based on values which prize strength and qualities associated with physical dominance originally linked to the sexed male body. Thus, the social value of such qualities is now embodied, especially, by women's skeins, an anatomical marker that influences the characters' social identity and acceptance.

Once girls' skeins start to awaken and the power arrives, boys are separated or segregated from girls for their own safety and for fear of repercussions. Boys' movements begin to be restricted, and they are progressively segregated and denied mobility. According to Iris Marion Young, the "more a girl assumes her status as feminine, the more she takes herself to be fragile and immobile, and the more she actively enacts her own body inhibition" (153). These inhibitions are shifted onto men as the dystopian society progresses and women gain supremacy. Femininity evokes fragility and weakness, but, in the masculinist matriarchy, boys are now the weaker sex and must evoke said feminine status through immobility and inhibition.

Their restricted access to public spaces and segregation is indicative of the impact of the body and physicality on the construction of their social identity and treatment within this dystopian society:

> They fell into it easily. You only had to see a few videos online for the fear to hit you in the throat. But for the girls it has not been so simple. You cannot keep them from each other. Some of them are angry and some of them are mean, and now the thing is out in the open some are vying to prove their strength and skill. (Alderman, *The Power* 23)

This passage describes the initial shift in the gender-sex social hierarchy, which begins with worry that young men could be victims of senseless violence and aggression, so they are separated and kept safe. This occurs easily because the collective accepts this dystopian rule or

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social configuration as part of the natural order. As stated by the end of the novel, "'what it means to be a woman' is bound up with strength and not feeling fear or pain" (380). This dominant, normalized paradigm within the novel is constituted by the female/male gender-sex binary that corresponds to a victim/oppressor hierarchy which is easily inverted: if women no longer occupy the classification of victim because they are now associated with "strength" and "not feeling fear or pain," then society needs to fill this category with the binary opposite, i.e., men. Furthermore, if women now have superior strength and must not feel fear or pain, effectively eliminating any affect or compassion, their social identities must inevitably encompass those dystopian values attributed to the preeminent, superior group, i.e. the oppressor.

Traditionally, the justification for women's inferior social positions relied on "containing them within bodies that are represented, even constructed, as frail, imperfect, unruly, and unreliable, subject to various intrusions" (Grosz 13). Without the skein, men's bodies become frail since they are the weaker sex. They become imperfect because they do not have that which symbolizes the perfection of power and strength, as they become the subject of electrical jolts or intrusions. Thus, the fictional dystopian society transfers the justification for men's newfound "secondary social positions" onto their bodies.

Moreover, this segregation serves to further differentiate the two social groups based on their sex and corporeal markers: i.e., those who do not have the skein, men; and those who do, women. By focusing on the binary distinction of characters' sexual anatomy, part of the dystopian element of the novel is also limiting of identity that produces the consequent erasure of the non-binary, intersex, and trans communities. Both the patriarchal and masculinist matriarchal gender-sex system implement and require the Us vs. Them or Self vs. Other dichotomy in order to function. The communities that challenge this rigid binary and must be eliminated. Only cis-male/female bodies can acquire meaning by utilizing the oppositional

dualism of Self or Subject vs. Other. According to Simone de Beauvoir, "A man's body has meaning by itself, disregarding the body of the woman, whereas the woman's body seems devoid of meaning without reference to the male" (20). In *The Power*, the skein re-signifies women's bodies by placing them as the dominant model within social hierarchy. As a result, women's bodies are whole, the containers of meaning, and need no reference to the male body, as it is they who have the skein, and because they have the skein, they have the power. With this physical might, women become angry and cruel as they attempt to prove their strength and skill. In a patriarchal society, man "is the Subject; he is the Absolute. She is the Other" (20). As the hierarchy shifts and women begin to encompass these masculinist values to prove their superiority, they become the Subject while men become the Other, and as women's social position rises due to the changes in their physical superiority, their body becomes the model— the Absolute.

The awakening of power leads the group-based hierarchy to establish bodily normality and abnormality so as to further establish gender-sex differentiation and construct and maintain rigid social identity categories. The physical change in women occurred on a massive scale that required social reaction and adaptation to keep "the body confined, constrained, supervised, and regimented" (Grosz 141) by violent or coercive "inscriptions of cultural and personal values, norms, and commitments according to the morphology and categorization of the body into socially significant groups" (141–42) that limit one's social identity, especially within a dystopian society. Thus, throughout the novel, this masculinist gender-sex system is never dismantled or at any risk, since the characters quickly substitute one sexed body for another while retaining the social and gender values intrinsic to masculine supremacy and dominionism. This social shift can be contrasted to Sarat's corporeal experience and rejection: as an individual who differs from the norm due to her more masculine and large body, she cannot produce a substitution in the heteronormative matrix to allow for a masculinist matriarchy and thus

become the embodiment of normality. Instead, her bodily difference causes her to be labelled as abnormal and contributes to her status as an outcast.

Normality is assumed by categorizing, distributing, and evaluating social identities through individuals' bodies. These bodily subjects willingly execute "contemporary practices of normalization" so that abnormality "is unfavorable and brings disadvantages. Subjects thus 'choose' to use normalizing techniques to defend their interests and to optimize their chances in a neoliberal capitalistic society" (Jansen and Wehrle 46). This becomes a form of neoliberal normalization that utilizes positive terminology and "practices of organization, rationalization, enhancement, or limitation according to the principles and needs of the economy: now every subject 'freely chooses' to normalize or optimize itself, to enhance its gains (human capital) and reduce its losses in the economic market" (46). Women's bodies and power are normalized in their optimization and training as efficient private military for NorthStar. They choose to incorporate and utilize techniques and practices that increase their utility as fighters and warriors, and, thus, to participate as human capital in the private, unregulated armed forces. Women train to become elite fighters: organizing, rationalizing, enhancing, and limiting their bodies and their capabilities.

The use of the skein becomes a reason for segregation and group division within women, as well. As a model of the Absolute, women are expected to have complete command over their skein which must be a consistent and constant energy source. All those who do not fit the mold of this toxic "masculinity" or normativity, are deemed abnormal and undesirable. Toxic masculinity is defined in this dissertation as the cultural and social demands and pressures that compel men to conform to and act according to social notions of "masculinity" previously defined as domination, aggression, strength, lack of affect, etc. Jocelyn, Margot's eldest daughter, is the figurehead of abnormality within the novel as her skein is uncontrollable and erratic: sometimes it provides great bursts of electrical power, and other times it is completely

unresponsive. Because of this lack of command over her power, her body is deemed unoptimizable, and so her social identity and position among her peers becomes precarious.

In Jocelyn's case, "the older she gets, the more intractable the problem seems to be. Sometimes she has all the power she wants, and sometimes nothing" (Alderman, *The Power* 214). In a neoliberal society that requires maximum effectiveness and productivity, her body's lack of reliability is deemed unwelcome. As previously stated, neoliberal contemporary practices of normalization cause subjects to willingly accept, desire, and promote normality. As is the case with Jocelyn, "everything seems so confusing, and all she really wants is to be normal" (232). The definition of normal has changed: having a skein is insufficient, and it must be optimized and infallible to be a productive member of the group and construct an appropriate social identity. Thus, social pressure on women's bodies increases, characterized by new linguistic terminology as a neoliberal mechanism to further pressure women into "freely choosing" to conform and normalize their bodies: "There are nasty names now for a girl who can't or won't defend herself. *Blanket*, they call them, and *flat battery*. Those are the least offensive ones. *Gimp. Flick. Nesh. Pzit.* The last, apparently, for the sound of a woman trying to make a spark and failing" (71). This could be seen as an example of toxic masculinity performed by women who reproduce neoliberal masculinist discourse to promote power, efficiency, and strength in the body as the sole signifiers of worth. The effectiveness of women's skeins, i.e., their bodies, allows them to be included within the in-group and construct a privileged social identity.[33]

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[33] This novel also evokes parallelisms with the superhero novel. At first, the awakening of this new "superpower" or electrical skein does not read like a dystopia, yet the expectations for social improvement associated with the rise of superheroes does not occur. Like the rupture with the benevolent, altruistic superhero in the comic genre, cf. *Watchmen*, so too does *The Power* question the sole placement of authority in the hands of women. Simply because they were previously oppressed and have normative characteristics of femininity and passivity, this does not lead to a more benevolent society. Reminiscent of Actonian philosophy, it seems that Alderman, in line with this shift in superhero comics, portrays the notion that absolute power corrupts.

For Margot, Jocelyn's lack of physical strength is unacceptable. As a public official and the figurehead of a private military corporation, her body and those bodies associated with her must be consistent and efficient for their use and market production. An abnormal, unreliable soldier diminishes NorthStar's gains as well as Margot's social status and power as a mother and as an entrepreneur. So, Margot promises Jocelyn, "'You can be just like all the other girls. I know we can fix it for you.' This is what it means to be a good mother. Sometimes you can see what your kids need better than they can" (215). In her attempts to normalize her daughter, Margot utilizes neoliberal methods of positive terminology and false promises. She masks her vested interests as the marks of a "good mother," who, nevertheless, manipulates the will of her child to reach normalization and optimization of her human capital.

However, Jocelyn is unable to fully regulate herself and optimize her productivity. Her corporeal abnormality limits and determines her social identity. She begins to date a boy, Ryan, who has a skein due to a chromosomal irregularity. They meet "in a private chatroom online, both of them looking for people like them. Weird people. People in whom the thing hadn't *taken* right, one way or the other" dedicated to "'deviants and abnormals'. Jocelyn had thought, That's me. That's where I should go" (169). Their bodies mark them as deviant, so their social identities reflect such aberration and transgression.

Throughout the novel, Jocelyn struggles with her attraction to abnormal or deviant people. She is interested in Ryan and his power because it is "very real. The feeling of it delineates the lines of the body very clearly. […] The single dependable human desire is very adaptable; what there is, in humans, is sexy. This, now, is what there is" (170). This excerpt depicts the difficulties with normalization. In essence, the neoliberal dystopian society of *The Power* values and normalizes physical strength and power, but maintains a rigid, essentialist hierarchical structure in which only women with skeins are superior and normalized. Thus, when encountering men with such organs, they are deemed deviant and undesirable, although

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they contain a latent social attraction because of the power they symbolize. Perceived as partly abnormal due to her inconstant power, she does not feel revulsion for the deviancy of men with skeins. Her hyper-focused desires for a stable and efficient skein only allows Jocelyn to value and desire strength and power, despite abnormality. She only finds men who have a skein attractive due to its ensuing feeling of power that "delineates the lines of the body" and brings into focus such physical strength. "What there is" now in humans is this electrical energy and strength, and for Jocelyn, this is the only true value. Her abnormality causes her to struggle with adhering to such rigid and limiting social identities.

The dystopian society of the novel adopts a rigid, binary, essentialist perspective in regards to skeins and power, so Ryan's chromosomal abnormality must be kept secret. If men also have skeins, they are killed. Although some desire skeins and wish for women to try to awaken them within men by employing "the techniques that are already being used in the training camps to strengthen the power in weaker women," most men "don't want to be associated with this. With *weirdness*. With chromosomal irregularity" (170). All women must have functional skeins, and all men must not. Any variation is deemed weird, and in a neoliberal society where only normality is prized, any weirdness is utterly rejected and villainized. In understanding the ways in which gender roles are reassigned to women, Alderman depicts how "male and female characteristics are socially constructed differences and these characteristics can be radically changed by social and political intervention" (Turner 31). The dystopian inversion of the social hierarchy into a masculinist matriarchy continues to rigidly limit the characters' social identities according to their sex, essentialize their gender, and normalize their bodies in compliance with productivity and optimization.

The essentialism of gender and the consequent hierarchization that functions within patriarchy "as a system of power relations of men over women" (Turner 101), or in this case masculinist matriarchy which subordinates men, is justified through its predication on nature.

Hence, "because of their reproductive role in human societies, women are associated with nature rather than culture and hence have a pre-social or sub-social status. Women have not, as it were, made the transition from animality to culture, because they are still tied to nature through their sexuality and fertility" (101). Yet by becoming physically superior, they are able to create a link between their essentialist, sociobiological supremacy and nature. As some reactionary men's activists state in the novel, "'Women are just animals,' says UrbanDox. 'Just like us, they want to mate, reproduce, have healthy offspring'" (Alderman, *The Power* 200). Women remain connected to nature, reproduction, and their essential animality, but this now empowers them. Because of women's corporeal strength, men are no longer needed. As such, women will kill most men and "only keep the most genetically healthy of us alive" for reproductive purposes (200). UrbanDox equates these gender relations to slavery in that "If you have a slave, that slave's your property, you don't want damage to come to it. However bad any man treated a woman, he needs her in a fit condition to carry a child. But now … one genetically perfect man can sire a thousand" so women, defined by their animalistic nature, can mistreat men further (200). The novel inscribes the battle of the sexes, i.e. conflict between group-based hierarchies, with essentialist rhetoric and evolutionary discourse. Although connected to nature, sexuality, and reproduction, their physical powers and corporeal superiority grant them freedom. The female body no longer needs to abide by regulation, as men become the redundant and disposable sex. By utilizing the analogy of slavery, UrbanDox maintains the framework of victims/oppressors and showcases how the group hierarchy has inverted with little change to the social structure itself.

Performativity and repetition of physical dominance within the gender-sex system leads characters to believe that superiority and domination is based on male and female biology. Essentialist thinking is reinforced throughout the novel, imitating current notions of women's peaceful and compassionate nature. When discussing the events that lead to war and the

Cataclysm at the end of the novel, the epistolary passages reflect notions regarding men's and women's natures: "a world run by men would be more kind, more gentle, more loving and naturally nurturing. Have you thought about the evolutionary psychology of it? Men have evolved to be strong worker homestead-keepers, while women—with babies to protect from harm – have had to become aggressive and violent" (376). The irony of this statement is used to indicate that this essentialist notion based on the body is constructed and justified through scientific discourse that shapes social identities. As seen in the novel, a social system controlled by men is just as violent and aggressive as one which privileges women because it hinges and is based on the same values of essentialism, binary hierarchies, rigidity, violence, and oppression.

The appearance of this excerpt at the end of the novel is of special significance because the narrative has depicted "women's aggressive capacities through the reproduction of individual and collective acts of cruelty and [their] justification through discourse presenting the coercion of men as necessary for the success of humanity" (Jarvis 128). The evidence current patriarchy provides to exemplify women's compassionate and gentle nature due to childbearing and rearing is inverted to substantiate their aggressive nature in the novel. This is further substantiated by Neil, the fictional paratextual author of the novel who writes this narrative as a historical fiction that tries to explain events prior to the setting's Cataclysm, referenced in the novel by sections that temporally situate events through a countdown. In these epigraphic sections, Neil his attempts to dismantle these learned notions, as he concludes that none of the traits ascribed in the gender-sex system are natural. "Gender is a shell game. What is a man? Whatever a woman isn't. What is a woman? Whatever a man is not. Tap on it and it's hollow" (Alderman, *The Power* 381). There is no substance to essentialist claims. But, ultimately, in this neoliberal dystopia, this cannot be changed as it sustains the current system of power. These essentialist notions must be normalized in order to maintain strict, limited

social identities that provide optimized human capital for the market. Society must remain the same, albeit with slight inversions of power.

As in *American War*, propaganda also serves in *The Power* to create models and influence the public on construction of social identities. Whereas the advertisements in the Free Southern State were used to put forth monolithic stereotypes of Northerners to further nationalist notions of Enemy threats to Southern enjoyment, Alderman's novel depicts propaganda as functioning in a more nuanced way using consumerist approaches that sell commodities by creating aspirational images and models to be desired and followed. Thus, the consumption of press and propaganda contributes to the normalization of the sexed-gendered body. A mechanism that sustains the neoliberal male/female binary is capitalist consumer culture and media, which works to normalize the gender norm. As women's bodies become more optimal, advertisements appear

> with sassy young women showing off their long, curved arcs in front of cute, delighted boys. They're supposed to make you want to buy soda, or sneakers, or gum. They work, they sell product. They sell girls one other thing; quietly, on the side. Be strong, they say, that's how you get everything you want. (Alderman, *The Power* 290)

This publicity incites more participation and consumption within the market by providing aspirational and entertaining imagery, but it also contributes to the construction of social identities and a model of the corporeal ideal. The constant bombarding of images in advertisements and capitalist propaganda influence the public by constructing a consumerist need for the products and lifestyles sold within these campaigns, but they are also reflections of their desires as they tap into these latent longings and ambitions found within consumers.

The novel contains excerpts of ads that focus on the body and reflect the role reversal that occurs within the world while maintaining the neoliberal capitalist masculinist matriarchy. Some examples include the sale of the "Personal Defender" taser for men that is "safe, reliable, and easy to use" and discreet so "no one needs to know you can defend yourself but you" (140). However, this instrument is later withdrawn from the market because it "was established that a

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woman's body, receiving a large electric shock, would often produce a large reflexive arc 'bouncing back' towards her attacker, even if she fell unconscious" (140). Similar to penis enhancement or viagra pills, the novel contains advertisements to increase women's electrical power "to increase the duration and strength of their power using this secret knowledge" with just "one weird trick to improve performance" (140–41). Or defensive slip-on rubber socks that "No one need know you're wearing them, and unlike a shoe they cannot easily be removed by an assailant" (141). All of these seek profit from this newfound power but continue to prioritize similar experiences and aspects within society: defense against physical violence and performance enhancement.

To sustain itself, neoliberalism utilizes practices and notions of personal choice and self-interest that normalize the body and "hide the systematic aspects of power—domination, social hierarchies, and economic exploitation. […] women still incorporate social norms and power hierarchies through mundane techniques of normalization that then become part of their bodily subjectivity" (Jansen and Wehrle 47). These normalization techniques that uphold certain bodily standards and social group hierarchies are now depicted as the results of individual choice. Margot employs Jocelyn as a soldier in her privatized militia, NorthStar, and gives her advanced drugs and treatment to help her control her erratic power. There, Jocelyn is surrounded by normal girls who repudiate and Other any abnormal women as military structures seek obedient, regulated, and capable bodies. Thus, Jocelyn, who seeks social acceptance, attempts to convince herself that she is normal and that she likes normal men. She rejects her attraction to pure power and abnormality or deviance. In doing so, she tries to reinstate her own averageness. She denies she ever liked Ryan and realizes that "the other girls are right. It's better with a man who can't do it; it's more normal, anyway" and so she wishes that her peers would forget she dated Ryan because "she's forgotten him, it was just a teenage thing, and the drugs have normalized her power more than ever. She's normal now, completely normal"

(Alderman, *The Power* 234). Because Jocelyn so wishes to be normal, she considers her sexual attraction a choice and so chooses to be attracted to "normal men." To be with a normal man is socially "better" for her as it also reflects her own normality to the public. If the group forgets about Ryan, they will forget about her abnormality and fully accept her. As such, one can see how the neoliberal dystopian society through the use of normalization and restricted social identities attempts to influence and mold its citizens to comply with its regulatory "set of norms."

4.1.2 Pain, Desire, and Sexual Violence

Similar to Sarat's experience of pain and brutality during the Camp Patience massacre, which acted as a catalyst in the construction of her nationalist identity, each character's initial experience of the awakening of the skein organ in *The Power* occurs in moments of pain or sexual violence and ignites their newfound social identity. The first protagonist to stimulate her power is Roxy when she witnesses her mother's murder in a highly traumatic event: "Roxy feels it start to build in her then, though she doesn't know what it is. It's just a feeling at her fingers' ends, a prickle in her thumbs. She starts screaming" (Alderman, *The Power* 8). This unnamable power is at her fingertips, a salvation for a girl in need. To protect her, her mother tells her to run. However, Roxy has been bullied and mistreated at school and is used to getting in fights to defend herself. Her social identity at this moment is as Bernie Monke's daughter, a child of an English mobster, so she understands the need to utilize force, "You've got to stomp them till they beg. You don't run. Something's happening. The blood is pounding in her ears. A prickling feeling is spreading along her back, over her shoulders, along her collarbone. It's saying: you can do it. It's saying: you're strong" (9). In a conflict, she must get her enemy to "beg" her to stop and become submissive. Through strength and violence, she has learned to defend herself. The power within her is giving her confidence. Although yet unknown, such

strength is already speaking to her and, through her corporeal feelings and experience, she is able to understand that she is capable of defending herself against two grown men.

As the danger escalates, she feels her body change as her power builds: "Roxy feels the thing like pins and needles along her arms. Like needle-pricks of light from her spine to her collarbone, from her throat to her elbows, wrists, to the pads of her fingers. She's glittering, inside" (9). The delineation of all of these body parts speaks to the inherent physicality of this energy. It is rooted within her flesh and electrifies her in anticipation. She is hyperaware of her body in this moment and is "glittering." The use of this word connotes reflection and brilliance and infuses this scene with hope and positivity. It anticipates a splendor in her body as it awakens itself to possibility.[34] As she's being attacked, instead of defending herself in the traditional manner by kicking or punching, "some instinct tells her a new thing. She grabs his wrist. She *twists* something quite deep inside her chest, as if she'd always known how to do it. He tries to wriggle out of her grip, but it's too late. She cuppeth the lightning in her hand. She commandeth it to strike" (10). The power within Roxy, as with all women, is described as instinctual and natural, an essential part of her body. It is deep within her, a primordial energy beyond conscious understanding. The last two sentences from the passage above, "She cuppeth the lightning in her hand. She commandeth it to strike," are excerpted from the fictional biblical Book of Eve.[35] The use of verbs reminiscent of such biblical tradition and the consequent narrative connection of the body with the Book of Eve instill it with the divine destiny or power of Judeo-Christian tradition. However, the notion of commanding lightning additionally evokes the image of a mythological female Zeus or Thor-like figure. The use of all such references

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[34] The drug that is later concocted to intensify women's power is called Glitter in an attempt to imitate this moment. Ironically, it is not consumed for self-defense and personal protection, but for aggression and supremacy.

[35] This Book of Eve is written in response to women's new power and status in society and is seemingly based on the figure of Mother Eve, otherwise known as Allie, as she becomes a prophetess of the Holy Mother, the Judeo-Christian God become female.

immediately elevates women's bodies to a divine and superhuman status as they become vessels and commanders of celestial strength and power.

Margot awakens her skein in an incredibly painful and communal experience with her daughter. By this time, the power is already discovered within the world. She approaches the attempt to incite her power from a logical, distanced perspective after reading scientific journals and CDC reports. However, in the moment of her skein animation, she is transposed to a pre-social, pre-civilized state of mind, as she remembers the natural world in her youth and "smells the scent of wet leaves after a rainstorm. An apple orchard with the windfalls turning to rot, just as it was on her parents' farm" (26). This passage further establishes a connection between women's bodies and nature. According to Grosz, women are considered "somehow *more* biological, *more* corporeal, and *more* natural than men" (14). The power that derives from their skein is rooted in this notion as it evokes impressions of nature and childhood memories before logic, maturity, and civilization. However, the connotations of "rot" speak to dark undertones. As opposed to Roxy, later depicted as someone who seeks parity and hierarchy attenuation, Margot's experience signals rottenness, corruption, and darkness, an identification with the gloom of dystopian society. This is not a joyful, glittering moment as with Roxy's ability to protect herself, but a destructive rainstorm. This allusion to rain foreshadows Margot's role in the cataclysmic cleansing of society by the end of novel, which Alderman connects to the parable of Noah's Ark. Her body signals that her social identity will remain rigid; a hierarchy-enhancing force.

The stimulation of her skein is not a soft prickling of her body but is instead encompassed in incredible pain: "It deepens. Something is cracking her bone, twisting it, bending it, and she wants to tell Jos to stop but she can't open her mouth. It burrows through the bone like it's splintering apart from the inside; she can't stop herself seeing a tumour, a solid, sticky lump" (Alderman, *The Power* 26). This deep and profound physical pain warps

and distorts her body, just as her electrical power and social identity are twisted to uphold the masculinist matriarchal dystopia. She is silenced when the power takes hold of her like a tumor that splits her apart. With the morphing of her body, her identity also changes. Her original desire for collective good and vindication of women becomes sickly and cancerous and any counter-identification she may have had with society splinters off from her:

> Only pain can bring such attention to the body; this is how Margot notices the answering echo in her chest. Among the forests and mountains of pain, a chiming note along her collarbone. Like answering to like. […] She sendeth her lightning even unto the ends of the earth. […] And she knows, she felt that *twist*, and she remembers that maybe she has always known it and it has always belonged to her. Hers to cup in her hand. Hers to command to strike. (27)

The deep pain she experiences stems directly from her body, highlighting it as the principal cause of her social identity. The skein in her collarbone calls to nature's forests and mountains of pain, for it is a monstrous, animalistic natural power that will cause tremendous harm. This scene evokes the biblical passage in Roxy's awakening by including another passage from the Book of Eve. Whereas Roxy only commands her lightning to strike in personal self-defense, Margot's will be sent "unto the ends of the earth." This signals that Margot's influence, given to her by the supranatural, pre-civilized, corporeal power, will be used in devastation and mass harm. She will not use her power for individual, defensive reasons, but to dominate on a grander, international scale.

As women's powers awaken, the government resists this shift in authority and seeks a method of controlling women and preventing them from working and being in positions of power in the public office. As a method of male resistance, the patriarchal established power acts through repression. This first attempt of the repression of women by male authority is exemplified by Daniel Dandon, the governor of Margot's unnamed state, and the representative of male hegemony within the novel. He attempts to restrict Margot's—and women's—access to the workforce as he does not want her to ascend and, ultimately, replace him. He creates an obstacle for female ascension by initiating a testing program to corroborate whether the women

who work in public positions have a skein. If so, they would no longer be able to hold office.

According to Foucault, examination functions as a mechanism of discipline within society.

> The examination combines the techniques of an observing hierarchy and those of a normalizing judgement. It is a normalizing gaze, a surveillance that makes it possible to qualify, to classify and to punish. It establishes over individuals a visibility through which one differentiates them and judges them. That is why, in all the mechanisms of discipline, the examination is highly ritualized. In it are combined the ceremony of power and the form of the experiment, the deployment of force and the establishment of truth. At the heart of the procedures of discipline, it manifests the subjection of those who are perceived as objects and the objectification of those who are subjected. (*Discipline and Punish* 184–85)

In this way, discipline over the body is present in the act of examination itself. Women's bodies must be normalized and classified. In this ceremony of power, if the women do not meet the specific requirements, they are punished with loss of employment. Those who maintain their positions are disciplined into obedience. The test acts as a figurative confrontation between Man and Woman as an example of how male power attempts to maintain itself and control over women's bodies through oppression and micro-violence in that it involves sending electrical impulses, or deployment of force, which trigger an electrical reaction of the organ to establish the truth of women's skeins: "Give them an almost imperceptible shock across the skein; the skein will respond automatically with a jolt. Margot can feel her skein is ready, anyway – it's the nerves, the adrenaline" (Alderman, *The Power* 74). The exam predicates itself on the fact that women will have no control over their bodily responses as the skein automatically responds to stimulus and involuntarily reacts sending an electrical charge, thus, revealing its presence to the examiner. The notion of female bodily autonomy is further weakened when they are given the choice between undergoing this medical testing that is invasive of their privacy or rejecting this examination and being fired, therefore, eliminating themselves as labor power. Thus, with this procedure, women are objectified and subjected to this form of disciplinarian normalization.

However, for Margot this is an obstacle that she is able to overcome, showing that the established power is substituted by the new female power. This patriarchal power is no longer able to repress women's bodies, so it becomes simply a site of resistance that is overcome. Margot fights the testing and tries not to discharge her skein. She is unable to show her struggle, but due to the patriarchal society in which she is raised, Margot "has always known exactly how to be silent" (75–76) to succeed. This is a very hard but familiar difficulty of her body: wanting something which she denies. She exerts pure willpower and discipline over her body: "It is hard now, very hard, but the difficulty is familiar. Her body wants something, and she is denying it. The itch of it, the pressure of it, is across the front of her torso, down through the muscles of her stomach, into her pelvis, around her buttocks" (76). It is an uncomfortable experience, but she wills herself not to discharge as she is familiar with discomfort and corporeal discipline. The passage itemizes the itch and pressure she feels in her body as the pain and discomfort take hold.

Because she successfully passes the test which does not detect her active skein, Margot is deemed trustworthy and harmless, so she maintains her job and is placed in charge of testing. As such, she participates in this patriarchal discourse by promoting it as necessary to "keep our sons and daughters safe" (77). Instead of rising to power and rejecting this witch hunt for skein-holders, Margot upholds this practice to weed out those who are unfit as she continues with these normalizing judgments, surveillance of bodies, and mechanisms of discipline: "She tells herself, as she signs the forms, that it's probably true. Any woman who can't stop herself from discharging under this mild pressure is a danger to herself, a danger, yes, to society" (77). Unlike Daniel Dandon's use of the examination to eliminate and repress skein-holders, Margot supports the test because she considers it an opportunity to facilitate neoliberal normalization or normativity. Margot utilizes corporeal eligibility and ability to determine whether certain women should remain in public positions. She continues, then, to employ normative masculinist

values based on strength and discipline: not all women are accepted, only those who can be optimized and have enough self-control or authority to withstand pain and discomfort. According to Sarup, Foucault's notion of

> discipline, as a procedure of subjection, does indeed tie each individual to an identity. […] the techniques of discipline distribute bodies to various places and activities. They prescribe the body's movements, impose norms on its activity, watch out for any deviation, and exclude the non-conforming. In these ways, the body is connected with process of meaning: it is tied to an identity. (73)

Thus, through the examination as a mechanism of discipline, Margot's identity has been molded. Margot's own body is normalized, and therefore, tied to a social identity that is conforming so she can construct meaning and status within the dystopian society. As she gains this privilege by meeting disciplinarian standards, she imposes norms on bodily activities, and seeks deviation so that she can exclude the non-conforming.

Although this ableist discrimination is deemed innocuous and beneficial, since it is considered an individual choice as one can simply opt out and lose their position, it is a veiled neoliberal normalization practice to increase efficiency and productivity of the market's human capital or labor power by solely incorporating able-bodied, powerful, and efficient bodies into the workforce. The determiner of one's eligibility within this job market is women's strength and capability of control over their skeins. The body's "constitution as labour power is possible only if it is caught up in a system of subjection […] the body becomes a useful force only if it is both a productive body and a subjected body" through discipline (Foucault, *Discipline and Punish* 26). As such, those within a public, governmental position are not immune to private neoliberal capitalist interests that seek normalization and the most efficient form of economic benefits.

Margot's acceptance of masculinist matriarchal values is evident as her social identity grants her more power. She no longer needs to deny her body what it desires and discipline it through testing and patriarchal resistance. So, as time passes and women steadily gain more

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sociopolitical and economic power, she transforms into a lecherous older woman attracted to youthful men—in this example, Tunde—who uses her powerful position to acquire sexual favors: an inversion of the older lewd male figure: "She smiles reassuringly. At least, that's what she intends. She has the feeling that, once it reaches her lips, it might have come out more as a leer. The problem is that these fucking reporters are so attractive" (Alderman, *The Power* 245). Margot cannot stop herself and blames the male objectified Other and his body for her lust and lasciviousness. She focuses on his body as the reason for his success. His videos are popular "because he's handsome as hell. He's half naked in some of them, reporting from the beach in just Speedos, and how's she supposed to take him seriously now, when she's seen his broad shoulders and narrow waist and the rolling landscape of obliques and delts, glutes and pecs" (245). Although he reports on incredibly serious topics, the only content she is willing to accept from a man with his social identity is his sexualized body. Thus, sexual desire is derived from social power, which is, in turn, derived from physical or corporeal power. The men, then, become the Objects and Other. As objects, they lack sexual agency as their purpose is to be objects of sexual desire for women.

As a man, Tunde does not have a skein or any superior physical power. His first experience at the beginning of the novel with these is also his first sexual—and sexually traumatic—experience. The novel commences with Tunde as a twenty-one-year-old young man attracted to a seventeen-year-old girl. He is described as "just out of that period of his life where everything seemed the wrong size, too long or too short, pointing in the wrong direction, unwieldy" while his love interest is "more of a woman than he is a man, demure but not ignorant. Not too shy, either, not in the way she walks or the quick smile that darts across her face" (12). Reminiscent of discourse surrounding inappropriate sexual relations, Tunde is represented as an immature youth or "boys will be boys", while Enuma is more of a seductress

who is wise beyond her years. However, she is still legally a child or minor and significantly younger than Tunde.

When depicting Tunde's interest in Enuma, Alderman describes how he desires her. He likes "her secret smile and her jokes that he didn't at first realize were jokes. And the curve of her hip, and the way she fills her T-shirts, yes. It's been quite a thing to arrange to be alone together with Enuma. Tunde's nothing if not determined" (12). This excerpt is almost predatory in the way it portrays Tunde's male gaze and intentions. He interprets her smiles and jokes as secretly meant for him and obsesses over her body and his desire for her hips and breasts. He manipulates the group of friends to leave their accommodation so that he can be alone with Enuma and lies about having non-existent chaperones. He is determined to be with her. Since Enuma does not explicitly complain, he understands that she consents to his advances.

In this scene, there are relational power dynamics at play. Tunde, an older adult man, holds more physical and therefore social power and status over Enuma. He can be dominant and more aggressive in his intentions towards her. He attempts to flirtingly tease Enuma and treat her as a serving girl, which further marks her as his inferior who must obey his commands: "'Hey,' he says, in a mock-lordly tone. 'Hey, servant girl, bring me that Coke.' She turns and smiles with wide, limpid eyes. She looks to one side and then the other, and points a finger at her chest as if to say, Who? Me? God, but he wants her. He doesn't know exactly what to do" (13). Part of Enuma's appeal to Tunde is her inferiority that is translated from her body. Her eyes are wide and limpid as she assumes a submissive position which increases Tunde's desire. Part of her sexual appeal is that he believes himself, albeit mockingly, her lord and she a mere serving girl who must acquiesce to his requests.

This seduction scene initially plays as an awkward adolescent sexual encounter steeped in misogyny as Tunde further attempts to submit Enuma to his will. She drinks a Coke, and he flirts with her saying "'You know such things are not for the likes of you.' She clutches the

Coke to her midriff. It must be cold there against her skin. She says, demurely, 'I just want a little taste.' She bites her bottom lip. She must be doing it on purpose. Must be. He is excited" (14). His superiority is codified in her supposed unworthiness in drinking a Coke: an icon of international corporate capitalist power. This takes place prior to the Day of the Girls and the worldwide awakening of women's skein, so, as a woman, she cannot yet possess any icons of neoliberal power. Instead, her body acts as a representative of capitalist commodification: similar to Coke's motto being "Enjoy," so too, does Tunde interpret that he can enjoy Enuma's body. Although her body and her actions could be interpreted as innocuous, Tunde's interest and desire color his perspective to make him believe that she must be acting this way on purpose. Just like in a commercial for Coke that incites desire for the ice-cold beverage dripping with condensation, her skin, her body and its sense of cold and taste, and her lips and mouth, are all triggers and excuses to sustain Tunde's arousal and superiority.[36]

They playfully tussle over the can of Coke as if they were wrestling for control over her body, and "He pushes her arm back a little more, making her gasp and twist backwards" (14) as he exerts his corporeal dominance over her. The Coke can here symbolize their struggle for economic and social superiority—in fact, it can represent insertion and control over the neoliberal market—as he physically manipulates and hurts her. As Tunde furthers the physical contact with Enuma, she uses her power on him: "At first it is pinpricks in his hand and forearm, then a swarm of buzzing prickles, then it is pain. He is breathing too quickly to be able to make a sound. He cannot move his left arm. His heart is loud in his ears. His chest is tight" (15). In his initial encounter with the power, Alderman also enumerates the sensations throughout Tunde's body as a recipient of electrical shock. However, as a passive object or victim of this

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[36] In addition to its history of using women's bodies to sell their products, see also Coca Cola's 2016 "Taste the Feeling" campaign for examples of twenty-first-century imagery published the same year as the novel. See: https://www.coca-cola.ie/marketing/campaigns/iconic/taste-the-feeling and https://www.wallstwatchdog.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/coca-cola-taste-the-feeling-2.jpg

power, instead of the agent, he is powerless and immobile. The pain he feels is unproductive towards his optimization as his body begins seizing.

While using her power on him, Enuma laughs and kisses him without his consent and renders him completely immobile: "He is afraid. He is excited. He realizes that he could not stop her, whatever she wanted to do now. The thought is terrifying. The thought is electrifying. He is achingly hard now, and does not know when that happened" (15). This sudden lack of corporeal strength and superiority in the face of the perceived "weaker" sex leaves Tunde at odds with himself. He is terrified by this shift in social identity, but also intrigued and seduced by this new status he has unlocked. In a fetishistic way, he likes being at her mercy. Alderman infuses this scene with an ambiguity in both Tunde's emotional and physical reaction. He is terrified and seduced; he loses bodily autonomy as he unwittingly has an erection due to his desire for Enuma but also because the electrical current forces this type of corporeal reaction. This is the first instance of nonconsensual sex within the novel, and the fact that it is enacted by a female aggressor indicates the shift in social identities from victims to abusers or oppressors.

Tunde's first sexual encounter, thus, leaves him conflicted. He is a victim of sexual assault who was also attracted by his own vulnerability in the moment, as he suddenly underwent a reversal of roles. He was penetrated by electricity instead of being the penetrator. Tunde attempted to commence the encounter but was rendered immobile and had the kiss initiated without his express consent:

> There is a shame like rust working its way through his body. He thinks over that afternoon compulsively. In bed at night: her lips, her breasts pressing against the smooth fabric, the outline of her nipples, his absolute vulnerability, the feeling that she could overpower him if she wanted. The thought of it excites him, and he touches himself. He tells himself he is excited by the memory of her body, the smell of her like hibiscus flowers, but he cannot know for certain. The things are tangled together now in his mind: lust and power, desire and fear. (16)

Her body is still a place of desire for him as he remembers and imagines its curves and parts. She is deeply material, an embodied identity, profoundly connected to nature in her smell of flowers. However, as he fantasizes about Enuma, he cannot disconnect feelings of vulnerability which will forever interplay with any future sexual interaction. His lust is connected now to women's power over him, which he desires but also fears. Thus, this reversal of physical and (hetero)sexual power where the male body is controlled by the woman's will seeks to invert traditional social conditioning that requires women's submission. These sexual dynamics are not erased by the inversion as they continue within a paradigm of masculinist power relations that requires an objectified body that must be used, regardless of consent, for the subject's pleasure.

Although the initial awakening of her skein is almost insignificant, Allie practices and hones her skill to prepare for the right moment to unleash the full explosion of her power. Allie's foster father, Mr. Montgomery-Taylor, beats and sexually assaults her on a regular basis in his attempts to control and dominate her. To avoid further harm, Allie "doesn't roll into a ball. She doesn't beg him to stop. She knows it only makes it go on longer. He pushes her knees apart. His hand is at his belt. He's going to show her what kind of a little whore she is" (33). Allie must allow her body to become completely objectified and dissociate so as not to feel more pain. She must also disconnect from the embodied identity of "little whore" forced upon her by those in power. As a means of dissociation from her physical surroundings, the voice in Allie's head acts as a psychological confidante and protector.

On the night of the "Day of the Girls" revolution, in which many women suddenly revolt and reveal their power to the masses, Allie partakes in this collective movement when she is told by the voice to kill her foster father and escape. When she begins to brace herself for the attack, there is an overpowering smell of rain that infuses the room, which evokes notions of nature and cleansing. Once again, like with Margot, the allusion to rain foreshadows Allie's

desire to imitate the parable of Noah's ark with an Armageddon situation that will eliminate all counter-identifying social identities. Another excerpt from the Book of Eve also follows this phrase: "She maketh a channel for the thunderbolt and setteth a path for the storm" (34). With this, one can understand that Allie will act as a guide and set a path for women's empowerment and domination. Hers is not a flash of lightning but the power of a thunderbolt that allows for great destructive storms. With her power and body, she retakes her agency and achieves revenge. As Allie escapes, she knows that she doesn't need a weapon to protect herself. She remembers "and the thought makes her laugh – that aside from cutting her dinner she really has no need for a knife, no need at all" (35). This notion is freeing and emancipatory. Her body is her weapon, and, as a young girl, this is finally enough to gain power, social identity, and defend herself.

Where at first women used the power in self-defense, their morality becomes warped with their newfound liberation and physical dominance. Thus, they begin to mimic the formerly superior group (i.e., men) and adopt masculinist notions of desire and self-satisfaction. Alderman depicts scenes of female sexual violence against men to elucidate the ways in which their social identities begin to adopt gender traits of violence, domination, competitiveness, and aggression. One such example occurs with Tunde while reporting on riots in Delhi. He is assaulted and electrified by a seemingly mentally unstable woman: "There are scribbles of pain drawing a tree across his side, it's hard to breathe. He's on his hands and knees […] It's going to be fine. He's going to get away" (151). The pain is inscribing itself onto his body as it is transformed into a tree: a symbol of female strength. He is rendered completely immobile, his body betraying him. However, Tunde believes himself, a lone man, capable of stopping a deranged powerful woman, because he still presumes his retention of some semblance of social dominance and control. As such, he tries to dissuade her by telling her he will not hurt her. It seems bizarre for a victim of assault to be telling their attacker this, especially someone who is

clearly more powerful. Tunde has not yet understood his shift in social identity and his new position in the social hierarchy.

As she inscribes her power onto his body, the symbol of her strength is also written on hers: "He can see her skein twitching at her collarbone, a living worm" (152). This living worm, or tumor, is reactive and productive. And he fully realizes he is completely helpless and powerless. She jolts him and he has a vision of his childhood with his mother and calls out to her. She tells him: "This thing hurts more than it should because it short-circuits your brain. You are confused. You are not at home. Your mother will not come" (153). He is now a child calling for his mother in the face of danger, because as a woman, she can now protect him.

This deranged woman is attempting to rape him, and Tunde is distinctly aware of physical form: of how his "back is scraping on the gravel; he can feel the edge of a wet concrete block in the small of his back, rubbing him raw" through the pain of his body. He comprehends his vulnerability and knows that "if I fight her off too hard she'll knock me unconscious, and then she can do whatever she wants" (153). This scene is reminiscent of the experiences of most sexual assault survivors. Tunde's body is immobile, yet he feels everything as his nerve endings are stimulated and his surroundings and experiences slowly rub him raw. He realizes that he is utterly powerless and fears a loss of consciousness as the ultimate submission and lack of control or autonomy. Fortunately, he is saved by three women before he is raped. This experience signals men now depending on women for protection. No longer privileged allies or guardians, their bodies have rendered them weaker, more submissive social identities.

Tunde's experience was with a deranged woman, but as the novel progresses and women's corporeal strength allows them to achieve dominance, they become increasingly violent in sex, regardless of mental illness. Initially, this was done as a retaliation for centuries of misogyny and sexual abuse. This is case with Roxy's employees who were trafficked in Moldova: "She saw what one of them had done to the three men who'd taken turns with her.

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Down there it was just burned flesh, fern patterns on the thighs, pink and brown and raw red and black" (217). Roxy's brother, Ricky, is another example of female sexual assault against men. He was raped for fun as a gang of women disfigured him and burned his genitals: a corporeal inscription symbolizing the absence of power and weakness of the phallus. However, Ricky was never a sexual predator, only a victim.

Ricky describes his ordeal, and attempts to avoid victim-blaming by continuously insisting on how

> he didn't want it. They took their turns on him. They were just trying to hurt him […] Ricky kept very still until it was over, and didn't say nothing and didn't do nothing. Just waited for it to be done. Roxy knows why they haven't called Bernie home. He'd hate Ricky for this, even if he tried not to. This is not what happens to a man. Except now it is. (218)

This attack is not for personal revenge or self-defense; it is a sadistic assault that these women committed for fun and to prove their strength. The acceptance of masculinist values has led to such violence and oppression, as the weaker sex must remain silent and submissive in fear of further pain. Ricky and Roxy's father, raised in a traditional patriarchal society, would not understand this situation. When Alderman states, "this is not what happens to a *man*," the connotation is not that this is not what happens universally or that this should not happen at all, but instead, that this should only happen to women. However, with this change in social dynamics and identities, rape remains the status quo and it is simply inverted.

When Roxy seeks vengeance and retaliation against the perpetrators, they victim-blame Ricky stating that

> He was *asking* for it. He begged us for it. Fucking begged us, followed us, told us what he wanted done to him. Filthy little scrote, knew just what he was looking for, couldn't get enough of it, wanted us to hurt him, would have licked up my piss if I'd asked him, that's your fucking brother. Looks like butter wouldn't melt, but he's a dirty little boy. (220, emphasis in original)

They depict him as servile, begging for the pain and sexual experience. By referring to him as a "scrote," they use a metonymy to signal that his only value and social identity are through his

body, namely his genitalia, which mark him as Other. The fact that this derogatory term is also used to describe a "worthless or despicable person" (OED) further renders the phallus, and those who have them, as worthless, abhorrent, and weak. He is no longer a man, but a "dirty little boy" as Allie was once a "dirty little whore."

On a larger scale within the novel, sexual desire and violence also interconnect with religion. In a cultlike, primitive ritual in the Bessaparan forest, Tunde encounters a bacchanal scene in which women jolt men and partake in animalistic, frenzied sexual activities. The men in this scene fully submit to the new hierarchy and adopt their positions as the submissive and weaker sex. They seem to enjoy the pain of electricity and sexual objectification: "Four young men crawled on all fours in front of a woman in a scarlet robe. Her eye sockets were empty, red and raw. There was a grandeur to her step, a certainty in her blindness. The other women prostrated themselves, kneeling and full body, before her" (Alderman, *The Power* 302). This priestess figure's lack of eyes marks her as a victim of sex trafficking who was blinded by her traffickers so as to curb her power. Her physical suffering marks her as worthy of status and freedom: although she is red and raw, she is also described as grand and carrying her body with certainty. She commands respect through physical obeisance characterized by women kneeling and men entirely dehumanizing themselves by crawling on the floor so as to resemble animals or infants.

This is followed by a young man entering the forest grove: "He wore a crown of branches in his hair and a white cloth tied at his waist. His face was peaceful. He was the willing sacrifice that would atone for all the others" (302). The symbolic connection with Jesus Christ is evident. As Jesus Christ died to atone for the sins of all of humanity, so, symbolically, this young man's body functions as a vessel that carries all mankind's latest sins. Jesus's sacrifice was insufficient to atone for such grievance. But, unlike Jesus, this young man will not rise

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again from the dead. Thus, Christianity with Jesus as the figurehead is replaced by this updated version with a goddess, one in which women's bodies hold primacy.

The blind woman states: "You are weak and we are strong. You are the gift and we are the owners. You are the victim and we are the victors. You are the slave and we are the masters. You are the sacrifice and we are the recipients. You are the son and we are the Mother" (302). The slave and master terminology is reminiscent of Tunde's rhetoric when trying to seduce Enuma. By beginning this speech and establishing men's inferiority, women are owed such sexual gifts and sacrifices from such an object. The use of the singular "you" versus the plural "we" signals the massification of this movement. Within the We-I balance of social identity,

> the pressure exists to sacrifice our carefully cultivated individuation, involves what we can term identity transferral. Here we cede part of the individual 'I' to the group in return for being empowered by associating with the greater strength of the collective 'We'" and an enhanced identity which is stronger than the individual so that "our sense of individual power and self-worth are increased by identifying with the strength of the mass of other equal members of the group. (Claeys, *Dystopia: A Natural History* 44)

Thus, women's bodies are all connected to form the group and further support their superior group-based hierarchy. Through her speech, the priestess encompasses all women, a symbolic idol. Her social identity and power are such that Tunde "longed to kneel at her feet, his face buried in the wet soil. He wanted the fight over, he wanted to know who won even at his own cost, he wanted the final scene. […] And when she killed him, it was ecstasy" (Alderman, *The Power* 303). This marks men's weariness and debilitated state. Tunde understands that women have won, they are the "victors." With this knowledge, he wishes the fighting and battle to end. He accepts his social identity and submits to a power, which "embodies the urge towards self-oblivion in the *jouissance* of fusion with the Other" (Ross 228).

Throughout the novel, the awakening of the power within older women is a collective experience. Initially, young women's skeins start working naturally, but older women required the electrical touch of an already functioning skein to awaken their own. That is, younger women would use physical touch and their electrical power in a communal experience to

construct a larger collective of physically superior women: "Historically, the most potent symbol of the profane world is the human body. The body is dangerous and its secretions […] have to be enclosed by ritual and taboo to protect the social order. Yet, at the same time, the body is sacred. The charisma of holy individuals typically flows through their physical secretions" (Turner 75). In the case of *The Power*, the most prominent physical secretion is that of women's electricity or lightning. The novel presents this power as dichotomous: as will be seen in the upcoming section, it becomes sacred through the adoption and revision of Biblical texts and apocrypha because it empowers women, granting both protection and strength, but, since it belongs to the human body, it maintains connotations of the "profane world" because it is dangerous, since it can be used to harm and destroy others.

4.2 The Masculinist Matriarchy and Religious Fervor

In a scene in Riyadh, Tunde observes how his companion awakens the power in an elderly woman: "This is how it works. The younger women can wake it up in the older ones; but from now on all women will have it" (Alderman, *The Power* 65). And in this moment, the elderly woman begins to cry and ululate, her voice echoed by others as the women fill the streets with their voices as "the country – Tunde thinks – must be full of this joyful warning" (65). Tunde considers this a joyful warning to those that can harm them, as now there will be repercussions for damages against them since women can finally have individual and collective power. This moment of solidarity creates "a sense that this is an egalitarian and horizontal linkage between women. Once bestowed with the power, a woman then has the power to confer it to others" (Ross 208). This mutual empowerment can only be achieved through acceptance and group belonging.

The fact that younger women pass the power to older women creates a reversed filial relationship in that they are able to connect with each other because they share "the same genus,

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they have a shared, essential, aspect of identity" (208). However, the notion of reverse filiality foreshadows the dystopian elements of this novel. The natural order of progress and change is passed down from the older generations to the younger ones, but this is not the case in *The Power*. This biological power and consequent sense of ideological solidarity and sisterhood is unnatural, without roots in the experience, wisdom, and patience traditionally acknowledged of the older generations. To counteract this unnatural order, Mother Eve's religion justifies that "The young are close to God, they say, and young women, especially. Our Lady was only sixteen years old when she bore her sacrifice into the world" (Alderman, *The Power* 202). However, the acceptance of a generational reversal symbolizes the dissolution of change and equity. Instead of following the steps of true progress, this justification of reverse filiality not only signals the dystopian characteristics of the novel, but also cements them so that masculinism will continue and merely substitute or reverse the sex/gender binary to place women in the superior hierarchy.

> According to Fukuyama,
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> Human beings are intensely social creatures whose emotional inclinations drive them to want to conform to the norms surrounding them. When a stable, shared moral horizon disappears and is replaced by a cacophony of competing value systems, the vast majority of people do not rejoice at their newfound freedom of choice. Rather, they feel an intense insecurity and alienation because they do not know who their true self is. This crisis of identity leads in the opposite direction from expressive individualism, to the search for a common identity that will rebind the individual to a social group and reestablish a clear moral horizon. (56)

In *The Power*, these competing value systems that seek gender equality and parity are quickly subjugated by the dystopian masculinist matriarchal society so as to maintain itself. But the shift from male to female dominance creates a similar moment of crisis, which leads to a strong desire for common social identity and a rigid moral and ideological horizon.

As previously mentioned, the neoliberal dystopian society in the novel is mainly defined by masculinist ideology sustained by a Judeo-Christian religious movement. Turner considers Christianity a "'Patriarchal religion'" responsible "for the socialization of women into

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subservient and submissive role" and links such paternalistic and patriarchal systems of belief to "particular economic requirements" (104) that demand both domestic and public labor. Since dystopian society commonly suppresses individuality as it can result in "counter-identification," religion is an appropriate ideological tool considering that "a psychological fundamental of religion" is "the elimination of the self, the denial of individuality" (Evans-Pritchard 64). Thus, religion within *The Power* is utilized to deny dissent and support a new misandrist socialization of men as subservient.

4.2.1 Group Belonging or Sisterhood

The initial members of Allie's updated misandrist religion were young women who escaped or were rejected by their households and sought refuge within a Catholic convent: "Girls thrown out on to the street – the nuns will take them in. […] Some of the girls were prayed over by parents who thought a demon had possessed them. Some fought with other girls; some are still fighting here" (Alderman, *The Power* 44). Allie learns from the women in the convent. She manipulates paternalistic Christianity that linked female empowerment with demonic possession into a new ideology that adapted female fighting into collective action against the enemy Other.

Within this context, Allie is given the opportunity to erase her past and adopt a social identity more aligned with what is glorified within this budding misandrist ideology and religion: "She calls herself Eve and the voice says: Good choice, the first of women; excellent choice" (45).[37] The patriarchal doctrine in Christianity was first promoted by Pauline theology within the New Testament in establishing that women must keep silent and remain obedient to

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[37] As the novel progresses, Allie is known as Allie, Eve, and Mother Eve. For purposes of clarity, this dissertation will only refer to her as Allie, unless directly quoting from the novel or other material.

men. And a "justification for [Paul's] negative view of women was derived from the Adamic myth in which the origin 'of all our woe' was located in the disobedience of Eve" (Turner 108). Hence, the name Eve is of particular importance. By claiming this name, Allie begins to subvert the misogynistic doctrine of the Church and replaces it with an inverted ideology. As Eve, Allie is almost divided in two: "Eve has made friends in a way Allie has always found difficult. Eve is kind and quiet and watchful, where Allie was spiky and complicated" (Alderman, *The Power* 47). This resembles the dichotomy of female personality in Christianity, that splits women "into diametrically opposed halves – either the harlot or the pure mother" (Turner 109). As Allie, she was labeled a "filthy little whore," but as Eve, she becomes an asexual, divine healer and prophetess.

Allie does not erase Christian doctrine but instead reconstructs it. As Eve, she will be the first of women in this new age. She will be a model for other women. Through her name and its evolving religious and ideological connotations, her social identity will also be associated with more status and power as, like the reconstructed biblical Eve, she will change from social outcast to supreme leader and religious figurehead. In most messianic religions, "sin is brought into the world by women" as Eve "deceives the man, thereby condemning all mankind" (Gilmore 79). Hence, although Allie attempts to elevate the figure of Eve, she affirms her destructive power and eventually fully embodies this figure when she provokes the Cataclysm, and thus remains the origin of "all *men's* woe." By continuing to embody and adopt the persona of Eve, Allie promotes the rigid social identity expounded by the masculinist matriarchal dystopia that values strength, aggression, and destruction.

Throughout the novel, one can encounter notions of the chosen family as a site for belonging and acquisition of social identity. Religion influences social identity "both physically and emotionally by defining the group by the unity of transcendental experience. This appears to validate the belief system and produces intense feelings of brotherhood" (Claeys, *Dystopia:*

A Natural History 52). The unity of the women initially offers moments of protection and comfort. Characters can commit to and trust each other and create solidarity in their ostracized experiences and future cause.

Roxy identifies this sisterhood and the consequent feelings of sorority shared by the female believers in the convent while she partakes of a transcendental experience similar to worship and bible study. She gets emotional when she envisions being accepted in the community: "Roxy has a feeling she can't quite name, can't really place. It makes her a little bit soft inside, a bit teary" (Alderman, *The Power* 115). To sustain these notions of solidarity, Allie, after supper, shares a parable from the Book of Ruth which she describes as "the most beautiful story of friendship in the whole of the Bible. No one was ever more faithful than Ruth, no one ever expressed the bonds of friendship better" (115). This bible study functions as a lesson in Scripture where the women congregate and study to find the passages in the Bible that align with their ideology and rewrite or reconstruct those that do not. Allie reads the biblical passage where Ruth tells her mother-in-law and friend "Don't tell me to leave you. Whither thou goest, I shall go. Your people shall be my people. Your God will be my God" (115). These relational ties of loyalty and solidarity are framed within religious discourse of family and companionship. As Mother Eve, Allie situates herself as the guiding mother or parental figure, while her followers are each other's sisters and of equal status together. She is instilling these notions in her listeners so that they not only feel a transcendental euphoria or ecstasy common to religious collectives, but also feelings of loyalty to her as their mother. They must follow Allie blindly and loyally, like Ruth, and accept her reconstruction of God as their own.

To further instill this sense of solidarity and group belonging or have an "us," her group must have an "other." In the study of Scripture, Allie creates this differentiation for the social group by othering all men: "'It's not for us to worry about the men,' she says. 'Let them please themselves, as they always have. If they want to war with each other and to wander, let them

go. We have each other. Where you go, I will go. Your people will be my people, my sisters'" (116). Although this scene is initially of comfort and sisterhood, upon a closer reading, the elements of dystopia appear. She establishes an oppositional dichotomy with men, not only repudiating their group but also associating notions of war and violence with them. Allie, thereby, assigns their social identities as violent Others who may seek to separate and hurt women, who, as a result, must be loyal, like Ruth, and follow Allie as her people.

Allie initially would like to stay in the convent forever, but, in her experience, belonging is conditional: "This is always the answer. They never want you to stay forever. They always say they love you, but they never want you to stay. […] If you want to stay, you'll have to make this place your own" (46). So, in order to stay and feel safe, she must own the place and create a collective religion to cement her power within ideology. Belonging and acceptance require collective objectives and interests through group cooperation and collaboration, allowing the individual to identify with the group: "Projects and commitments may involve collective intentions, as with a religious ritual that requires the coordinated involvement of one's fellow worshipers for its realization. A social project may involve the creation or re-creation of an identity" (Appiah, *The Ethics of Identity* 25).

Thus, the first project within Allie's religious ideology attempts to revise religious and spiritual texts by placing women as central figures within Christian mythology and creating an authoritative discourse, thereby acquiring more collective importance as women and as members of this religion as a result. When discussing the assimilation of authoritative discourse, Bakhtin attributes it a significant role in one's ideological becoming since such persuasive and authoritative discourse or rhetoric "strives rather to determine the very basis of our behavior" (Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination* 342). Thus, Allie's religious lectures and expositions influence both individual and group behavior that eventually becomes assimilated as unquestionable and normative ideological.

Allie begins one of her speeches to the masses by alluding to the female God's mercy and power: "They have said to you that man rules over woman as Jesus rules over the Church. But I say unto you that woman rules over man as Mary guided her infant son, with kindness and with love" (Alderman, *The Power* 92). Allie immediately twists traditional Christian paternalism regarding the submission of women before men by placing the figure of Mary above Jesus and the Church. Because "the one who creates is greater than the thing created" (89). As a loving and kind mother, Mary has created Jesus and thus is greater and responsible for the Christian tradition as a whole: "They have said to you that his death wiped away sin. But I say unto you that no one's sin is wiped away but that they join in the great work of making justice in the world. Much injustice has been done, and it is the will of the Almighty that we gather together to put it right" (92). In this excerpt, Allie refutes the entire doctrine of Christianity and the New Testament by disregarding Jesus Christ's sacrifice and consequent erasure of sin. In doing so, she not only diminishes his power as a man, but also invokes the need for a new figure to lead, cure the sick, make miracles, and act in this way. Ultimately, it seems that she is creating a space so she can substitute Jesus.[38]

Allie is not truly subverting and reclaiming Mary as a maternal figure: "she is not liberating women, but encapsulating them in a new theogony as repressive as the patriarchal one," rewriting scriptures to uphold their ideological requirements, which eventually "radicalises into a means of rage and revenge" (Yebra 75). She erases Jesus' acts of salvation and the cleansing of sin, which requires believers to understand a need for "justice in the world" that was not solved by Jesus Christ's crucifixion. Those who believe, but do not correct injustices, will not have their sins absolved or be accepted by God in the afterlife. By gathering together and being interpellated or called upon as collective subjects by the Almighty, the

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[38] This is later corroborated in the end of the novel in the epistolary fragments when Naomi references Mother Eve and biblical scripture. See page 375.

speech is cementing a group identity while highlighting the many injustices committed by the enemy Other, i.e., men, against whom they must fight.

Allie makes the redundancy and exclusion of men clear when she states that "They have said to you that man and woman should live together as husband and wife. But I say unto you that it is more blessed for women to live together, to help one another, to band together and be a comfort one to the next" (Alderman, *The Power* 92). Allie's exclusionary tactics are based on the principles of sisterhood and solidarity explored in the previous section. Their demand to "band together" makes evident that the nuclear family with a male figurehead is a danger to women's comfort and must become obsolete: "Choosing or being chosen to belong to a group— or not to belong—starts a process. It is not just that love and resistance are met with acceptance or rejection. Acceptance and rejection themselves provoke love and resistance. Acceptance in a group strengthens the bonds" (Griffiths 88). Members of Allie's church must work to maintain group membership via loyalty and love. On the contrary, the enemy Other, or man, that resists the new teachings and his new subservient place in the world is met with rejection that causes further resistance.

She goes on to say, "They have said to you that you must be contented with your lot, but I say unto you that there will be a land for us, a new country. There will be a place that God will show us where we will build a new nation, mighty and free'" (Alderman, *The Power* 93). With this final statement, Allie refers to the nation of Bessapara that seceded from Moldova after a revolution by the women who were trafficked as sex slaves in the country and a coup by the former leader's wife who killed him with her power and took control of the government. She imbues this misandrist undemocratic country with hope and divine providence, thus mixing religious and political ideology to further her "social project."

Allie's teachings are initially met with hostility, and the convent is raided by the police. However, she is forewarned about this scheduled attack, and Allie and her followers are able to

trap the male forces and broadcast their superior power to the world. In her streamed speech after her victory, Allie announces that God has changed in accordance with the rise of female power. Now, humanity must be influenced by women in religious mythologies: "Jews: look to Miriam, not Moses, for what you can learn from her. Muslims: look to Fatimah, not Muhammad. Buddhists: remember Tara, the mother of liberation. Christians: pray to Mary for your salvation" (127). As Appiah states, "it is through our identifications that we recognize our models" (*The Lies That Bind* 22). Thus, Allie encourages humanity, especially women, to identify with female leaders and prophets who should act as humanity's models.

> She follows this notion by remarking on former religious teachings,
>
> You have been taught that you are unclean, that you are not holy, that your body is impure and could never harbour the divine. You have been taught to despise everything you are and to long only to be a man. But you have been taught *lies*. God lies within you, God has returned to earth to teach you, in the form of this new power. (Alderman, *The Power* 127, emphasis in original)

In ecclesiastical Christian misogyny, women, and their bodies, are positioned as the traps set up by the devil for men; as "the unhappy source, evil root, and corrupt offshoot, who brings to birth every sort of outrage throughout the world" (cited in Gilmore 86). Allie subverts this notion by associating this electrical power with divinity. Women's bodies are now the locus in which God resides, as signified by the gift of this power. Their corporeal electricity is a celestial offshoot. The roots they create are not evil but powerful and natural. Ultimately, the mother figure Allie evokes does not birth outrage, as the traditional paternalistic Church suggests, but "harbors the divine." What is telling is that Eve does not simply eliminate already established theology and creates her own *de novo*, but instead utilizes the Gospels and the notion of God, heavily entrenched in ecclesiastical misogyny and shifts the focus onto the female characters. However, this does not rid such a system of discrimination and oppression, it simply reverses such misogyny to misandry. Allie's teachings remain as binary as the original ones. She does not deny the existence of evil or Satan. Thus, if women are no longer the unclean or unholy,

but instead the divine models with whom humanity must identify, then men must take the place they previously held and become the source of evil. Ultimately, Allie uplifts voices historically ignored or silenced, but in turn, silences and ignores those previously uplifted. She does not preach equity or parity, but a slight shift in the dystopian system.

4.2.2 Loss of Individuality Through Massification

Allie becomes a recruiter. Like Albert Gaines, she not only revises history to fit her ideological narrative of female supremacy and their injustice and persecution by men, but she also skillfully selects the inductees that would most easily accept her religious dogma. Her first act of establishing group membership and adherence to her belief system is through the rite of baptism, so that to be fully accepted as a member of Allie's church, her followers must be baptized. According to Claeys, "Religious groups exhibit the clearest forms of the ritualized expression of belonging through assertions of cleansing, sustenance, and the like. The muck of 'I' is cleansed by bathing in 'We'" (Claeys, *Dystopia: A Natural History* 52). The symbolism of baptism in the novel serves as a cleansing of previous individual identities and a rebirth with an exclusive and rigid social identity: female Holy Mother believer.

Through conversion, religious fundamentalists, in this case Evangelical Christians, are able to adopt a new identity that is "accessible to all members of the community, somehow detached from any particular individual, yet flexible enough to be mastered or appropriated by all of them" (Castillo Ayometzi 43). This allows those baptized into the Church "to be recognized as full members of this religious community" and thus acquire the supposedly "valuable and desirable identity of being 'Christians,' and therefore good people" as an alternative to their previous, undesirable identity (43). For the first baptism ritual and conversion to this updated Christianity, Allie selects the outcasts among the girls in the convent: "They were, if anything drew them together, the girls who had suffered the most, their stories

being particularly terrible, their knowledge of what one might fear from others and oneself particularly acute" (Alderman, *The Power* 88). Allie does not select the most outstanding or most physically or socially attractive, but instead singles out the most vulnerable. Those who, like Sarat and the homicide bombers in *American War*, are outcasts and have undergone some form of public humiliation and pain, therefore they yearn for belonging and group acceptance. The fact that they had suffered the most at the hands of men also makes them predisposed to desire revenge against them or "justice." She manipulates their fear of the Other and of an isolated self with no support of a loyal and comforting social group to gain her staunch following and provide them a privileged social identity.

When the girls wade into the ocean water, Allie asks the Holy Mother to baptize them. She is able to control bodies by manipulating their internal electric currents without their knowledge or consent. Using the baptismal water as a conduit, she utilizes her power and steers the girls' bodies so that "each of the girls around the circle suddenly feels their knees buckle under them. As if a great hand were pressing on their backs, pushing them down, ducking their heads into the ocean to rise up, water fountaining from their hair, gasping and knowing that God has touched them and that this day they are born anew" (87). They believe this presence to be a miracle. Allie is the only one who can communicate with the Holy Mother and transmit Her will. She seems to employ the *deus ex machina* device as an addition to her theatrics during the baptism: what the other women consider to be the deity acts to resolve their conflict and seemingly conclude their plight as outcasts and oppressed women through their baptism and allegiance to this new form of religion. The supposed presence of this divinity and its urge purify and christen them in the water functions as their salvation, which becomes a solution to their problems and grievances. The girls' contact with the divinity inspires them by making them feel powerful and special—the Chosen ones—and elevates Allie's social identity by cementing her as a practically omnipotent prophetess. They are, thus, cleansed and "born anew"

or indoctrinated into their new social identities and pass on their knowledge and devotion so others come to ask for teaching and inclusion.

This religious ideology spreads through the contrived use of "miracles" that influence the public to convert. Allie's performance of healing blessings, thus, not only influences the public to accept this new theology and become indoctrinated, but also functions as an interpellation of the subject that constructs social identities that further internalize theological, masculinist values. She conducts her first instance of miraculous restoration on a micro-scale among the girls and nuns in the convent. Allie stops another girl's seizures during an epileptic episode as she "puts her little finger in the notch at the base of the skull, reaches out with a fine tendril of power and *flicks* at it. Luanne opens her eyes. Her body stops convulsing all at once" (85, emphasis in original). In this instance, and the following miracles, Allie utilizes the constructed identity of Mother Eve as diligent, pure, and divine, as well as the religious ideology invoked in miracle-making and the power within her body schema, to cement her position within this dystopian society.

Integral to social identity, as previously stated, is the body and its sensory media since "sensory perception occurs in the world and constitutes this world for us" and so "our senses of touch, smell, hearing and taste [can] enable us to open ourselves" up to create or mold our environment (Shilling 55). Through her sixth sense, i.e., her electrical power which enables her to sense and control other bodies, Allie is able to create an environment conducive to the acceptance of her religious teachings, influenced by an ideology which constructs social identities within a masculinist matriarchal hierarchy. Followers "start to believe in her. That there is something within her" that marks her as a guide to be followed (Alderman, *The Power* 86). With her power, Allie becomes a healer and a saintlike figure within her cult. According to Weber, "all religions and religious ethics have had to reintroduce cults of saints, heroes or functional gods in order to accommodate themselves to the needs of the masses" (Weber 103).

The elimination of the primary position of Jesus from scripture and her restorative miracles enable Allie to become a saint, a hero, and a functional god.

Although female solidarity and sisterhood are initially portrayed sympathetically in the novel, as Allie's social power expands and her message spreads, massifying groups into crowds, the dystopian setting manages to distort the original message of righteousness and maintain its status quo. Claeys points out that "when groups reach a certain size our ability to function as individuals is increasingly constricted" (*Dystopia: A Natural History* 39). Thus, the dystopian impulse to sublimate individuality and promote a rigid social identity is present due to this massification and depersonalized crowd mentality.

Due to her expanding popularity and her status as an idol for the masses, Allie and her team begin to organize indoctrination and fundraising events masked as blessings and healing miracles. Alderman depicts one of these functions in which Allie is curing a paralyzed boy with a broken back. What the crowd does not know is that her team includes

> people who curate these events for her and make sure that the nerve damage isn't too severe for her to be able to do anything. [The young boy] had a friend from the same hospital; a nice kid, even more of a believer than Christian himself, but, unfortunately, the break was too profound for them to be sure she'd be able to cure it. Besides, he wasn't right for this televised segment. Acne. (Alderman, *The Power* 203)

This excerpt highlights the false, neoliberal manipulation behind these events. Allie is not a compassionate altruistic humanitarian, but a neoliberal masculinist matriarch who seduces the masses with the opium of religion to promote her cause and achieve superior social status. She manipulates the cultural connotations that exist between religious entities and "the care of the sick" which is considered "an act of charity *par excellence*" because "physical exposure to disease is indicative of heroic virtue" and since diseases are considered "the consequences of immorality," sickness and the ill can only be redeemed by "the institutionalized grace of the Church" (Turner 62). Allie becomes a hero by exposing herself to the illness of sinners who find grace, redemption, and compassion in her Church. However, corporate manipulation is

present in the team of headhunters used for such events and the candidates selected: youthful, aesthetically pleasing, and optimal people. Their bodies are objectified and commodified as products that inspire sympathy and mental and emotional affinity, because, if not for their illnesses, they would be the model of normality, physical desire, and efficient labor products. Thus, they are utilized to create the desired effect within the crowd once they are healed, normalized, and redeemed: mass hysteria and fanaticism that leads to heavy donations.

Allie guides the enormous crowd in evangelical chants to pray for the boy's healing as she speaks to the Holy Mother: "'But there's a great multitude praying for this humble and obedient young boy, Holy Mother.' […] The crowd is full of people rocking back and forth on their heels and weeping and muttering" (Alderman, *The Power* 204). The use of the terms "humble and obedient" is reminiscent of descriptions originally used for young girls. Her description of the young boy signals to the crowd that the Holy Mother will only help men who are "humble and obedient" to women. She manipulates the crowd's emotions into an extremely sensitive religious fervor: "as we all honour our own mothers and the sacred light inside every human heart, as we all worship You and adore You and love You and kneel before You. Holy Mother, please, take the force of our prayers. Please, Holy Mother, use me to show your glory and *heal this boy now*!" (204, emphasis in original). By phrasing her "petitions" for healing in this way, any curing of the young boy is attributed to the crowd. Their blind faith and loyalty allow them to believe that the force of their prayers can influence a divine miracle. They subject themselves to the Holy Mother's will, i.e., the neoliberal masculinist matriarchal dystopian ideology, and are consequently rewarded.

In this event, Allie promotes the Bessaparan government and nation, thereby utilizing religious ideology to influence and gain political power: "'Our Lady has told me that women are to gather together! And to perform great wonders! And to be a blessing and a consolation to each other! And' – she pauses after each word for emphasis – 'where have women gathered

together more than *here*?' Stamping, hollering, whoops of delight" (207, emphasis in original). The power of the masses has produced miracles and wonders, so women must continue to gather and become part of this rigid in-group or crowd. The crowd, as defined by Le Bon, "forms a single being, and is subjected to the law of the mental unity of crowds" (Le Bon 2). Le Bon identifies defining characteristics of crowds that lead to their manipulation, massification, and consequent lack of individuality: the individual's judgment is weakened by the collective mentality, which attributes to him "a sentiment of invincible power which allows him to yield to instincts which, had he been alone, he would perforce have kept under restraint" (6). These actions are spread via mental "contagion" so that, in "a crowd every sentiment and act is contagious, and contagious to such a degree that an individual readily sacrifices his personal interest to the collective interest" (7), or, one could say, sacrifice one's individuality to social or group identity. This sense of invincible power occurs through their belief in the powers of Allie's healing, as any injury can be treated if they are faithful and follow the Holy Mother's will. But to be bolstered by the divine, they must sacrifice their personal interests for the sake of the collective.

The cadence and measure of her speech is steady, with a hypnotic rhythm and pauses after each word to control and mesmerize the crowd. As this rhythm increases with the use of rhetorical devices such as exclamations, select word emphasis, and anaphora to highlight and solidify her beliefs, she slowly builds heightened affect and manipulates the crowd into religious fanaticism and ecstasy: "The crowd explodes in screams and cheers and stamping of feet. The men and women in the audience surge forward […] they're panting and sobbing, they're breathing in her breath, they want to eat her alive" as she announces that the Holy Mother or God(dess) has arrived "preaching compassion and hope, teaching vengeance against those who have wronged us and love for those who are close to us" (Alderman, *The Power* 207–08). She masters the crowd and manages to create a psychological and physiological

visceral reaction that overwhelms individual rational thinking. In order to achieve these manipulations and crowd mentality, their mood must be one of ecstasy or euphoria. And as Le Bon further posits,

> A person is not religious solely when he worships a divinity, but when he puts all the resources of his mind, the complete submission of his will, and the whole-souled ardour of fanaticism at the service of a cause or an individual who becomes the goal and guide of his thoughts and actions. Intolerance and fanaticism are the necessary accompaniments of the religious sentiment. (39)

The infusing of terms such as "vengeance" in her speech, allows Allie to sway the crowd to adopt her viewpoints and further fanaticize her followers. She plays on the mob's previous experiences of injustices, sins, and "gender-based victimhood" (Ross 224) to further substantiate their intolerance and ardor, which she manipulates to expound a need for revenge. Allie constructs a "politics of resentment" in which "a political leader has mobilized followers around the perception that the group's dignity had been affronted, disparaged, or otherwise disregarded" and seeks restitution for these perceived wrongs that "carries far more emotional weight than people simply pursuing their economic advantage" (Fukuyama 16). In the passage, Alderman seems to provide a reflection about group identity within the West, especially the U.S., as well as minority politics, predicated on the desire for revenge rather than equality. Allie does not seek parity or vindication, but more so vengeance. As such, this novel is simultaneously feminist and anti-feminist by serving as a criticism of certain feminist stances. Allie's misandry reflects Valerie Solanas' *S.C.U.M.: Society for Cutting Up Men Manifesto* (1967) that critiques the male sex and blames mankind for war, hate and violence, competition and socioeconomic classes, etc. Solanas concludes that it is an ethical imperative to eliminate all men and posits a utopia of female supremacy that eradicates disease, death, and capital.[39]

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[39] Because dystopian fiction functions as a commentary of real-world occurrences and policies, the politics of resentment in Alderman's novel reflect contemporary rhetoric in the West. A salient example can be encountered in the discourse of the Alt-Right and the Trump administration, which incite feelings of injustice and resentment of white, rural, lower and middle-class Americans against urban, educated BIPOC and minorities for the former's perceived erasure and suppression. See Katherine J. Cramer's *The Politics of Resentment: Rural Consciousness in Wisconsin and the Rise of Scott Walker* (2016) and Jeremy Engels' *The Politics of Resentment:*

Under the guise of religious doctrine, Allies attempts to unify women against their common enemy, "those who have wronged us," by creating a mass movement that becomes increasingly threatening and dystopian. The crowd becomes a mob that wishes to consume Allie's self or social identity as they "eat her alive." This creates a sense of depersonalization within the collective, as women become "an inexorable, homogenous and ultimately monstrous mass" (Ross 221) that submit themselves to the will of their divine leader.

Throughout the world, but especially in Bessapara, women become fixated on revenge against men. The crowd mentality exemplified in this passage creates a mental contagion that feeds on sentiments of intolerance, vengeance, and resentment. Allie manages to weaken the judgment of those women already intoxicated by their newfound power, which creates a further sense of invincibility. Women lose their individuality, sacrificing themselves to a fanatic, religious group identity. Through their loss of individuality and feeling of invincibility, women begin to consider men redundant and unnecessary. They construct a stereotyped social identity for men as "less intelligent, less diligent, less hard-working, their brains are in their muscles and their pricks. Men are more likely to suffer from diseases and they are a drain on the resources of the country" (Alderman, *The Power* 312–13). Because they are a drain on the country's resources, they are not even valuable as labor power in material production. The belief in their invincibility causes women to deem themselves fully capable to strike on their own and do without most men. They need only keep "Good, clean, obedient men" (313), who have a place in society as reproductive and domestic labor: the only role available to them within the neoliberal dystopia.

A Genealogy (2015) for more examples of violent and hateful rhetoric used to dominate political discourse in the U.S.

4.3 The Corruption of (The) Power

4.3.1 Social Power and Institutional Leadership

According to Appiah, "not only does your identity give *you* reasons to do things, it can give others reasons to do things *to* you […] the most significant things people do with identities is use them as the basis of hierarchies of status and respect and of structures of power" (*The Lies That Bind* 19, emphasis in original). Thus, in the novel, social identities limited by the rigid gender-sex system inform the structures of power according to the authority given to the dominant in-group identity. Both social and individual power are analyzed in this section to understand the ways they function within the dystopian society of *The Power* to construct social identities. MacKinnon explicitly links gender and power because "Gender is an inequality of power, a social status based on who is permitted to do what to whom" (MacKinnon 8). And in *The Power* women want to shift this inequality of power and be the active agents with a license to inflict violence on men. They wish to influence and invert these hierarchies of status and respect.

The dystopian society in *The Power* depicts the ways in which female characters seek and fight for power while remaining within a masculinist paradigm and striving for misandrist objectives and rewards. Because the novel depicts a dystopian society, there is no general desire to counter-identify or eliminate the power structures already established; women are not inherently better or, if given the chance, would not seek authority instead of equality or parity. They continue to identify with a system that upholds hierarchy-enhancing forces and oppositional confrontation. Alderman seeks to depict Jessa Crispin's notion that once women gain "access to power, we will not see a more egalitarian world, but the same world, just with more women in it" (Crispin 37). Following an Actonion view of power, Crispin states that authority warps and distorts egalitarian causes. By setting the novel in a dystopian reality,

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Alderman is able to portray the mechanisms of ideological identification and the ways Crispin's notions may ring true for some of the female characters. However, of note, characters like Margot or Allie do not initially promote egalitarian causes or express any interest in an egalitarian world. Instead, they gain power and leadership positions out of self-interest: the former seeks financial gain whereas the latter desires the safety that power provides. They never seek social justice, but instead embrace a system that "more easily gives access to power" and so they "will necessarily be part of this system of power and oppression" as "active participants" because they benefit from it (Crispin 37). Margot and Allie operate within the masculinist power structure, constructing social identities that identify with this neoliberal dystopia. Alderman's depiction of characters such as Tunde and Roxy provide an egalitarian perspective since they are the ones that defend the cause. However, the dystopian society does not permit such a counter-identification, and so their attempts at equality fail.

The factors that determine success are entrenched in traditionally masculinist values. Although both characters initially begin their journey as victims of patriarchy attempting to dismantle such oppression, they reach masculinist matriarchal power and authority and are resistant to dismantling the dystopian system as this would require them to relinquish their dominion in favor of a non-dystopian society. As Crispin concludes, "women in positions of power are much less likely to attempt to dismantle this system of inequality. Power feels good. Capitalism feels good" (37). As a dystopian novel, *The Power* is not an anti-feminist novel; it acts as a warning to readers by portraying the ways in which the feminist, egalitarian movement can be coopted by leaders with self-interested, neoliberal objectives of socioeconomic profit, and so distort the feminist message and ideals.

The depiction of neoliberalism within the novel—and its relation to power—stems from the notion that neoliberal rationality is the current dominant "mode of governmentality," which expands into all spheres of society—i.e. economic, social, and institutional spheres, especially

(Brown 43). Neoliberalism, through this mode of governmentality, "produces subjects, forms of citizenship and behavior, and a new organization of the social" (37). If this neoliberal governmentality is affixed to a rigid social identity based on gender and masculinism, such characteristics would influence the construction of "individuals as entrepreneurial and capital-enhancing actors" (Rottenberg 57) that would divide humanity between "the worthy capital-enhancing" powerful masculinist subject and the unworthy feminine Other, who would be designated to perform "reproductive and care work" (20). without contributing to production and the workforce.

Roxy becomes such a "capital-enhancing actor" as she takes over the family business within organized crime and begins to sell a power-amplifying drug for women called Glitter. Not only does Glitter produce a slight high, but it increases and prolongs women's abilities to use their electrical energy, making them more efficient soldiers and workers. As Roxy counts her money, she understands its influence, as "her decisions turn into maths turn into power" (Alderman, *The Power* 177). Money, symbolizing the resulting control over the means of production within capitalist society, is described in the novel as magical because it can be transformed into anything: "Turn drugs into influence with Tatiana Moskalev, President of Bessapara. Turn your ability to bring pain and fear into a factory where the authorities will turn a blind eye to whatever you're cooking up there" (178). Despite the drug trade being an illegal activity, it is defended and promoted within the dystopian society because it contributes to the ideal neoliberal unregulated market and growth of capital by optimizing female power and enhancing production. In fact, Roxy's company's economic power extends into legitimate social institutions such as the Bessaparan state and the privatized NorthStar army which seek to inflate economic yields.

This inversion of social expectations through the appropriation of masculinist power is first institutionalized through aesthetic and cultural shifts: "Boys dressing as girls to seem more

powerful. Girls dressing as boys to shake off the meaning of the power, or to leap on the unsuspecting, wolf in sheep's clothing" (77). Power is first consumed through gendered aesthetics. As women become "wolves," girls' clothing loses its inferior status by gaining performative power and symbolism. For example, because skirts or the color pink, customarily conceived as feminine, do not truly render someone weak or denote inferiority, in the novel, women simply attribute masculine values and powerful connotations to these garments instead of discarding or repudiating them. This proves that apparel and aesthetics are abstract, empty vessels that can be attributed values according to the dominant ideology. In this case, women's clothes begin to adopt connotations of strength and power because they are linked to those who have attained such qualities. The attempt to emulate girls' aesthetics indicates their consequent social power, and the manipulation of fashion and styles shows how their authority and command has infiltrated cultural consciousness

While these cultural shifts occur to reflect the inversion of gender status and hierarchy, institutional power attempts "to keep everything *normal*, to keep people feeling safe and going to their jobs and spending their dollars on weekend recreational activities" (77, emphasis in original). This excerpt highlights how the inversion of gender hierarchy does not truly dismantle or affect neoliberal dystopian power. This change is superficial, and masculinist and neoliberal principles are still maintained by valuing strength and the free market, where people continue to spend their dollars and contribute to consumerism.

As women's power strengthens, and they further expound masculinist matriarchal values, the relational dynamics as victims/oppressors between men and women also begins to shift in business and commerce. Women begin to take control of the means of production and make men's labor power and market access condition to their approval. For example, when Tunde travels to Riyadh as a journalist to document a riot, he needs to be promoted to gain access to this form of labor. The women in the riots recognize him as the press, but do not want

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a man to march with them unless he publicly removes his clothes to prove he is not carrying any weapons. This act not only limits Tunde's access to the labor market by denying him an opportunity to be productive, but it also creates a sexually exploitative experience that leaves Tunde publicly vulnerable and denigrated: "Any one of them could kill him with a single blow. In for a penny. He undoes his jeans. Slips them down. There's a little intake of breath around the crowd of women" as they smile and lick their lips (63). In this moment, Tunde is aware of his sexual and physical vulnerability. He could be killed at any moment for simply wanting to work. After stripping, Tunde is granted access to covering the riots as a journalist. He is introduced to a leader named Noor, whose name she says "'means the light. We are the ones who bring the light'" (62). In her description of her name, Noor transforms from a singular to a plural identity. Her individual name means light, but they ("We") are the bringers of light and justice. Ironically, the act that she demands of Tunde in order to participate in labor power and have access to and control over the means of production is quite dark and unjust. This excerpt makes evident that women are starting to have power over bodies but also over institutions and the media, and, most importantly in a neoliberal dystopia, the market.

Power in *American War* is mostly portrayed as an invisible force whereas in *The Power*, it is depicted as both physical, inscribed upon bodies and drawn in iconographies, and social, represented by the Allie's control over the masses or, as will be later discussed through the ratification of laws and public policies. A passage in the initial epigraph from the fictional Book of Eve states that it is connected to natural forces by depicting it as shaped like a tree:

> Root to tip, central trunk branching and re-branching, spreading wider in ever-thinner, searching fingers. The shape of power is the outline of a living thing straining outward, sending its fine tendrils a little further, and a little further yet. (3)

Power always seeks to expand its reach and further establish itself. It is constantly spreading itself out and "straining outward" to increase its influence on the natural world and on humanity. As power expands, it is depicted as aquatic by taking "the shape of rivers leading to the ocean—

the trickles to rivulets, the rivulets to streams, the streams to torrents, the great power gathering and gushing, becoming mightier to hurl itself into the great marine might" that also grows within humans (3). By growing and gaining more adherents, power becomes mightier. Whereas one can control trickles, rivulets and streams, gushing torrents of momentum and expansion prove too powerful. This natural potential to become part of a broader collective and gain the mighty power of the masses is inherent within all of humanity. As previously mentioned, women are historically connected to nature and ecological symbolism. Thus, by depicting social power using organic metaphors, Alderman further establishes that the power being expanded and adopted within the novel is connected to women but is also masculine, dominant, and "mighty." Hence, the evocation of an environmental, raw, material structure of human power is coded in an essentialist biological gender binary.

This passage makes a direct reference to the expansion of social power and authority as it travels between people, and individuals must submit to their leaders and the greater collective: "People form villages, villages become towns, towns bow the knee to cities and cities to states. Orders travel from the centre to the tips. Results travel from the tips to the centre" (3). The mighty group power expands to form the public to be ruled over and institutions to rule over the public. This excerpt examines the two ways in which human power can change: through institutional directives and through collective social influence:

> One is that an order might issue from the palace, a command unto the people saying "It is thus." But the other, the more certain, the more inevitable, is that those thousand thousand points of light should each send a new message. When the people change, the palace cannot hold. (4)

Of note is the use of the term "change" in this passage. This does not refer to a dismantling of the system and its power structures, but to a transformation, or in this case, an inversion. Although more credence is attributed to collective social power and unity of individuals, in the

narrative, massification is simply a tool of institutional power.[40] Allie and Margot, who both seek change as inversion, give commands from the palace and enact true power in this way by maintaining the dystopian status quo. As cities must bow to states, so do the masses bow to institutional neoliberal power. In the face of the "thousand thousand lights," the (power) structure of the palace remains, only its male occupants must escape.

This passage concludes with the phrase "She cuppeth the lightning in her hand. She commandeth it to strike" (4). As opposed to the "thousand lights," this reference is to an individual, which could be interpreted as a powerful *female* human or deity. As a biblical reference from the Book of Eve, this "She" could refer to the Holy Mother. However, this passage is utilized throughout the novel in reference to the female characters who are leaders and figureheads of institutional and corporate powers. The ambiguity of the pronominal reference hints at the fusion between religious ideology and capitalist sovereign power within the novel, or the instrumentalization of the former to maintain the latter. In this way, this hierarchical power resides in the political, institutional strength of a ruling elite over the collective it commands. The conclusion of this excerpt highlights the true influence of said powerful elite by citing the female "She" and, thus, signaling that power is not gender neutral but belongs only to women through the use of physical strength and violence in commanding the lightning to strike and submit the male masses.

An example of orders and the implementation of institutional masculinist matriarchal power is the passing of highly discriminatory laws in Bessapara. Men's social status and authority are incredibly diminished through executive state control. On a political and administrative level, men must be under complete control of their female guardians, who must give them permission to travel, work, and gather in groups:[41] "Men are no longer permitted to

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[40] See the notions of Le Bon's crowd and mass fervor in the previous section.
[41] As opposed to Allie's speech urging women to "gather together" and strengthen their faith in the Holy Mother by seeking justice and vengeance, men are prohibited from such collective solidarity and power.

own businesses. Foreign journalists and photographers must be employed by a woman," and they are "no longer permitted to vote—because their years of violence and degradation have shown that they are not fit to rule or govern" (273). Thus, the institutional power of the female ruling elite allows women to have absolute control over the market and means of production as well as public, state powers. Within this masculinist matriarchy, men are no longer deemed fit to maintain positions of social privilege.

Those women who attempt to ally and help men, i.e., those who counter-identify with the neoliberal dystopia, are punished:

> A woman who sees a man flouting one of these laws in public is not only permitted but required to discipline him immediately. Any woman who fails in this duty will be considered an enemy of the state, an accessory to the crime, one who attempts to undermine the peace and harmony of the nation. (273)

Power is not granted to all women, only those who accept and identify with the dystopian government. Rigid and disciplinarian laws are passed in order to maintain such identification. In reference to the violence and power of patriarchy, bell hooks states that "patriarchy demands of all males that they engage in acts of psychic self-mutilation, that they kill off the emotional parts of themselves. If an individual is not successful in emotionally crippling himself, he can count on patriarchal men to enact rituals of power that will assault his self-esteem" (65). Psychological self-mutilation, in the case of the masculinist matriarchy of the novel, involves the emotional crippling of compassion and equity. The women of Bessapara must enact administrative rituals of power such as the discipline and punishment of counter-identifying women who support men. Hegemonic masculinity can only remain powerful as long as it is continually reified. And, in *The Power*, this is achieved by oppressing counter-identifying women and men and foregoing love, sympathy, and collaboration in order to be in control and retain power.

As previously stated, not all women embrace masculinist matriarchal values. Roxy counter-identifies with this dystopian power structure and promotes equality between men and

women. She is aware that women's newfound power will change society, but she seeks collaborative efforts: "And we've all got to find some new way to work together on it. You know. Blokes have got a thing they can do: they're strong. Women have got a thing now, too. And there's still guns, they don't stop working. Lot of blokes with guns: I'm no match for them. I feel like … it's exciting, you know?" (Alderman, *The Power* 113). Roxy is excited at the possibilities of partnership as she recognizes that men and women's power and strength are comparable. She believes that both sexes are now on the same level and wishes to work in conjunction to dismantle the existing hierarchy and power structure. Allie's invocation of the term "new" regards a rewriting of history to place women at the forefront and so works within the same structural paradigm, whereas Roxy's use of the term "new" here truly connotes innovation and revolution. In contrast, Allie does not trust Roxy's family and advises her to surround herself with women: "'You can't trust them, though.' Roxy laughs. 'What, men? All men? Can't trust *any* of them?' Allie says, 'Be careful. Find women you trust to work with you'" (132, emphasis in original). Roxy's incredulity at the notion of disregarding all men in the world is rational. However, in this dystopian society entrenched in a fight for superiority within the gender-sex hierarchy, this is what the structural power promotes.

In order to feel safe, Allie must "own the place," which eventually means to "own the whole world" (133). Allie's social identity construction becomes political as her megalomania increases. She must be constructed as a political leader of the masses to acquire institutional power and thus have authority and control. According to Elcheroth and Reicher, "precisely because identities do produce social power, those who wish to wield such power (politicians, leaders and other activists) will actively seek to construct versions of identity that sustain their practical projects" (Elcheroth and Reicher 95). As Allie wishes to "own the world" for her own safety, she must adopt a masculinist matriarchal project and adapt her social identity to acquire power within this dystopian paradigm.

Collective or "shared identities brings masses of people together with a shared understanding of the world and a shared understanding of what is in their interests—in other words, identities create constituencies" and so mobilization and power over these constituencies depend on "the ability to define identities in ways that" promote a leader's political project while meshing with "the population's interest," allowing institutional figureheads to "act as an authoritative 'entrepreneur of identity'" (Elcheroth and Reicher 90). Thus, there is an almost cyclical nature to leaders' social identities: they are informed by society and their supporters or voters, but their identities also inform the social group identity through vertical vicarious enhancement. Followers "gain individual strength through identifying with the particularly heroic qualities of our leaders. Their valour, their passions, their strength, become ours" (Claeys, *Dystopia: A Natural History* 46). Allie's social identity is a reflection of and reflects upon this neoliberal masculinist matriarchal dystopia. She is a powerful figure because she also possesses traditionally masculine traits such as mental and physical strength and endurance as well as authority and leadership, just like her foster father, whose "particular kind of rage has always been very controlled, very quiet" (Alderman, *The Power* 32). She has control over others' bodies as she can penetrate and occupy them for benevolent and nefarious purposes with her powers.

In the epigraph of the novel, Alderman includes another biblical excerpt regarding the desire for a monarch or ruler: "The people came to Samuel and said: Place a King over us, to guide us" (i). Samuel contests that the King will act as a parasite, taking from the people their sons, daughters, labor power, and material means of production, to which "They said: No. Give us a King over us. So that we can be like all the other nations. Give us a King to guide us and lead us into battle" and the Lord granted them a King (i). Like the Israelites, the women in the novel desire a ruler to emulate previous power structures. They disregard the fact that they will lose autonomy and control of their own production by creating such an institutional power.

Alderman portrays this parasitic ruler in the figure of the traditional totalitarian leader, Tatiana Moskalev, the first president of Bessapara. Tatiana is initially presented as an ex-gymnast who was a victim of grooming and abuse, as she was seventeen when she first met her forty-two-year-old husband. She is also described as "gilded – bronze highlights in her hair, glitter on the curve of her cheeks" (104), emulating the traditional "trophy". But as women start to rise against their oppressors, Tatiana proves she is hungry for power. After the former president's sudden "heart attack," the "Supreme Court of the country unanimously votes in emergency session to appoint his wife, Tatiana, as interim leader," and she remains in this dictatorial position until her death (107).

Her hasty ascension marks the rapid and violent shift from male to female totalitarian institutional authority:

> Tatiana Moskalev brings her wealth and her connections, a little less than half her army, and many of her weapons to a castle in the hills on the borders of Moldova. And there she declares a new kingdom […] She calls the new country Bessapara, after the ancient people who lived there and interpreted the sacred sayings of the priestesses on the mountaintops. (108)

As she creates this new country, she simultaneously declares war on four others and on *man*kind. By combining her militarism with religious ideology and sacred folklore of the Goddess, Tatiana attempts to acquire political support and justify any horrific, criminal actions she will take against her enemies. What is supposed to be a utopian dream of female emancipation quickly proves a continuation of the oppressive dystopian nightmare and thus makes "clear how the transference of power operates within a closed system of abuses" (Miller 412). Tatiana becomes sadistic in her abuse, from punishing an individual man by forcing him to lick glass from the floor because he spoke without permission (Alderman, *The Power* 257) to legalized mass oppression of all men (272–73). With this, Alderman portrays how Tatiana's obsession with the domination and destruction of the male Other corrupts any utopian dream. In fact, the Bessaparan and international public's acceptance of such domination by a powerful

leadership speaks to dystopian society's distorted social conditioning that constructs these figures' identities as aspirational leaders and heroes instead of dictators or extremists.

As opposed to the traditionally dystopian figure of Tatiana, whose strength results in extreme sadism, Margot represents the neoliberal dystopian leader whose power is derived from, and applied to, the endorsement of capitalist economy. She creates the NorthStar camp, a public and private initiative, to train a community of powerful, optimal, efficient women as private military soldiers and so to control and profit from the defense and security market niche. Marrgot's objective is to acquire political and economic power. Through her public office, she can influence institutional power to benefit her private, mercantile interests.

To campaign for office and promote her corporate plan, Margot gives an interview in which she is "also looking good. Glossy, sleek hair. Subtle tones of cream and brown on her eyelids. Nothing too showy. She could be that lady on your block who takes great care of herself, swims and does yoga. Aspirational" (97). Margot utilizes the power of cultural aesthetics—her fitness, good looks, and corporeal optimization—to construct her social identity and elevate her position as leader and incite women's ambition and rapport. Instead of promoting abstinence like her predecessor, Margot wants to "really *help* these girls" (97, emphasis in original). She devises a three-point plan: "One: set up safe spaces for the girls to practice their power together […] Two: identify girls who have good control to help the younger ones learn to keep their power in check. Three: zero tolerance of usage outside these safe spaces" (97). Margot applies notions of altruism and communal aid to further her own political and economic ambitions. The practicing together creates an established in-group and following, while the teaching of "good control" instills the need for normalization and optimization so that these soldiers are efficient labor power and products. As she wants to have absolute control over her product, NorthStar will not tolerate usage outside their dominion and will be a monopoly.

This idea gains popularity because Margot is already a political leader, and her status as a powerful woman in control of authoritative discourse furthers her initiative. Girls "are *tearing* each other apart. They need someplace to go. They got to let off steam.' Before the week is over, Margot's received over one and a half million dollars in donations for her girls' camps" (100, emphasis in original). Margot identifies the dystopian need for controlled violence, and as a result, receives a large number of investors for her neoliberal scheme.

Just as she utilizes her public platform to gain support for her private interests, Margot also uses said private ventures to support her public ambitions. When questioned on her ties to private military corporations while running for governor, she explains that the public and private are working together in this neoliberal initiative: "NorthStar Systems are one of the most well-respected companies in the world. They run private security for many Heads of State. And they're an American business, just the kind of business we need to provide jobs for hardworking families'" (165). In an excerpt eerily similar to Trumpist propaganda and campaign strategies, Margot defends her vested interests in this corporation with the argument that it is increasing American business and can be considered of reputable standing as a domestic conglomerate. Instead of discussing the ways in which these female soldiers become capitalist products, she focuses on the job opportunities provided and the capital such jobs create. Ironically, this "well-respected" business is not as upstanding as Margot leads the public to believe, as it participates in the drug trade, supplying its soldiers with Glitter to raise their efficiency and power.

In a moment of self-reflection, Margo contemplates the true reasons behind her desire for the position of governor and more political power.

> She thinks of Jos and how she'd be able to help her if she had more power and influence. She thinks of the state and how she'd be able to change things for the better. But, as her fingers grip the cardboard podium and the charge begins to build across her collarbone almost involuntarily while she speaks, the real reason is that she can't stop thinking of the look she'd see on Daniel's face if she got it. She wants it because she wants to knock him down. (171)

The pursuit of public good and helping her abnormal, non-optimal child are not her true purpose in running for governor. She desires the social status and institutional power she would receive and is motivated by self-interest and personal revenge in "knocking down" her misogynist boss. Margot's desire to fully undertake a leadership position is reminiscent of neoliberal "Lean In" feminist politics where women must "actively lean in to their careers" to close the "leadership ambition gap," one that encourages "women to move up the professional ladder and into leadership positions" (Rottenberg 66). In theory, this allows for women's improvement, as more women join the workforce, but this ambition gap of "climbing the power hierarchy" becomes the ultimate objective in and of itself (67). Margot does not want to end inequality and better society; she simply wishes to rise and form part of the superior social identity group within the power hierarchy: a change in her position, but not a change in the system.

In the debate against Daniel Dandon, the incumbent, he insults Margot by insinuating she abandoned her family to pursue corporate interests. As a response, she jolts him with her power: "He staggers, his eyes go wide, he lets out a gasp, he takes one, two, three steps back from his podium and wraps his arms around his midriff. The audience have understood, both those live in the studio and the folks back home; everyone has watched and seen and understood what's happened" (Alderman, *The Power* 186). Showing her physical dominance over a man-- the standing governor or political figure of the state, no less—she proves her worth and power according to masculinist matriarchal values. Margot, like Sarat, has honed her power and her body to become a potential weapon. Sarat's experience as the embodiment of a weapon, however, is that of blind indoctrination and lack of proper education and training. Like the knife given to her by Albert Gaines, she believes herself powerful and a weapon, but is simply an unrefined, objectified tool for another. Instead, Margot and the implication of her threat towards Daniel Dandon becomes a truly efficient weapon. Her mastery over her power and her manipulation of US citizens and public policy, provide her with an opportunity to gain entrance

and influence over the market. This is evidenced by her authority in NorthStar, where she not only gains economic benefit, but the creation of a private militia extends her military power by creating and properly training embodied weapons.

The audience and voters have understood through this act of aggression in defense of her honor that she is an appropriate, aspirational hero-leader to follow and model themselves on. Margot wins the election and becomes governor as voters "went into the voting booths in their hundreds, and thousands, and tens of thousands, they'd thought, You know what, though, she's strong. She'd show them" (187). The public values strong leadership that can fight and "show them." The use of "them" connotes the "us vs. them" conflict of the battle of the sexes. "Them" or the male others must be shown or taught their new place within this power structure; they are now the inferior sex, and the public needs someone like Margot to do it.

By the end of the novel, both models of leadership--traditional totalitarian and contemporary neoliberal—embodied by Tatiana and Margot respectively, interact when the two women meet. Tatiana explains to Margot that "I like America. Land of freedom. Land of opportunity" (247). Bessaparans desire the American dream: "We want to live freely, to pursue our own way of life. We want opportunity. That's all" (247–48). She utilizes these neoliberal ideals of freedom and economic opportunity to ingratiate herself with Margot and obtain Margot's and the US government's support in Bessapara's war against men by voting against any sanctions or reprisals the country might face in the UN. In exchange, they will hire NorthStar to work as their private army: "You work with NorthStar, don't you? Private military. You are a shareholder, in fact. I like NorthStar. Teaching girls to be warriors. Very good—we need it more" (248–49). Because NorthStar wants to be contracted as a military service for the UN to enter Saudi Arabia and secure energy supplies, and Tatiana proposes they first enter Bessapara and thus create a successful track record for them to be accepted by the UN. Tatiana wants to employ NorthStar as her private army, which "would take NorthStar exactly where

they want to go. The board would be *very* happy to continue their association with Margot Cleary until the end of time if she could pull this off" (249). In this excerpt, Tatiana acknowledges Margot's vested interest in the private sector and utilizes it to achieve support in the public, political sector. Thus, any political action in the novel must be framed by neoliberal, corporate support and intervention.

By depicting the influence of neoliberalism on the traditional totalitarian regime, Alderman portrays the complexities and nuances of current dystopian power structure. Insofar as social identity is concerned, neoliberalism constructs a subject that is "entrepreneurial in the sense that she is oriented toward optimizing her resources through incessant calculation, personal initiative, and innovation. […] And the question of social justice is recast in personal, individualized terms" (Rottenberg 59). As an entrepreneur, Margot is able to calculate the benefits of such an arrangement and the value her initiative will achieve. To justify the misandrist atrocities they commit for self-interest and to further power, they frame their actions as social justice by blaming men: "We don't have to ask ourselves what the North would do if they won, Senator Cleary. We've already seen what they do; […] We are both on the right side here" (Alderman, *The Power* 249–50).

4.3.2 Physical Strength and Violence

When examining power and its reciprocal relationship with identity construction, Elcheroth and Reicher determine that

> violence derives from the ways that identity is defined and controlled, but also the way in which violence serves as a means of gaining power over identity and defining it in ways that establish particular people as authoritative. (67)

And so, as violence and power are linked in *American War*, so too does this occur in *The Power*. Initially, the novel makes use of soft power via ideological manipulation and religion. As such, "soft power calls for 'indirect' ways of manipulating ideas, identities, and relations in order to

achieve the desired outcomes from its subjects" by making those in power, such as Margot and

Allie, appear aspirational (Turkmen 32). But as women begin adopting masculinist matriarchal

values of aggression and combativeness to acquire power and invert the gender hierarchy,

violence escalates. Thus, as effective change and maintaining or achieving total female power

becomes more difficult, characters in the novel resort to "hard power," that is, coercion and

brute force to "get others to act in ways that are contrary to their initial preferences and

strategies" (Nye Jr. 11).

According to bell hooks, the sociopolitical system of patriarchy "insists that males are

inherently dominating, superior to everything and everyone deemed weak, especially females,

and endowed with the right to dominate and rule over the weak and to maintain that dominance

through various forms of psychological terrorism and violence" (30). Thus, in adopting the

patriarchal model in this masculinist matriarchy, this domination is reversed, and women now

enact forms of violence, especially sexual violence.[42] The world of *The Power* is already

characterized by the normalization of extreme sexual violence as a feature of patriarchy and

masculinity.[43] At first, power is used to liberate women from this sexual abuse; but then they

shift from victims to oppressors. bell hooks goes on to argue,

> As women have gained the right to be patriarchal men in drag, women are engaging in
> acts of violence similar to those of their male counterparts. This serves to remind us that
> the will to use violence is really not linked to biology but to a set of expectations about
> the nature of power in a dominator culture. (57)

Within this framework, women commit sexually violent crimes against their male counterparts

as an exercise of their dominating power. Vigilantism in "revenge bands" (Alderman, *The*

Power 281) and cult followings enact sadistic crimes of crucifixion and sexual abuse. Tunde

comes across an exhibition of said revenge in the Bessaparan forest. A man resembling Jesus

Christ is tied up and crucified on a post: "There were the marks of pain across his body, livid

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[42] See bell hooks' *The Will to Change: Men, Masculinity, and Love* (2004) on how patriarchy requires male
dominance via sexist, i.e., sexual, violence.
[43] Cf. The depiction of sex trafficking in Moldova (Alderman, *The Power* 101–03).

and dark, blue and scarlet and black. Around his neck was a sign with a single word in Russian: *slut*" (296, emphasis in original). The women who commit this atrocity subvert Christian symbolism and invert its connotations. Instead of a pure, innocent divinity being sacrificed, this man's "crimes" are laid bare as he is accused of lasciviousness. His corpse is publicly humiliated and the punishment for his crimes is written on his body as a testimony of women's vengeance. This instills the notion of fear to all who see it. The message is evident: "There is a part in each of us which holds fast to the old truth: either you are the hunter or you are the prey. Learn which you are. Act accordingly. Your life depends upon it" (297). Men, those who once hunted, now become prey and must submit and obey or forfeit their lives.

Straus identifies two reasons behind participation in group violence and murder: intimidation and coercion or fear and anger: "Many respondents described situations where they believed that they faced a choice between being punished or committing violence and many choose the latter" (122). Although there are instances in the novel of coercion of women to participate in acts of violence under threat to face punishment by being considered "gender traitors," most women who commit violent atrocities do so to associate their social identities with masculinist matriarchal matriarchy and its misandrist and resentful discourse. This is what Roxy perceives in the women, seemingly NorthStar soldiers, who raid a refugee camp in Bessapara. Roxy sees their faces the night these predators enter the camp and interprets their motivations and desire for violence: "Never keep someone on a job who likes it too much. She knows when she sees the single flash of that gleeful and hungry face that they're not here to raid for what they can find. They're not here for anything that can be given" but instead seek vengeance and brutality against men and their allies (Alderman, *The Power* 315). The continual use of "they" serves to further collectivize this group and establish their social identity as a "monolithic entity" (Ross 221). Roxy understands, according to the "gleeful and hungry" faces, the ensuing, animalistic violence that will take place. These women will murder because they

are angry at men and enjoy claiming their revenge by taking what cannot be given, i.e., men's bodies, sexual autonomies, and lives.

In one of the novel's most graphic and disturbing scenes, Alderman describes how these female soldiers brutally rape a young man. The women begin to undress their male victim, while they, instead, remain fully clothed. This opposition between the man's naked vulnerability and soldiers' protective clothing acts as a symbol of their power over him. They continually electrocute him and paralyze him. As with Sarat and the detainees in Sugarloaf in *American War*, Alderman makes explicit how the bodies of victims of torture turn against and betray them by depicting the way in which the female soldier's jolts focus on the young man's genitals to force an erection as well as provide excruciating pain and public humiliation:

> Her mates are laughing now and she's laughing too as she pumps herself up and down on him. She's got her hand firmly planted in the center of his stomach, giving him a dose every time she thrusts up with bunched thighs. One of her mates has a cellphone. They photograph her there, straddling him. (Alderman, *The Power* 316)

This is a communal act of sexual violence meant to build camaraderie within the group. In a patriarchal power structure, "Men can successfully use violence to elevate their social status and gain respect from others" (Kruger 195). Thus, with this scene, the women pursue the same status and respect through violence. After the soldier finishes, she kills her victim, and she "shakes herself like a dog, and like a dog looks hungry yet. They start up a chant, the same four or five words in a rhythm as they ruffle her hair and give each other fist-bumps" (Alderman, *The Power* 316). This act has served not only to dehumanize the victims: the abusers themselves have become insatiable "dogs." They have now become the hunter. As a communal atrocity, however, the group supports the rapist's actions: "The group pardons, exonerates, expiates, absolves. It is our invisibility cloak. What would be wrong at the individual level becomes acceptable with the group's sanction. The gang will rape more readily than the individual" (Claeys, *Dystopia: A Natural History* 49). As a monolithic entity, group members are granted anonymity in their perpetrations, eliminating members' inhibitions. These acts of abuse and

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violence were committed to maintain respect and power and because they simply can. They have successfully, in this moment, defeated and punished the enemy Other.

The novel also depicts acts of individualized brutality. As the most physically powerful character in the novel, Roxy's relationship with violence and her power are initially based on notions of fear and protection, as with most powerless women living in the previous patriarchal system. Her father, the patriarch of her family and of organized crime, is both a "shelter and a weapon. When he puts his arm around her shoulders she feels a mixture of terror and comfort. […] She's always wanted to have that. It's the only thing worth having" (Alderman, *The Power* 51). Roxy longs for the fear and comfort that she can emit with her power. For Roxy, her desire to defend the oppressed stems from a longing to protect victims and eliminate oppressors, and this social identity is the only thing worth having.

Roxy constructs herself as both avenger and protector when she enacts vengeance for her mother's murder. The perpetrators "had this coming, she thinks. She lights up the rail. Three of them go down, backs arching, crying out, fitting and gnashing and eyes rolled back. Got you. You asked for it" (56). As she attacks the men responsible for her mother's death, her lightning is righteous in its vengeful violence. Her belief that they "asked for it" resembles the rhetoric of patriarchal victim blaming. And so, her killing of the man who murdered her mother is her attempt to emulate her father: "She thinks of her dad with his rings on and his knuckles coming away from a man's mouth dripping blood. This is the only thing worth having. She puts her hand to Primrose's temples. And she kills him" (58). Roxy is enticed by this violence and is tempted to adopt these patriarchal values of aggression, conflict, and brutality to earn respect and group membership. The only thing worth having is the physical power to kill, which grants social power and status.

Roxy later learns that her father actually ordered her mother's death as retribution for having an affair and selling family business secrets. Upon hearing this news, Roxy murders

again and feels that "she's the one who's going to bring in the new world. That the power will be in her hands to change everything. She feels the power in her fingertips, as if she could punch a hole right through the world. 'I want justice,' she says. 'And then I want everything'" (228–29). With this, she is on the precipice of fully becoming another Allie-like figure, obsessed with male subordination and achieving superiority by identifying with the "new world" of masculinist matriarchal dystopia. Her power and anger would make her shift, not truly change, society if she surrenders to violence and metaphorically punches a hole through the world. Justice, although desirable, is insufficient as she is tempted to control everything and, like Allie, "own the world."

Ultimately, Roxy decides against this vicious cycle of vengeance and does not kill her father: "She knows how this goes. If she kills him, it'll never be over. […] If she keeps on killing anyone who pisses her off, someone will come for her in the end" (230). So, for Roxy, justice is a peaceful transition of power in which she takes over the family business and her father retires and lives in comfort where she will protect him. In choosing peace and true justice, Roxy counter-identifies with the normative power structure that demands conflict and violence.

As a consequence of Roxy's refusal to betray her male family and not succumbing to the power in gender discrimination and violence, however, she is made to suffer. Her father and brother, her only remaining male family, join forces to steal her skein, an action which would essentially kill or maim her. When the surgeons touch her skein,

> pain sounds like a fire alarm through her body. It's clean, white pain, like they're slicing very carefully through her eyeballs, shaving off layer after layer of flesh. It's a minute of screaming before she realizes what they're doing. They have lifted up the string of striated muscle across her collarbone and they are sawing at it, separating it strand by strand from her. (264)

The graphic imagery and narrative horror emulate Roxy's own trauma at being involuntarily operated on while her bodily autonomy is violated. The violence of this act resembles the violence in the sexual abuses committed against the men. After they cut out her skein, she feels

empty. Her skein was "the thing that made her work. It's jumping and squirming because it wants to get back inside her. She wants it there too. Her own self" (265). This anatomical fragment is made sentient as Roxy attributes her own consciousness to it. It also desires to be back in its home. She is not whole without it. Her "own self" or social identity is henceforth ruined and abolished. Remarkably, this loss is caused by her counter-identification with the dystopia, because she was trusting of men.

After the removal of her skein, she is discarded and forgotten about, so she manages to escape into the Bessaparan forest. Here, she coincidentally meets Tunde. Although initially wary of each other, they begin to form a relationship based on true equality and companionship. They find humor in the mundane and "his laughter makes her laugh. And then they are both standing in the forest, leaning against a tree, hooting and gasping for breath, and something is broken between them then, and something is a little easier" (310). Alderman depicts the regenerative power of laughter and humor as a way to bring adversaries together and start a peaceful and just companionship. Both are abandoned outcasts. In this equal status, they can be together and find comfort in each other without the hindrances of social pressures.

Tunde and Roxy complement each other. They are not constrained by the rigid social identities placed upon them by the dystopian society. They have more nuanced subjectivities: "He says, 'I've done a terrible thing,' and she says, 'You saved my life.' She says, 'You can't even believe half the things I've done, mate. Bad bad things,' and he says, 'And you saved my life'" (323). They have both done terrible things, but they have both done wonderful things. They are not exclusively good or evil, us versus them. Outside of the masculinist matriarchy, their identities can be multiple and complex.

In this scene, neither is more powerful than the other: "They are both injured and hurting. […] Theoretically, he is stronger than her now, but this makes them both laugh"

because she's is fiercer and knows how to fight and is more familiar with violence (324). The gender-sex binary hierarchy is fully erased in their relationship:

> Their bodies have been rewritten by suffering. They have no fight left. They cannot, in that moment, tell which of them is supposed to be which […] They touch one another gently, feeling out the places where they are alike and where they are different. He shows her he is ready, and she is ready, too. (324–25)

The dystopian society has erased their social identities and "rewritten" them to blur all gender-sex boundaries so they are unable to know which gender is supposed to act according to social standards, i.e., "which is supposed to be which." Masculinist violence has been eliminated and replaced with gentleness and consent. Roxy and Tunde objectively recognize their anatomical differences without value judgments, gently waiting for the other to be ready. They fit together, and, for a moment, are without fear amidst a war. With this scene, Alderman portrays the union of true equals who come together in mutual vulnerability and thus erase the oppositional binary of the neoliberal dystopian society.

When the sexual encounter culminates, they kiss. A kiss "indicates the possibility of acceptance across cultural divisions and hope of change" (Donawerth 33). This traditionally symbolic act does not restore men to dominance but promotes the hope of sexual equality. Unfortunately, this hope of change is only achieved on the individual interpersonal, micro level, for both Tunde and Roxy lose all hope of rejoining society and enacting true change. These characters, who understand true equity, will never gain power. For Tunde, a "disobedient" man, his life's work is stolen and appropriated by a former lover who declares him dead: "Her name was on the photographs, and her name was on the writing. Tunde was mentioned nowhere. She had stolen it from him entirely" (Alderman, *The Power* 300). Because he counter-identified with the masculinist matriarchy by attempting to unveil the true atrocities women were enacting against men, his social identity is eclipsed by his more socially powerful contemporary.

Because of the loss of her skein, Roxy is considered abnormal and banned from regaining power within this neoliberal dystopia. She will forever be excluded from a position

of authority. When she returns to society, Roxy contacts Allie in an attempt to stop the violence she witnessed in the Bessaparan forest. Roxy wants to enact change and help the men in Bessapara, but Allie interprets the trauma of Roxy's skein removal as a sign that men must be completely eradicated and woman should rise: "There's only one way to put it right. The war has to start now. The real war. The war of all against all" (352). After knowing true peace and equality between the sexes, Roxy wants this same peace for all of society. However, nobody will take Roxy seriously without her skein; and because she does not comply with the desire to maintain masculinist matriarchy, she is left powerless and forgotten by society.

Roxy's skein is transplanted onto Darrell, her brother. He keeps this a secret until he uses the skein to attack Jocelyn when she enters their illegal Glitter factory. He successfully harms Jocelyn but is attacked by the female workers in the factory because of his abnormality. They seek revenge for his lies and for killing a woman, the superior sex, and, most importantly, he has transgressed natural laws. There is a power in normality, as with Roxy, his abnormality is not tolerated and causes mass violence. Darrell finally learns that he is no longer a hunter, but its prey. The women who attack him are associated with darkness and natural elements such as the earth and sea. In doing so, Alderman collectivizes or massifies the women by attributing to them the same expanse, enormity and depth as the earth and sea. This collective, thus, goes beyond the human to depict savage animal or natural forces that overwhelm Darrell. They symbolize the undifferentiated violent mass of all enraged women in this society.

Darrell's abhorrent attempt to gain power serves as an example of men's resistance to the inverted power structure: "The world is trying to go back to its former shape. Everything we've done is not enough. There are still men with money and influence who can shape things to their will" (330). Men can still use capitalist methods to maintain power. As a response to the growing conflict and resistance between men and women, Allie wishes to create a global-scale war and imagines it as a great flood that will require "five thousand years of rebuilding,

five thousand years where the only thing that matters is: can you hurt more, can you do more damage, can you instil fear?" so that women will win and have complete control (353). Power only exists when it is exercised successfully (370). And in the novel, it is wielded through institutional authority and violence. This cataclysmic act is the ultimate exercise of power to establish inflexible control.

With this massive violent event, Allie wishes to eliminate all counter-identification and cement the masculinist matriarchal social identity and power structure. Cojocaru argues that the "belief in redemptive violence is a belief in war as the only hygiene" (4), and Allie believes war will act as a mass baptism and cleanse the world of social identities that do not conform to this neoliberal dystopia. According to Elcheroth and Reicher, and as previously stated, identities reshaped by violence are characterized by their rigidity so that "violent turning points do not simply provoke shifts from one prevalent form of identity to another; they also transform the nature of identity, from something fluid into something frozen" (100). Thus, Allie does not wish social identities to be able to shift freely between patriarchal and masculinist matriarchal power structures. With this cataclysm or Armageddon, she wishes to freeze all identities to encompass rigid social identification. Because she plans this "apocalypse," she is able to warn her loyal followers so that they can survive and repopulate the world according to their own doctrine:

> Convent walls are thick, and convent women are clever, and when Mother Eve warns them that the apocalypse is near at hand and only the righteous will be saved, she can call the world to a new order. The end of all flesh is near, because the Earth is filled with violence. Therefore, build an ark. (Alderman, *The Power* 367)

As with the biblical parable of Noah's ark, the women will find refuge in the convents until the world is fully cleansed of all "sinners" who counter-identify with the prevailing power system and religious ideology.

As the other protagonist who identifies with the neoliberal dystopian society, Margot also influences the start of the cataclysmic war for economic purposes. Although she disguises her intentions with patriotic rhetoric stating that "My country comes first. We need strong

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leadership," and she is also aware that there "is a bonus in her contract if NorthStar deployments around the world top fifty thousand women this year. The bonus would buy her a private island" (369). Her monopoly on the private military sector will be quite lucrative in the event of an armed conflict, so she creates the opportunity to profit from this. This act further cements the neoliberal influence within this dystopia in which women like Margot profit from its socioeconomic power structure.

The ending of *The Power* portrays the preservation of the status quo within neoliberal dystopias, regardless of the multiple opportunities to resist and change its power structures. The social identities of Margot and Allie shift and are constructed to maintain and acquire individual relevance and privilege as they identify with neoliberal dystopian hierarchy-enhancing forces. Characters such as Roxy or Tunde, who seek equality and parity by acting as hierarchy-attenuating forces, thus counter-identify with the collective and their social identities and oppressed and annihilated. The epistolary epigraph reinstates these notions by providing the perspective of society after five thousand years have passed. Although the more dystopian and violent elements have attenuated, attempts to deconstruct the gender/sex binary and the masculinist matriarchy are still met with resistance. In fact, Naomi's final recommendation to Neil, who has shown himself to counter-identify with his current society, is to consider "publishing this book under a woman's name" (382). Thus, this society and those in power continue to work to erase the social identities of those who rebel against the dystopian system.

5. *The Windup Girl* by Paolo Bacigalupi

The author of *The Windup Girl*, Paolo Bacigalupi is a science fiction writer from the U.S. known for his debut novel, *The Windup Girl* and his collection of short stories, *Pump Six and Other Stories*, which take place in the same universe as the former. His previous work as an editor for an environment journal informed his portrayal of the ecological crisis and agricultural diseases within his oeuvre.

The Windup Girl takes places in Bangkok in a fictional Thai Kingdom in a distant future and follows several characters: Anderson Lake, an American "calorie man" or representative of a transnational corporation known as a calorie company; Hock Seng, labeled a "yellow card" from Malaysia because of his yellow skin tone and card-carrying refugee status; Jaidee, a "white shirt" working for the Environment Ministry—whose employees dress in all white—and Kanya, his coworker. [44] Of special interest in the novel is its titular character, a windup girl named Emiko. Abandoned in the Thai Kingdom by her Japanese master, Emiko is a genetically engineered "New Person" who faces sexual abuse and a precarious situation as a non-human illegal alien living in a society in which she is outlawed and subject to death if discovered. She dreams of escaping to a utopian village populated by New People.[45]

Emiko's plight is focused on survival and constructing a social identity free from dystopian collectivist confines, whereas the remaining characters attempt to navigate their energy deficient, ecologically hostile environment while promoting their own self-interest and constructing identities with elevated social status and power. Anderson arrives at the Thai Kingdom as a spy for AgriGen to gain access to the country's seedbank and informational food data. AgriGen, though, is a reviled "calorie company" that monopolizes food trade and controls, through patents, new disease-resistant variants of produce that are under constant threat of

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[44] For clarity, I refer to the fictional Thai nation in the novel as the "Thai Kingdom" only, and the actual nation as "Thailand."

[45] Throughout the narrative, it is unclear whether this enclave truly exists or is simply an imaginary utopia.

epidemics and shortages. Thus, Anderson's cover is to work as the manager of an energy company, SpringLife, that researches and creates new methods of storing energy or calories, and it is in that capacity that he hires Hock Seng as his assistant. Hock Seng was once a successful businessman but is now living in the Thai Kingdom after a mass genocide and exile of his people in Malaysia. His situation is precarious, and his ultimate desire is to steal the SpringLife blueprints regarding energy storage and sell them in exchange for investment in his renewed trading company. As opposed to these foreigners, Jaidee and Kanya are native Thai citizens working for the Environment Ministry: a corrupt institution whose principal objective is to expel biological threats to the Thai Kingdom in an attempt to reduce plagues and prevent ecological disaster. Jaidee is a firm supporter of the Environment Ministry ideals and is famous throughout Bangkok as the only incorruptible "white shirt" or the Tiger of Bangkok. Kanya, however, is an infiltrated spy for the Trade Ministry, the antagonistic administration that seeks to open the Thai Kingdom's border and markets to foreign enterprise. The characters' individual actions in the novel are set within growing tensions between the Trade and the Environment Ministries, which embody the conflict between a globalized, deregulated market and an isolated, nativist central government who fight for control over Thai economic policy.

By the end of the novel, the tension between both ministries culminates in an open conflict after Emiko kills the Thai Kingdom's revered leader in an act of self-defense. As a result, Bangkok suffers civil strife ending in an intentional sabotage of the city's main defense against the rising sea levels and floods: its levees and pumps. Emiko's posthuman status allows her to survive in a city destroyed by human and natural disasters. This conveys the *tabula rasa* trend by creating a social and individual newness at a micro level (the flooding only occurs in the city of Bangkok in which Emiko is the sole survivor) with slight macro implications that posthumanity can come to power throughout the rest of the world. The protagonist is conferred a radically, completely new social identity, different from its previous construction, as society

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becomes a blank slate. Only through this complete renewal can lasting change be effected on both individual social identity and on society in general. Humanity is no longer a symbol of hope since "human beings themselves have already nearly succeeded in wiping out the species" (Jacobs 101), and therefore, any hope or renewal must be found by eliminating the human and turning to the posthuman figure or that of "disidentification" that creates a new type of subject. According to Lars Schmeink, the posthuman within the novel attempts "to establish a position in the 'natural order' and ultimately ends up threatening to replace the human completely" in a world characterized by "rampant capitalism, of individualistic consumer societies, leading to a global ecological catastrophe" (73).

This chapter will focus on the neoliberal commodification of the characters' bodies, especially the posthuman body. The dissertation will analyze the ways in which Emiko's body is made optimal for market and capital purposes and explore her struggle between her genetic engineering—i.e., what is believed to be her biological nature within the novel—and social and cultural training—i.e., nurture. Because of her perceived disidentification with the novel's dystopian society, special attention is paid to Emiko's subversion of the inequality within the Thai Kingdom as the posthuman body rises and displaces humanity within the natural order or hierarchy. However, Thai ideology is entrenched in nativist beliefs that presuppose humanity's, especially Thai, superiority. As such, this chapter will study the ways in which traditional notions of being considered "good people," karma, and royal nationalism inform the construction of social identity within Bacigalupi's novel.

Of special interest is the conflict between the two Thai ministries of Trade and Environment and the effects of postcolonialism and neoliberalism in their policies. The final section of the chapter examines the effects of institutional and individual authority within *The Windup Girl*, which is set in an Anthropocenic age that also reflects the power of humanity over nature and vice versa. The notions of "wasted humans" or disposable humanity inform the

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treatment and construction of social identity within the Thai Kingdom, utilizing control over individuals and violence to maintain dominion. However, unlike the two previous novels analyzed, much power is granted to individuals within the novel, especially the posthuman Emiko, due to her original disidentification. Via a biblical allegory of flooding, Bacigalupi establishes a tabula rasa in which Emiko is able to construct her own social identity and is primed to displace humanity. This leads to a tenuous, if not ambiguous, sense of hope.[46]

5.1 "Thainess," Niche, and Nativist Ideology

The Thai Kingdom is a hostile environment for any non-natural or non-native residents since the social or ideological conditions of the country are a threat to their well-being and social identities. The belief system of Thai citizens is imbued with notions of cultural duty and karma, which serve as a justification for the dystopian setting. As Jaidee initially understands, just like land "and sea must intersect. These men with profits in their beating hearts have no choice, they must rush in no matter the consequence, and he must always meet them. *Kamma*" (Bacigalupi 75). This creates a sense of inevitability to their current neoliberal capitalist structure. There is a constant tension, just like the land and rising sea, between foreign capitalists and Thai isolationists.

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[46] As opposed to *American War* and *The Power*, the representation of the protagonist's mechanism of identification is unique. Thus, the sections of this chapter are ordered to better discuss and analyze the dissertation's three thematic axes. Unlike Sarat, who is raised with nationalist discourse, or the characters in *The Power*, who also already find themselves within a patriarchal system and simply participate in the shift in ideology to a masculinist matriarchy, as a foreigner, Emiko is at first ignorant to Thai culture and ideology. For this reason, the section on ideology must precede the other sections in this analysis--followed by a discussion on power--to more thoroughly comprehend the relation that Thai nativist ideology has with the nation's well-entrenched dystopian structures, how this leads to acquisition of institutional power, and the influence of both ideology and power on identity construction within the novel. The hypothesis of this dissertation posits that the ability to successfully disidentify with a dystopian society occurs via a character's removal and displacement from its social paradigm. When analyzing *The Windup Girl*, Emiko is able to achieve this disidentification through the potential of her posthuman body, which allows her to separate herself from the human species and its constructs. Because of this, this chapter's analysis of the body is situated at the end, as it is of significance in the novel's dénouement.

By following this notion with "kamma" or karma, there is a sense of deservedness. The characters deserve to be reincarnated within such a hostile ecological and sociopolitical environment. It is their duty to participate in such structures. Jaidee, as the headstrong, heroic Tiger of Bangkok, holds unambiguous, perspicuous considerations of karmic justification and ideological tensions. However, Hock Seng's experience as having both a successful social identity in his native Malaysia and becoming a refugee Other grants him a more nuanced perspective, and he understands the "painful truths" of life:

> Suffering is his lot. Attachment is the source of his suffering. And yet he cannot stop himself from saving and preparing and striving to preserve himself in this life which has turned out so poorly. *How is it that I sinned to earn this bitter fate? Saw my clan whittled by red machetes? Saw my businesses burned and my clipper ships sunk?* (98–99; emphasis in original)

The ideological teachings of karma and reincarnation are also imbued with neoliberal ideals. That is, individuals are made to believe that their difficulties are their own, personal fault. According to Turkmen, "any problems occurring as a consequence of the neoliberal system of governance are considered their own personal failures, exemplified by their inability to fulfill societal expectations" (23–24). Suffering is their lot, and the hostile environment they must reside in is their penance. Thus, the neoliberal dystopian elements of society are ignored, and individuals—not the social system—are responsible for their hardships. Hock Seng attempts to understand how his sins earned him such a "bitter fate" and finds himself responsible for not identifying the social threats of the Green Headbands. Although he comprehends that material attachment—understood as such when he mentions his business and clipper ships—is the "source of his suffering," he cannot stop himself from creating such attachments and striving for economic success.[47]

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[47] Although an Other, Hock Seng continuously attempts to gain a foothold in society and elevate his social identity through economic means. He clings to the social identity of a "businessman" by seeking the blueprints from Anderson's factory to exchange them for permits and financing of a new clipper ship and trade business.

For Kanya, an agent of the Trade Ministry working as a spy in the Environment Ministry, her sins also are represented as inevitable: "A man comes to your village with a promise of food for your belly, a life in the city, and money for your aunt's cough and your uncle's whiskey. And he doesn't even want to buy your body. What else can one wish for? What else could buy loyalty? Everyone needs a patron" (Bacigalupi 303). Any notion of karmic purity is discarded with this excerpt in that individual sin is bound to economic and social prosperity. Loyalty is bought through patronage and economic benefit. Kanya sacrifices any attempt at positive reincarnation and clean karma by accepting and constructing such a social identity as a double agent. She understands that her

> own soul will certainly be sent back to this world again, at best as a human being, at worst as something else, some dog or cockroach. Whatever mess she leaves behind, she will undoubtedly face it again and again and again. Her betrayals guarantee it. She must fight this battle until her kamma is finally cleansed. To flee it now in suicide would be to face it in an uglier form in the future. There is no escape for such as she. (355)

She equates this karmic cost with individual choice and freedom, as she understands the nuances of the dystopian system in that "everyone needs a patron," but cannot conceive of any form of escape. Her social identity is tied to her karma as she will continuously be reborn into such a dystopian environment that enacts suffering and punishment.

5.1.1 Nativism and the Rejection of the Foreigner

Similar to *American War* and *The Power*, in *The Windup Girl* the formation of the subject or self is created through the presentation of and confrontation with the Other. Defining the enemy Other "is a central part of political life. The state as such is a unit bonded by the hostility of one group to others. What is crucial, however, is not the enemy but the idea of the enemy, the concoction of what inspires hatred" and fear (Claeys, *Dystopia: A Natural History* 17). As such, it is necessary for the social identity group within the dystopia to require an enemy Other with which to further establish its own identity boundaries. Whereas nationalist ideology

in *American War* created the Northern and Southern division, or the masculinist matriarchal system divided that between Man and Woman, in *The Windup Girl* nativist ideology establishes the Thai citizen as the self and the foreigner (i.e., yellow card refuge or illegal alien New Person) as the enemy Other that inspires disgust, hatred of its unnatural status that affronts niche and nature, and fear of its contagion and spread to take control of Thai society. Of interest is the character focus of all three novels. *American War* mostly centers on Sarat, whose rigid social identity is defined by the Southern nationalist identity group until her torture leads her to counter-identify with such ideology and society. *The Power* depicts both characters who adopt the masculinist matriarchy and identify with the dystopian society and those who counter-identify with it equally (e.g., Margot and Allie versus Roxy and Tunde). However, although *The Windup Girl* does depict Thai characters who identify with nativism and are considered the "Us" or selves, the novel's attention resides on the Other and the Othered characters' relation to dystopian society. This change in focus signals Emiko's consequent disidentification with the dystopian society as Bacigalupi highlights the enemy Others' experiences and social identities.

As a reaction to detrimental practices enacted against the environment, the Thai Kingdom creates an obsession with controlling its borders and markets, seemingly making sure everything remains in its natural niche, and eliminating anything considered invasive or toxic. Within the novel, "the emphasis on racial distrust and animosity highlights the growing divisions among peoples forced to survive under the conditions of a brutal capitalist economy" (Kurtz 183). Bacigalupi constantly refers to the Thai Kingdom as the last nation-state independent from transnational corporate rule: "The Thai Kingdom is clever where others are not. It thrives while countries like India and Burma and Vietnam all fall like dominoes, starving and begging for the scientific advances of the calorie monopolies" (Bacigalupi 5). Other, larger

countries have fallen to disease, natural disaster, and especially calorie company takeovers due to their open policy that does not value the importance of maintaining natural order and niche.

Calorie companies have a history of hostile takeovers of countries to acquire their seedbanks and technology, so the Thai Kingdom, now a minority within the national sphere, considers Thai citizenship a minority social identity and acts accordingly:

> Any minority groups, when faced with hostile acts, does several things. One of its first reactions is that it draws in on itself, it tightens its cultural bonds to present a united front against its oppressor. The group gains strength by emphasizing its collective identity. This inevitably means a conscious explicit decision on the part of some not to integrate with "the dominant group" but to validate their own culture (their religion, language, values, ways of life). (Sarup 3)

This leads to a sense of nativism within the Thai Kingdom. A strict, rigid collective identity is enforced that must not deviate from traditional Thai values and ways of life. All non-Thai residents are deemed inferior and rejected. Thai nativism is imbued with a common non-Western "'ethnic' conception of the nation" in which whether a member of the collective "stayed in your community or emigrated to another, you remained ineluctably, organically, a member of the community of your birth and were for ever stamped by it" (Smith 11).[48] Thus, although Hock Seng seemingly seeks harbor as a religious refugee, it is clear that the genocide in Malaysia was not because of a difference in religion between the Chinese-Malay Buddhists and the Muslim Green Headbands or native Malayans, but a conflict of ethnic nativism in which "the brown people turned on the yellow people" (Bacigalupi 289). The Chinese Malays who had resided in Malaysia for hundreds of years, were still not native to the country. And these "yellow people" now known as "yellow cards" are refugees in the Thai Kingdom, whose social identity is far more rigid.

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[48] Although the ethnic and geographical connotations of this excerpt are based in non-Western considerations, this sense of origin and place of birth informing one's identity is similar to the Southern nationalist groups of *American War*. Thus, in both dystopian novels, a sense of ethnic relations and cultural beliefs serves to construct characters' social identities.

Considered the Tiger of Bangkok, Jaidee is the figurehead for nativist Thai policy. He is the embodiment of the fiercely loyal Thai who espouses Thai ideology by upholding nativist views which deem non-Thai residents, i.e., immigrants, posthumans, and non-Thai beings or objects, as invasive hazards or Others that threaten the domestic economy, culture, and social identity. An example of his deeply entrenched nativism is his regard for the Chaozhou Chinese who have resided in the Thai Kingdom for hundreds of years, which should, by now, make them Thai:

> Jaidee has a certain respect for the Chaozhou Chinese. Their factories are large and well-run. They have generations rooted in the Kingdom, and they are intensely loyal to Her Majesty the Child Queen. They are utterly unlike the pathetic Chinese refugees who have flooded in from Malaya, fleeing to his country in hopes of succor after they alienated the natives of their own. If the Malayan Chinese had been half as clever as the Chaozhou, they would have converted to Islam generations ago, and woven themselves fully into the tapestry of that society. Instead, the Chinese of Malacca and Penang and the Western Coast arrogantly held themselves apart, thinking the rising tide of fundamentalism would not affect them. And now they come begging to the Kingdom, hoping that their Chaozhou cousins will aid them when they were not clever enough to help themselves. (168)

Although seemingly isolationist, Jaidee's nativism is still entrenched in neoliberal capitalist discourse. He has respect for the Chaozhou Chinese not only because they have assimilated into Thai culture and share their values, but also because they have large, well-run factories and are economically successful and benefit Thai economy. As opposed to the figureheads of assimilation—who must be noted that are still differentiated from native Thais but accepted because of their business savvy—the Malayan Chinese are "pathetic" because they alienated themselves from the natives of their country and did not adopt Malayan religion or weave themselves into the nation's social tapestry.

One's origins or "culture constitutes (contributes to) one's identity. Therefore slighting one's culture, persecuting it, holding it up for ridicule, slighting its value, etc., affect members of that group" (Raz 178). The Thai Kingdom, in slighting and persecuting non-native culture, is able to affect members of these foreign groups by constructing a less valued, Othered social

identity. Jaidee ridicules the yellow cards for their persecution by blaming the violent genocidal ideology adopted by the Green Headbands on the Malayan Chinese. He slights their value because they were not clever enough to assimilate and participate in a neoliberal market in their home nation, and "held themselves apart." The end of the passage is steeped in neoliberal discourse as Jaidee considers the Malayan Chinese responsible for their own situation as "they were not clever enough to help themselves." Instead of promoting a system that aids and supports its citizens, here the neoliberal notion of individual freedom causes the Malayan Chinese to be personally responsible for defending themselves against a radical, violent, genocidal faction. This is their own fault as they have the individual responsibility of integration and economic benefit. Due to such threats to nativist ideology and notions of personal responsibility for their own victimization, the "Environment Ministry sees yellow cards the same way it sees the other invasive species and plagues it manages. Given a choice, the white shirts would slaughter every yellow card Chinese" (Bacigalupi 318–19).

Both Emiko and Hock Seng's social identities are constructed as illegal aliens or refugees whose sole purpose within Thai society is to function as cheap, replaceable labor. As such, they are subject to nativist discrimination. As a migrant refugee, Hock Seng has no social agency or status within the Thai Kingdom. Migrants seek "a place to make 'a new beginning', to start again, to make a better life. […] They have to cope not only with the pain of separation but often also with the resentments of a hostile population" (Sarup 1). Hock Seng attempts a new beginning or social rebirth by deciding to steal kink spring blueprints from the SpringLife Factory and sell them to the Dung Lord in exchange for a fleet of trading ships. In essence, Hock Seng wishes to replicate his life and career in Malaya within the Thai Kingdom.

However, migrants and refugees without homelands do not have universal rights as citizens within nations. As Sarup states, within modern societies, there is a conflict between the rights of man and the rights of the citizen in that "one can be more or less a man to the extent

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that one is more or less a citizen, that he who is not a citizen is not fully a man. Between the man and the citizen there is a scar: the foreigner" (8). As a foreigner and refugee within the nativist Thai Kingdom, Hock Seng is barely considered a man due to his lack of citizenship. His social identity becomes restricted and monolithic because he is only considered a Malayan Chinese refugee. "Perhaps in Malaya we were still Hokkien, or Hakka or Fifth Wave, but here we are all yellow cards" (Bacigalupi 39). The social divisions and intersections they might have noted have been wiped clean under the dystopian society. Their social identities lose nuance and individuality, as they are all "yellow cards" that are no longer identified by their social status or ancestry but by their bureaucratic identification papers. Their restricted social identity is rigidified and oppressed in their struggle to survive within the Thai Kingdom. As will be discussed in upcoming sections, the Malayan Chinese refugees' value lies within their easily replaceable labor and bodies. In fields that require stability or dignified compensation within the workforce, the government enforces "Thai workers for Thai jobs. Yellow card refugees from Malaya are starving in the street, and he can't hire them" for jobs requiring specialized skills (23). As citizens of the Thai Kingdom, Thai workers have full rights and privileges. Nativist ideology, thus, reduces the yellow cards to barely human not only by attributing them a monolithic, devalued nature, but also by excluding them from a non-exploitative workforce reserved for native citizens.

The notion of passing as a Thai citizen is also present in Bacigalupi's depiction of Hock Seng: his physical appearance is incredibly similar to Thai citizens. He is only identified as a yellow card once he speaks Thai with his Chinese accent. By maintaining silence and passing, he is not a target of the typical Thai aggression and intolerance aimed at yellow cards. In a passage at the end of the novel when tensions between Thai factions start running high, Hock Seng is aware of the negative attention and violence foreigners, especially yellow cards, attract. He finds himself in a crowd of Thai citizens: "*Don't run. Don't panic. You can pass, as long as*

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you don't speak. The white shirt smiles at the watching people. 'Tell your friends what you see here. We are not dogs you feed with scraps. We are tigers. Fear us'" (290–91, emphasis in original). Silence grants Hock Seng safety within the multitude. The white shirts in the excerpt explicitly link their social identities to tigers. This is not only a reference to Jaidee, the Tiger of Bangkok and exponent of nativist, isolationist ideology, but also to the Indochinese tiger which is native to Thailand. The white shirts, thus, establish their intrinsic connection to the territory and government of the Thai Kingdom, but also demand the fear and respect such creatures impose.

Hock Seng, if silent, can pass as a Thai tiger, but if he is identified as a yellow card, he will become the Thais' prey. In such an instance, Hock Seng is forced to speak to gather information on the growing unease within the city. He "fights the urge to flinch at being identified. Forces himself to pretend as if they are all equals in this, to create a hopeful fiction that the man will see him as a person" (321). Hock Seng operates within the nativist paradigm of the Thai Kingdom and thus attempts to survive and save himself from prejudice by creating a "hopeful fiction" that all humans are equal and that, although he is not a citizen, he must still be viewed as a person.

Just as Hock Seng lacks social and political agency, so too does Emiko. Emiko's development in a Japanese crèche imbued her with notions of passivity and service to humanity. Mizumi-sensei, her teacher, instilled in the secretarial New People

> the faith that if they served their patron well, that they had attained their highest state. Mizumi-sensei introduced them all to Mizuko Jizo Bodhisattva, who has compassion even for New People, and who would hide them in his sleeves after their deaths and smuggle them out of the hell world of genetically engineered toys and into the true cycle of life. Their duty was to serve, their honor was to serve, and their reward would come in the next life, when they became fully human. Service would yield the greatest rewards. (220–21)

This religious perspective connects to Thai notions of neoliberal karma present throughout the novel. New People's "highest state" is only achieved through service to human patrons. The

figure of the buddha or Bodhisattva is utilized as a mechanism to indoctrinate New People. They must suffer in silence at the hands of their human patrons, but through their death, they can leave their "hell world" and be reincarnated as humans living a "true cycle of life." Such religious rhetoric manipulates New People to seek satisfaction of humans at the cost of their own wellbeing and survival. Ironically, it is unclear whether such genetically engineered figures can die of natural causes, meaning that their hell world could, in fact, be eternal subjugation to all humans. As windups living in a human dystopian society, their "reward", i.e., a superior social identity, arrives in their next life. Service as instruments of capital is made aspirational in the belief system of this society that clearly establishes an identity hierarchy in which the "fully human" is superior. Thus, upon her arrival as an illegal alien in the Thai Kingdom, Emiko is clearly aware of her inferior status due to her posthuman nature. However, her social identity as an enemy Other is further devalued due to her non-native or Japanese heritage.

In her country of origin, in spite of her subservience, she was still considered "a wonder. Here, she is nothing but a windup. The men laugh at her strange gait and make faces of disgust that she exists at all. She is a creature forbidden to them. The Thai men would happily mulch her in their methane composting pools" (54). As a sex worker, her social identity is further devalued as she is an "affront to niche and nature" (54). The Thai Kingdom limits her social identity to consider her "nothing but a windup." Her existence disgusts them because she is not native to their niche or environment, and so would be exterminated by nativist thinkers who would compost her.

By considering Emiko disgusting and no better than waste to be composted, Emiko is further rendered an enemy Other. This grants permission for her abuse and exploitation. According to Crispin, "In order to take advantage of someone, in order to think of them as a resource to be exploited, it helps to dehumanize them" (36). Her social identity is reduced to a resource to be capitalized on, either via sexual exploitation or composting. The question arises

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whether, had Emiko been a Thai creation, similar to Megodonts, would she be so poorly mistreated. Emiko's sexual abuse is not only a consequence of her posthuman status, but also of the fact that she is Japanese. In the first scene depicting her sexual assault, Kannika insists on her Japanese origin: "'Look at this animal!' and then she is kneeling above Emiko's face and hissing to Emiko that she is nothing, and will always be nothing, and for once the dirty Japanese get what is coming to them" (Bacigalupi 55). Emiko is dehumanized and animalized through her body, but also through her provenance. Thus, Kannika's sadistic abuse is not only rooted in her disgust over Emiko's genetic engineering, but what this passage more so indicates is that her revulsion stems from nativist ideology that rejects Emiko's foreign status. Her social identity as an enemy Other is rooted also in this belief system.

Emiko first discovers superhuman, physiological powers when she is attacked by a drug addict because of her posthuman, Japanese status. He equates her to military windups he fought "In the jungles in the north. Windups everywhere. *Heechy-keechy* soldiers" (154, emphasis in original). And although Emiko attempts to distance herself from these other New People models by stating that she is not a military windup, her attacker quickly restricts her identity and blends all windups together because they are all "Japanese, same as you" (154). His rage is not only because of her posthuman status, but also at her perceived affront or threat to Thai wellbeing: "Our people are starving, and your kind take their rice" (155). The Japanese fight and kill Thai citizens in wars, but also take their sustenance and threaten the "Us" group:

> However, Emiko rejects this social identification by questioning the reason behind such ideological thinking. *Is this how you will die? Is this what you were meant for? To simply be bled out like a pig?* A spark of rage flickers, an antidote to despair. *Will you not even try to survive? Did the scientists make you too stupid even to consider fighting for your own life?* (155, emphasis in original)

Emiko understands that being targeted in this manner is irrational. She is not simply defined by her genetic engineering or Japanese citizenship. With this, Emiko questions what she was "meant for," as she is constructed to be completely subservient to humanity, putting her life in

their hands to "be bled out like a pig" if humans so desire. She finally begins to feel rage at her mistreatment, which urges her to survive and fight for her life. She escapes, "not caring that she shows herself as a windup, not caring that in running she will burn up and die. She runs, determined only to escape the demon behind her. She will burn, but she will not die passive like some pig led to slaughter" (155). This is the first step in Emiko's disidentification with the dystopian society. Her social identity as an enemy Other has led her to play a passive role in society as a commodity and tool to be used as human capital. Yet, since she will no longer seek to pass or "die passive like some pig led to slaughter" she is rejecting her status as an animal or subhuman and denying humanity agency over her life. Her attempt to survive proves that she values her life for more than just a human instrument, which makes her act of survival quite subversive.

The discovery of such enhanced powers occurs almost simultaneously, though not coincidentally, with the knowledge that a village of free New People exists. Such information gives Emiko hope that the "hell world" of her existence does not have to remain interminable. After enduring Kannika's sexual abuse, she "falls into dreams of a place where New People dwell in safety, without patrons or masters" (220). This posthuman society also causes Emiko distaste at having no one to serve: "She forces back her revulsion. It is surely no worse than Kannika. She has been enslaved to think against New People, even when she herself is one of them. If she thinks logically, she knows that no New Person can be any worse" than humans and her clients (223). This revulsion and hope can stem from Fanon's notion of petrification. Colonization creates a petrified, rigid colonized subject that enforces rigid colonial culture and thus its own subjugation.

The colonial world, similar to the dystopian society of the Thai Kingdom which will be subsequently discussed, is "crushing with its stoniness the backbones of those scarred by the whip" (Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* 15). The colonized subject is penned in or

compartmentalized, petrified and unmovable in the social hierarchy so that the first thing the colonized subject "learns is to remain in his place and not overstep its limits" (15). Emiko's revulsion and hesitance about a society outside the limits of said hierarchy and colonialism stems from her petrification as a colonized subject. Her genetic nature and years of training reject the overstepping of her social limits by leaving her "place" as a dehumanized sex worker.

The petrified, colonized subject is allowed liberation in their fantasies and dreams: "muscular dreams, dreams of action, dreams of aggressive vitality" (15). As Marriott comments on Fanon's notion of petrification and liberation through dreams, "Deprived of all freedom and movement, the colonized thus turn to fantasized freedoms and objects, the trance-like euphorias of psychic images and objects in which the body is able to declare its libidinal freedoms and desires" (167). Emiko is constantly dreaming and envisioning her escape and freedom within the supposed New People village. "What would it be like, to serve no one? Would she dare? It makes her dizzy, almost giddy to think of it" (Bacigalupi 224). The psychic image of serving no one, a libidinal freedom, makes her dizzy and giddy with euphoria.

Part of Emiko's struggle within the Thai Kingdom is her isolation and devaluation. Knowing about the New People village gives Emiko a reason to survive and escape, i.e., to disidentify with her dystopian society: "She was never Japanese; she was only ever a windup. And now her true clan awaits her, if only she can find a way" (147). This possibility of resistance and disidentification allows her to step away from the social identities assigned to her. Kannika's nativist prejudice and abuse, based on Emiko's Japanese provenance, are discarded. Emiko accepts that her only identification is that of a windup, and now seeks group belonging and solidarity with her true clan.

She becomes empowered by this fantasy of freedom; coupled with her newfound powers, she creates the possibility to disidentify from society. Unlike the characters in *American War* and *The Power* who struggled and worked within the established parameters of

their respective dystopian societies, Emiko simply chooses to remove herself. She does not attempt to subvert, change, or uphold any of the established ideology, but instead imagines an entirely different society. Emiko's fantasies echo such disidentification: "Out beyond the roped-off windows, the city glows. From a height it is beautiful. Without natural people in it, she thinks that she could even enjoy it here. She drinks more water" (361). This excerpt foreshadows the conclusion of the novel, in which the city no longer contains "natural people." Within the scope of the narrative, despite Emiko's fantasies, she never reaches the New People village, nor confirms its existence. By following this sentiment with her drinking of water, Bacigalupi seems to make explicit the connection to Bangkok's future floods. In the end, she manages to enjoy the city after its flooding and human evacuation.

The nativist rhetoric encountered in Thai ideology can be considered to partake in colonial dialectic by participating within the paradigm of Us/Self vs. Them/Other. In the Thai Kingdom's attempts to survive as a nation-state among powerful agricultural multinational corporations, Bacigalupi explores the influence of nativist and colonial ideology within the dystopian society as the world economy becomes increasingly globalized and demanding of a free market. Anderson Lake is also treated with nativist prejudices during his stay in the Thai Kingdom. As a Caucasian outsider, he is often described as a "farang," meaning white foreigner, or "yang guizi," meaning foreign devil:

> Sometimes, Hock Seng thinks *yang guizi* are too stupid to have possibly taken over the world once, let alone twice. That they succeeded in the Expansion and then—even after the energy collapse beat them back to their own shores—that they returned again, with their calorie companies and their plagues and their patented grains… They seem protected by the supernatural. (40, emphasis in original)

Thus, Anderson Lake, as a foreigner, is still discriminated against due to nativist ideology, but his treatment differs from the other foreign characters in that his Western provenance and social capital provide more respect and tolerance. Although considered "stupid" and devils, their colonial objectives have allowed "yang guizi" to both physically and economically expand and

take over the world on two separate occasions. These colonial connotations are entrenched within Lake's social identity: he is both hated and distrusted as a foreigner, but also grudgingly respected for his country's power.

5.1.2 Neoliberalism: Isolationism versus Globalization

Although historically Thailand has never been colonized, as a developing nation in the East, it constructed an economic policy that permits foreign investment and technological advancement through globalized information trade. *The Windup Girl* is influenced by such colonialist presence and resistance to globalization by portraying the Thai Kingdom as an isolationist nation whose government agencies—the Environment Ministry, aka white shirts, and the Trade Ministry—are either opposed to or in support of foreign entry and Thai integration into the international market. Like *American War* and *The Power*, which portray an oppositional binary between two social identity groups based on traditional hostilities, the Thai Kingdom's factional enmity is reminiscent of Thailand's own conflict between the yellow shirts—elitist, royalist, oligarchic and military supporters—and red shirts—rural-based supporters, students, and populists. The ensuing conflicts regarding elitism, redistribution of wealth, and corruption led to a military coup in 2010 that shut down most of Bangkok.

Thailand's "royal nationalist" ideology promoted by both camps and considered almost a civic religion, has always been founded on the notion that the stability and prosperity of the nation require that "'good people' […] be subject to no formal mechanism of accountability at all" (Ferrara 34). These "good people" exercise authority over the nation, protect the monarchy, and enforce a social hierarchy via institutional power. Thus, the ideology of "royal nationalism places anyone who questions 'natural' hierarchies of status and power, underwritten by convenient interpretations of Buddhist ideas of merit and karma, beyond the pale of true 'Thainess'" (38). It seems that Bacigalupi foreshadows these historic events within his own

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novel when depicting the nuanced conflict between both ministries, who, in their efforts to establish control over government administration as the true "good people", pledge their loyalty and allegiance to the Child Queen and enforce the "natural" hierarchies present within the dystopian society that attempt to distinguish and exalt true "Thainess." As previously discussed, the notions of karma and Buddhist theology are utilized to reinforce such social status. Corruption, due to such a lack of accountability, is rampant in the Thai Kingdom in which both Trade and Environment Ministry officials take bribes and show favoritism to true Thais or "good people."

Locating the novel in Thailand, and with the Trade Ministry's desire for globalization, speaks to the neoliberal nature of the novel. This administration seeks to open the borders of the Thai Kingdom to the globalized market, seemingly irrespective of the effects that this may have on the environment. As such, the ecological crisis encountered within the novel is not deemed a consequence of globalized capitalism; instead, the environmental catastrophe is ignored and considered an opportunity to further enable and sanction neoliberal practices that participate in and expand the world's capitalist economy. This causes estrangement from the environment because it disregards the harmful effects of consumerism while requiring the constant expansion of the market and increasing inclusion of products. Any attachment or "affective ties with the material environment" (Tuan 93) is negated and substituted by a promotion and dependency on an ecologically destructive market that is constantly spreading and mobilizing. Globalization, thus, hinders interest in any local conditions and climate due to its expansionist, macroscopic driving force.

The Trade Ministry's focus on the deregulated, free market and economic growth is influenced by this notion of "royal nationalism" which seek no accountability or supervision and so promotes neoliberal ideology through notions of the "liberal promise" where "free economies and societies are able to manage adequately their conflicts" (Gutiérrez Sanín 14)

since there is no need for civil or environmental conflict if one has free trade. As such, through neoliberal democracy, "economies, societies, and polities are all isomorphic, which is to say not only that the more open they are, the better, but rather that openness in one domain has positive feedback effects in others" (14). In the case of the Trade Ministry, this institution considers these positive effects to be material, socioeconomic, and ecological: more products and materials to consume and trade, a more buoyant economy and social status, and a variety of agricultural products and technology to combat any plagues or environmental disasters.

Kanya, a Trade Ministry spy who works in the Environment Ministry, is aware of the power behind such economic promise: "How can one fight their money? Money is their power. Who remembers their patrons? Who remembers their obligations when money comes surging in as strong and deep as the ocean against the seawalls? […] We are not fighting the rising waters. We are fighting money" (Bacigalupi 244). In the face of capital, or money, environmental damages are forgotten. Trade, as the representative of money, and therefore economic power, is in ascension while the white shirts, plagued by corruption and forgetting their true objectives—to protect niche and nature—struggle against the "rising waters" and are blind to the "strong and deep" surges of foreign money.

In the novel, AgriGen, a hypercapitalist calorie company, functions as a colonial entity that attempts to eliminate the Thai Kingdom's isolationist culture which has allowed its people to produce and protect a rich and varied seedbank. The ideological and political landscapes of the dystopian society are influenced by the consumer society of the globalized world which has transformed into a "corpocracy" (Appleton 64) ruled by calorie companies that control the food market. In the attempt to create an alliance between the foreign calorie companies and the Trade Ministry, Anderson seeks a meeting with Trade Minister Akkarat to discuss a mutually beneficially arrangement, which would imply twisting him around his finger and turning "him into a good little administrator, like in India" (Bacigalupi 213). As with most colonial entities,

and with this reference to India, a historically colonized nation, Anderson wishes Akkarat to be a puppet for corporate interests. Calorie companies are "not in the nation-breaking business anymore. All we're interested in is a free market" (213). They simply wish for the Thais to "face outward instead of living in this absurd defensive crouch of theirs" so that their companies can expand and have "good business" (144). This description of the Thais almost as ignorant crouching savages and blind to the world is reminiscent of colonial discourse. The defensive crouch is considered absurd because, from a neoliberal perspective, globalization and free markets pose no true threat to their wellbeing. However, this does not erase the colonial undertones of Anderson's discourse, since, in a neoliberal, globalized world, influence over and unlimited access to the free market is the neo-colonial objective.

AgriGen and calorie companies in general are partaking in what Achille Mbembe defines as "infrastructural warfare" or an "orchestrated and systematic sabotage of the enemy's societal and urban infrastructure network" (82) that eradicates governmental control via the dissolution or elimination of administrations and civil services but retains the country's natural resources. Braidotti furthers this notion stating that Western coalitions, under the guise of "humanitarian aid," participate in wars which "are often neo-colonial exercises aimed at protecting mineral extraction and other essential geo-physical resources needed by the global economy" and so are considered more "privatized conflicts" (123). The calorie companies in *The Windup Girl* function using this neo-colonial imperative in that they seek to erase administrative infrastructure and protect the Thai Kingdom's natural resource (its seed bank). This privatized conflict is no longer interested in administrative control of colonized nations, but the authority over resources via free trade through a neoliberal economic policy.

Anderson acts as a representative for the company in its attempt to infiltrate and appropriate biological material. He offers Trade Minister Akkarat weapons and new wheat and rice variants as a way of combatting the nation's growing technological inequality. Anderson

stipulates that the opening of the Thai borders and inclusion of foreign scientists will be beneficial to the Thai population. Although wishing to open Thai borders and liberate the market, Akkarat is aware of the colonial nuances of Anderson's offer:

> Your people have tried to destroy mine for the last five hundred years. We have nothing in common […] Ever since your first missionaries landed on our shores, you have always sought to destroy us. During the old Expansion your kind tried to take every part of us. Chopping off the arms and legs of our country. It was only through our Kings' wisdom and leadership that we avoided your worst. And yet still you weren't done with us. With the Contraction, your worshipped global economy left us starving and over-specialized. (Bacigalupi 216)

This was followed by the calorie plagues which almost exterminated any rice variant. Both Anderson and Akkarat understand that there is power in who controls the market. Thus, Akkarat and Thai officials utilize a sense of nativism or Thainess within the country to foment feelings of prejudice and rejection so as not to participate in foreign trade and thus benefit from Thai exclusivity. This passage alludes to the West's history of colonial exploitation in Thailand. Western notions of liberating the market and scientific progress have traditionally come at the expense of the East. The notion of Us versus Them is rooted in the Other's destruction.

In their endeavor to monopolize the food market, calorie companies introduced genetically modified plants and seeds while creating diseases that destroyed any non-patented or non-calorie company products. However, the diseases mutated and annihilated most countries' food supplies. As a result, calorie companies must constantly provide new variants of seeds and food stock so as to combat the continuous disease mutation. Thus, from the Thais' perspective, Western interests, especially the calorie companies, have sought their destruction and division, and any dependence on multinational, globalized corporations has resulted in starvation, over-specialization, and plague as they become victims to the whims and benefits of others:

> The company goes in somewhere and we all stand back and wash our hands. Pretend like we weren't the ones responsible. The company pulls SoyPRO from the Burmese market, and we all stand aside, saying intellectual property disputes aren't our department. But people starve just the same. (9)

Such new versions of immune crops are utilized as weapons and tools of political manipulation to oppress and control countries which are dependent on such scientific advances. Only the Thai Kingdom remains against such neo-colonial advancement. However, Akkarat's desire to open the country's borders to non-calorie foreign businesses inherently grants calorie companies access in that they control most of the globalized economy. In its attempts to establish a neoliberal economy and free market, the Trade Ministry is opening itself to colonialist attempts.

As opposed to the Trade Ministry that wishes to expand commerce with foreigners, the Environment Ministry seeks closed borders to protect Thai citizens and land from foreign disease and speculation. Within the postimperial paradigm and as a reaction against colonialism, "no political tenet commands more audible assent than that of national sovereignty. 'We' aren't to be ruled by others, captive to a foreign occupation; 'we' must be allowed to rule ourselves" (Appiah, *The Lies That Bind* 69). So that, within the Thai Kingdom, the Environment Ministry's "royal nationalism" is imbued with this extreme desire to reject any foreign attempts at national sovereignty. The social identity or "We" is defined by such opposition to any foreign intervention or globalized, capitalist influence: Thais must rule themselves and maintain strong borders.

Bangkok, especially, serves as a microcosm and synecdoche of the Thai Kingdom itself. The late king Rama XII declared that Bangkok would not be abandoned and "fall to the likes of the *farang* the way that Ayutthaya fell to the Burmese so many centuries before" (Bacigalupi 243). He created the Environment Ministry as a resistance to foreign invaders and ecological disasters alike. The Ministry must operate the city's defense, charged with "the building of the great levees and the tide pools that would buffer the city against the wash of monsoon flood and the surge of typhoon waves" so that "Krung Thep would stand" firm against human and environmental threats (243). However, Thai culture and fear of environmental devastation has

waned, and most ministry white shirts are simply corrupt officials who are bribed in exchange for allowing illegal, ecologically detrimental practices and materials to be used.

The conflict between the Trade and Environment Ministries is, therefore, based on ideological influence and determined on a social scale: the former seeks economic profit by introducing a foreign, neoliberal market, whereas the latter wishes to maintain institutional authority but is likewise motivated by economic benefit via a domestic market. The novel describes this tension between both ministries within the city as indicative of a period of flux: "And beyond the factories, the rim of the seawall looms with its massive lock system that allows the shipment of goods out to sea. Change is coming. The return to truly global trade. Supply lines that circle the world. It's all coming back, even if they're slow at relearning" (91). The seawall and lock system that function as the city's only defense against the ocean is no longer considered dangerous or a threat to humanity. Instead, its connotations indicate ambition and business opportunities that allow the "shipment of goods." The return to the use of the ocean or nature as tools for human economic benefit demonstrates the onslaught of change and "return to truly global trade" and the free market. Humanity is circling back, learning nothing from its mistakes, because capitalism is so deeply entrenched within social practices and ideology. Both factions ignore the true threat to "Thainess" and the kingdom: rising water levels and ecological disaster, i.e., nature.

The consequent neglect of its duties and corruption is evidenced in the Environment Ministry's buildings:

> There is mold on the walls and chunks of the edifice are cracking under the pressure of vines. An old *bo* tree leans against a wall, rotting, underlining their failures. It has lain so for ten years, rotting. Unremarked amongst the other things that have also died. There is an air of wreckage to the place, of jungle attempting to reclaim what was carved from it. (175)

The Environment Ministry is exclusively focused on social affairs and personal benefit instead of maintaining its headquarters. This is all representative of the Ministry's decline and social

decadence. The environment is slowly invading the buildings and producing rot and wreckage. It is reclaiming its territory and encroaching on the human and artificial: "Jaidee eyes the building, wondering if the Ministry has come to crisis thanks to overreaching, or because of its phenomenal success. People have lost their fear of the outside world. Environment's budget shrinks yearly while that of Trade increases" (175). Funds are no longer allocated to environmental protection but economic expansion and globalization.

Before the introduction of neoliberal ideology, "the Ministry was a hero of the people, it was different […] their white uniforms inspiring respect and adoration" (175). Yet now, due to corruption and a desire for capital gain instead of environmental protection, white shirts are feared. At the sight of a white shirt, civilians now "Flinch and run. [Jaidee] is a bully, he thinks sourly" (175). Jaidee's social identity has shifted according to Trade's ascendency and a resurgence of capitalism; instead of being respected and adored, he is now considered a bully. For Jaidee, hard borders and hard enforcement are the only legitimate ways of being a "good person" and expressing "Thainess" in this ecologically ravaged dystopia. To not maintain such strict measures would allow the nation's citizens to become lax in their diligence and believe the problem resolved. However, his social identity is shifting, and severe measures are no longer acceptable as "Thainess" is now expressed via the acceptance of more expansionist, ambitious beliefs.

Jaidee, considered the Tiger of Bangkok by his contemporaries, represents the traditional paragon of Thai virtue and of a "good person." He is a royal nationalist who values the Environment Ministry's original ideological tenets: protect Thai ecological interests and maintain and isolate the local Thai niche, defending it against any foreign invasion: economic or environmental.[49] In doing so, Jaidee is the only incorruptible white shirt, which grants him fame, loyalty, and a mass following.

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[49] Until now, references to "niche" have mostly alluded to geographical and environmental connotations. However, it is important to note that this term also includes an economic definition that refers to a segment in the

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Jaidee leads "His men. His loyal children. His sons. The foolish followers of ideals and the Queen, joining his call, the ones who cannot be bribed, the ones who hold all of the honor of the Environment Ministry in their hearts" (73). He attempts to distinguish himself and his men as true supporters of the Queen and royal nationalists. Their supposed incorruptibility grants them social honor as he creates a large following or family of loyal children that elevate his social identity. However, as previously mentioned, strict isolationist and "honorable" ideology is losing relevance. Fighting for traditional ecological sanctions is no longer economically beneficial. Thus, white shirt recruits no longer wish to join Jaidee's family:

> Cadets say that being under Captain Jaidee is like starving of *akah* worms. You work and work and get skinnier and skinnier. These are good boys we have, but they can't help but feel ashamed when they have old uniforms and their comrades have new crisp ones. When they ride a bicycle two at a time, and their comrades ride kink-spring scooters. (122)

Those who accept bribes and succumb to allowing an open market grow more economically powerful. The incorruptible legion constantly works but is given no capital reward as their bodies are exploited and they grow skinny. There is no longer pride at their incorruptibility, as Jaidee's group is described as parasitic: a leech on both the workers' bodies and on society and the economy. The fact that his followers are ashamed of their old, outdated uniforms and materials while other white shirts enjoy new uniforms and more efficient and spacious forms of transportation indicates the evolution to more consumerist, capitalist beliefs that require new, updated materials and commodities.

The Environment Ministry's corruption not only allows economic benefit, but also social status. People join this workforce because it has "potential to pay well and a pretty girl might pay attention to a man dressed in white, a man who also had the authority to shut down her *pad thai* cart" (275). White shirts gain romantic attention and are desired due to their social

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market. One can say that the Environment Ministry's preoccupation can be considered twofold: a desire to control the spread of plagues and environmental destruction by closing borders, but also a desire to dominate and, thus, exclusively profit from the Thai market. The latter aim holds capitalist connotations and thus opens the system to corruption and bribery.

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status but also their administrative authority. Their institutional power grants them elevated social identities. The white shirt is an ironic symbol: those who should be clean and pure in their white, rather are stained by their corruption.

This change in ideology is shown via Jaidee's fall from grace. As the Tiger of Bangkok, Jaidee functions as a representative of the entire Environment Ministry, and along with his social descendance, so too does his administration lose social influence over the nation's ideological leanings. In the excerpt in which he is expelled from the Ministry and publicly humiliated by showing obeisance to Trade Minister Akkarat, the narrative describes the Ministry's interior and decorative depiction of the fall of Old Thailand: "The *farang* releasing their plagues on the earth, animals and plants collapsing as their food webs unravelled" while the nation's human forces struggle to survive and fight *"back the rising seas and plagues"* (204). In these images, the Thai Kingdom is depicted as a survivor against crippling invasion, persisting "through the disintegration, ideological and infrastructural, of capitalist-driven agribusiness" (Hageman 288). The Environment Ministry's propaganda situates the Thai Kingdom as the last remaining nation-state of the globe that struggles against the corporate heterogenous multitude.

At the Thai Kingdom's initial resistance to globalization and expansion immediately after the original onset of calorie company plagues, the Western corporations threatened an embargo on their continuously updated, disease-resistant goods. However, the Thai Kingdom embraced such an embargo because

> the Thai Kingdom was still alive. Against all odds, they were alive. As others were crushed under the calorie companies' heels, the Kingdom stood strong. *Embargo!* Chaiyanuchit had laughed. *Embargo is precisely what we want! We do not wish to interact with their outside world at all.* And so the walls had gone up—those that the oil collapse had not already created, those that had not been raised against civil war and starving refugees—a final set of barriers to protect the Kingdom from the onslaughts of the outside world. (Bacigalupi 173, emphasis in original)

Thus, the Environment Ministry becomes characterized by its barriers and walls: a resistance to interconnectedness with the outside world, rejoicing in international embargoes and defined by an isolationist "royal nationalism." However, nature, diseases, and plagues are immune to manmade borders, so white shirts initially fought endlessly, even futilely, to prevent their entry and spread. The Environment Ministry was originally a "hive of activity" with white shirts "rushing from office to street as they tried to maintain tabs on thousands of hazards. In no other ministry was the sense of urgency so acute. Plagues waited for no one" (173). The white shirts' responsibility expanded to include fights against plague, rising water levels with construction of dikes and levees, overseeing energy consumption and licensing of power production, and monitoring of disease spread. Initially characterized as in constant conflict with the Trade Ministry's neoliberal desire to eliminate any barriers to the free market, the Environment Ministry's own walls prove permeable and impermanent, like the walls of their headquarters that are filled with mold and vines. The Environment Ministry's barriers begin to transform into "the walls of neoliberalism [which] are condemned for being exceedingly permeable to capital and commodities while remaining impermeable to human immigrants" (Hageman 291) by accepting bribes for the introduction of foreign commerce while simultaneously victimizing non-Thai residents.

Echoing this sentiment of righteousness and correctness simply for being alive, Kanya thinks,

> *We are alive. We are alive when whole kingdoms and countries are gone. When Malaya is a morass of killing. When Kowloon is underwater. When China is split and the Vietnamese are broken and Burma is nothing but starvation. The Empire of America is no more. The Union of the Europeans splintered and factionalized. And yet we endure, even expand. The Kingdom survives. Thank the Buddha that he extends a compassionate hand and that our Queen has enough merit to attract these terrifying* farang *tools without which we would be completely defenseless.* (Bacigalupi 306, emphasis in original)

Kanya believes that the Thai Kingdom is correct in its policies because they are the sole surviving nation-state when countries such as China, Vietnam, the United States, the European

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Union, etc. have not endured. The mention of Buddha speaks to the notion of karma. Thai citizens, as "good people" in their "Thainess," deserve such survival and unity while others do not. Buddha and their karma have allowed them to live, endure, and expand. As previously discussed, the notion of karma and Buddhism also serve as a vehicle to incorporate neoliberal ideals within Thai ideology. As a proper "royal nationalist," Kanya also attributes this survival to the Child Queen. The Queen has "enough merit" to attract foreign investors whose tools contribute to Thai continuity and success. Yet, this allowance and participation in a globalized market, however controlled and minute, invites neoliberal influences. The Thai Kingdom is unable to simply extricate only the advantageous, expedient elements and tools of the free market from its consequent interconnectedness. By participating within the structures of capitalism and the globalized market, the dystopian society can no longer distance and fully isolate itself from its effects. Thus, the Environment Ministry does not fully embody the opposition to neoliberalism, but is, in fact, infused with neoliberal ideology in its justification for its actions.

5.2 Natural Power and Power Over Nature

Although all three novels include a connection between humanity and nature within their narratives, *The Windup Girl* provides a special focus on the dynamic between these two and how it informs social identity. As previously discussed, Bacigalupi's world is characterized by the incredible scientific progress that has allowed humanity to profoundly influence nature, especially via genetic engineering. Humanity's destructive effect on the environment occurred due to capitalist interests as calorie companies sought a monopoly on food production and patenting; they created agricultural plagues and pests to eliminate non-patented food strains and create their own, disease-resistant variants.

This hypercapitalist production and consumption of goods and crops has created a commodification of all life in which generippers are "busily toying with the building blocks of life" (Bacigalupi 93). The effects of such commodifying practices highlight the Anthropocenic nature of the novel in which human agency enacts material, global change on nature so that "humankind has become a global geological force in its own right" (Steffen, Grinevald, et al. 843). Will Steffen et al. define "global change" as the "biophysical and the socioeconomic changes that are altering the structure and the functioning of the Earth System," which include "land use and land cover, urbanisation, globalisation, coastal ecosystems" and "food chains, biological diversity, population, economy, resource use, energy, transport, communication, and so on" (615). In the novel, capitalist practices seeking to foment market profits and gain control of the economy have produced biophysical changes, especially. The novel begins by making the conflation between hypercapitalism and the Anthropocene explicit: "A unique gene that resists a calorie plague or utilizes nitrogen more efficiently sends profits sky-rocketing" (Bacigalupi 4). Through the extreme urbanization of Bangkok, to neoliberal globalization and food and population control, humankind attempts to elevate profit margins while disregarding any unsustainable, damaging effects on nature. Thus, the Anthropocene and its effects grant humanity more institutional and individual power over nature and one another. As such, this section will analyze the effects of such power within society and its consequent disidentification.

5.2.1 Institutional Power, Control, and Human Waste

In an attempt to control nature so as to better meet the needs of humanity and the market, capitalist practices and institutions "sought to emancipate human beings from their dependence on chance, brought about a form of securitization that changed the understanding of Nature from an entity on which one depended into an entity that posed a threat" (Marzec 20). This

leads to the environment becoming associated with notions of "risk and endangerment" (20), which can negatively affect labor and production, so that humanity seeks independence from and control over the natural world. For all the Thai Kingdom's manipulation and commodification of life and the environment, their additional bureaucratic attempts at regulation via administrative permissions and ministerial paperwork is quite useless. Accreditations and stamps that mark food as disease-resistant "are more talismanic than functional, something to make people feel secure in a dangerous world. In truth, if cibiscosis[50] breaks out again, these certificates will do nothing. It will be a new variation, and all the old tests will be useless" and people will die as they "all cough up the meat of their lungs no matter how many Environment Ministry stamps adorn their produce" (Bacigalupi 4). This notion of true control and power over the environment is a myth; a social construct that allows its citizens to feel secure in this dangerous environment. As a result, humanity constructs its social identity based on this fallacy which marks humans as superior in the natural order.

Furthermore, Bacigalupi depicts humanity's desire for power and control over the environment from highly specialized and specific New People creation to the resistance to the almost inevitable rising sea levels in Bangkok. Governmental institutions also attempt to maintain power and humanity's superior hierarchy by clinging to a defense system against the ocean: "Her Royal Majesty the Child Queen now supports that we shall never abandon Krung Thep to the invasions of the rising sea. We will not flee from our City of Divine Beings the way the cowards of Ayutthaya fled from the Burmese" (169). The ocean is described as an invasive threat which must be fought. To not heed the institutional commands would assign one the identity of a coward and would lead to a loss of social power. Control over the environment leads to control over society and social identity, so it is imperative to maintain humanity's

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[50] Cibiscosis is a fictional mutated plague encountered in food that brings about famine and death.

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independence and securitization. Ironically, such safety is acquired through methods and practices that are proven detrimental to the environment:

> Just beyond, the dike and lock system of King Rama XII's seawall looms, holding back the weight of the blue ocean. It's difficult not to always be aware of those high walls and the pressure of the water beyond. Difficult to think of the City of Divine Beings as anything other than a disaster waiting to happen. But the Thais are stubborn and have fought to keep their revered city of Krung Thep from drowning. With coal-burning pumps and leveed labor and a deep faith in the visionary leadership of their Chakri Dynasty, they have so far kept at bay that thing which has swallowed New York and Rangoon, Mumbai and New Orleans. (10)

Bangkok depends on an antiquated dike and lock system and seawall that attempt to hold the dangerous, powerful ocean at bay. The building pressure of the water foreshadows the conclusion of the novel in which the system is sabotaged and fails, leading to the flooding of the city. Regardless of this imminent disaster "waiting to happen," Thai social identity, their stubbornness, requires them to maintain this city. Ironically, their only recourse is unsustainable and detrimental: they use "coal-burning pumps and leveed labor" to keep the waters at bay so as not to succumb to the geographical changes they have caused. Their society identity as courageous and stubborn and their national pride and desire for differentiation from other countries requires an emancipation from nature rooted in capitalist practices that will eventually backfire.

Power over nature is not humanity's only objective within the novel, as previously mentioned; *The Windup Girl* also explores the commodification and control of the biological, i.e., the living. As such, biological existence or life becomes political because it passes "into knowledge's field of control and power's sphere of intervention" granting power not only dominion over subjects in death but also "mastery" over living beings. (Foucault, *The History of Sexuality* 142). In order to "take charge of life," institutional power requires "continuous regulatory and corrective mechanisms" that work to distribute "the living in the domain of value and utility" by qualifying, measuring, and hierarchizing (144). In *The Windup Girl*, institutional

power takes charge of life by assigning hierarchical social identities to the living and regulating their labor power. Jaidee, as a powerful member of a Thai institution, understands that

> All life produces waste. The act of living produces costs, hazards and disposal questions, and so the Ministry has found itself in the center of all life, mitigating, guiding and policing the detritus of the average person along with investigating the infractions of the greedy and short-sighted, the ones who wish to make quick profits and trade on others' lives for it. (Bacigalupi 174)

Capitalist overconsumption and high waste production is not only present in products, but in the commodification and regulation of the living. The Environment Ministry, an entity with a strict nativist ideology that seeks to protect the "good people" of the Thai Kingdom against all foreign, invasive life and product, is granted the power to mitigate, guide, and police human life and social identity. All foreign entities must be eliminated and deemed subpar, while any greedy or short-sighted Thai citizens must be investigated and punished. White shirts do not only regulate environmental practices and, in theory, maintain sustainable action, but they also have the power to construct social identities and mold identity groups. This leads to a division or hierarchization that susses out acceptable human capital from superfluous human waste. In doing so, the Environment Ministry becomes the center of all social and biological life.

This dichotomy is present in the geographical and social restrictions of the novel. Bangkok's slums and factory district are representative of the social and environmental degradation and wastage throughout the dystopia. The calorie companies, via Anderson SpringLife factory, are "spending millions to produce trash that will cost millions more to destroy— a double-edged sword that just keeps cutting" (16). This is the epitome of waste: the true objective of the calorie company is to infiltrate the Thai Kingdom and gather intelligence; to do so, they spend millions and waste energy and limited resources on the production of kink springs as a cover. Such wastage emulates capitalist consumerist practices that, for the sake of profit and a dynamic market, produce extensive amounts of refuse with no regard to the exploited environment or people.

Within a capitalist society, and especially in the novel, human waste is not only exemplified in the discard of products and residue, but also in the construction of "wasted humans" who are "no longer necessary for the completion of the economic cycle and thus impossible to accommodate within a social framework resonant with the capitalist economy" (Bauman, *Identity* 40). Bauman identifies that in the globalized era of human waste in which there is no longer a "waste disposal industry" where these harmful practices are confined to only one area of the globe, the problem with capitalism is no longer solely one of exploitation but also exclusion. Thus, it is exclusion that "underlies the most conspicuous cases of social polarization, of deepening inequality, and of rising volumes of human poverty, misery and humiliation" (41). Characters in *The Windup Girl*, excluded based on their bodies and nativist ideology, are considered waste. Regulatory institutional power polarizes and hierarchizes these figures by constructing their social identity, which is, thus, based on exclusion and consequent poverty, misery, and humiliation. This power is so entrenched within the dystopian society that these "wasted" individuals adopt and assimilate such notions. For instance, based on social discourse and treatment, Emiko originally believes herself to be "nothing but a windup. She was a fool. She was stupid to hope that he would see her as a person, a woman, as anything other than offal" (Bacigalupi 157). Emiko, as a New Person in the Thai Kingdom, is banned and demeaned so that she believes herself actual waste or "offal." The governmental powers that have deemed her illegal and prohibit her entry into the legal market function as a method of social exclusion. She is neither a person nor a woman, she is a posthuman, and the dystopian society and Thai government consider her inferior and unequal.

Hock Seng, as previously mentioned, is also qualified as socially inferior by these practices of power. In the scene in which a posthuman megodont is slain, and following its body being dismembered, members of the Dung Lord's company or gang arrive to gather the animal's offal. They collect the offal, "a lucky source of calories. With such a clean source, the

offal will likely go to feed the pigs of the Dung Lord's perimeter farms, or stock the yellow card food lines feeding the Malayan Chinese refugees who live in the sweltering old Expansion towers under the Dung Lord's protection" (32). Whatever is not consumed will be used as compost and a methane energy source. The Dung Lord's "good monopoly" (Bacigalupi 32) on human waste indicates also the status of yellow cards as wasted humans in the Thai Kingdom. This offal that originates from a dead animal's stomach is used to feed both pigs and Malayan Chinese refugees. Their needs and social identity are one level above methane composting and comparable to farm animals. The "sweltering old Expansion towers" is analogous, then, to the perimeter farms in that both house subhuman creatures excluded from power are utilized, if at all, as corporeal commodities.

The yellow cards occupy a liminal position in the Thai Kingdom; they are within and outside of society, similar yet alien, human yet non-native. Because of this dual, antithetic positionality, yellow cards, as refugees, can be considered "a constant threat to the image of order, signaling the horrifying impossibility of occupying one pure and distinct position" so that "the life of the refugee is strictly regulated and restricted by the law" (Diken 84). Obsessed with control and securitization, dystopian powers within the novel attempt to eliminate such individuals by constructing an inferior social identity, regulating yellow cards' employment opportunities so as to equate them to "waste" or, as Braidotti states, "disposable humanity" (127). The Environment Ministry rejects these Malayan Chinese refugees and wishes they return or remain "on the other side of the border. A Malayan problem. The problem of another sovereign country. Not a problem for the Kingdom at all. But Her Royal Majesty the Child Queen is merciful, compassionate" (Bacigalupi 298). However, the Child Queen's compassion only extends to allowing the refugees to remain in the Thai Kingdom. No institutional or political practices are put in place to protect these liminal figures and incorporate or assimilate them within Thai culture and economy. Although they are exploited for the few calories of their

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bodies, the Environment Ministry and other administrations still consider them "a problem" that should be discarded and disposed of over the border.

Within the novel, power is granted not only through the control and hierarchization of life, but also through public perception and standing. Bacigalupi incorporates the East Asian cultural concept of losing face, which refers to the notion of public humiliation that leads to a drop in social prestige or reputation. The loss of face threatens one's place within the social order by associating with less powerful social identity and status. Within the novel, both Ministries are constantly vying to gain social power by saving or gaining face, while making their counterpart and its constituents and supporters lose face.

As a devotee of the Environment Ministry's cause, the powerful, incorruptible Tiger of Bangkok, Jaidee, believes himself impervious to such attempts—on behalf of the Trade Ministry and Akkarat—to make him and the Environment Ministry lose face. Jaidee ransacks and destroys a particularly important delivery of illegal foreign goods, which makes Trade Minister Akkarat lose face: "Minister Akkarat is still smiling, but the Japanese want reparations for their losses and the white shirts will never give them. So either Akkarat will pay to make up for what the Tiger of Bangkok has done, or he will lose face to the Japanese as well" (137). This destruction of goods is a blow to the Thai free market, and so the loss of capital, products, and free enterprise in this neoliberal dystopia equates to the loss of face since Trade Minister Akkarat's prestige and reputation, i.e., his social identity, is linked to the maintenance and promotion of these economic practices. This is used as an opportunity for political propaganda to further devalue the Trade Ministry as an incompetent, weak entity that cannot protect its goods: "General Pracha's radio stations are calling Jaidee a tiger and hero, and the student associations have been calling for the Trade Ministry to be closed down and placed under the white shirts. The Trade Ministry lost face" (136–37). Jaidee's actions have gained him more face. He is rejoiced as a hero and tiger, "a Queen's Tiger" (139), marking him as a "good person"

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a proper Thai "royal nationalist" that acts as a predator and protector of Thailand. Such a rise in status grants all white shirts more power and a higher status, i.e., a more favored social identity. As such, the Environment Ministry believes itself justified in overthrowing the government administration and gaining more institutional power.

As a result of Jaidee's actions, the Trade Ministry seeks retribution using institutional power to eliminate individual power and thus de-construct Jaidee's social identity. The administration kidnaps his wife in order to force him to publicly debase himself, appease all foreign traders, and force the Environment Ministry to lose face instead. In a public humiliation ceremony surrounded by the Trade Ministry and its transnational corporate allies, Jaidee must ask for forgiveness and become a monk as penance for false, fabricated crimes in exchange for the hope of his wife's safe return. The Trade Ministry's gaining face, and consequent social power, depicts the rise of neoliberal, globalized corporations within the dystopian society who seek "Money at any cost. Wealth at any price" (182), where the space for free trade must be allowed and defended above all else.

In front of his enemies and his peers, Jaidee must confess and ask for forgiveness. The only incorruptible white shirt must admit to corruption: to using institutional powers for his own benefit (207), which allowed him to elevate his social identity. In response to this apology, Akkarat attributes Jaidee's individual actions to institutional failures: "We accept the apologies of the Environment Ministry and the failures of General Pracha. We look forward to an improved working relationship in the future. Now that this snake has had its fangs pulled" (208). Jaidee becomes a stand-in or synecdoche for the administration itself. By suppressing and dismantling Jaidee's social identity and forcing him to lose face to the entire Thai Kingdom, Akkarat gains power over the Environment Ministry. Akkarat's reference to the snake can pertain to both Jaidee as an individual and the Ministry as a whole: both the person and the institution have been defanged, they have lost social influence. The Tiger's fall is proof of the

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Environment Ministry's decay, which can be seen in the deterioration of its headquarters, and through the decline of its power or face.

This emergence of the Trade Ministry reflects the formal advent of neoliberalism via the acceptance and support of a global corpocracy. It is now "a very bad time to be an enemy of the foreign devils. With Akkarat in ascendancy, the *farang* are also on the rise. Every day brings more news of white shirt humiliation. The Tiger of Bangkok is now a shaven-headed monk without family or property" (231, emphasis in original). Their loss of face brings social humiliation and a shift in the power attributed to their social identities. Jaidee is no longer considered a tiger, but an ascetic monk. The fact he no longer owns property contributes the value placed on ownership of material goods and possessions in Bacigalupi's capitalist society. Jaidee's lack of family also speaks to his lack of group belonging: he has been excluded from his biological family and his ministerial family.[51] The public admissions of his corruption also stain his comrades, however notorious already for their extortions and bribery, yet never having been publicly denounced nor punished. Thus, Jaidee's loss of face not only serves to remove him as a national heroic figure, but also sheds light on and shames all white shirts' corruption, which diminishes their social identities and aggravates public opinion.

The gaining and losing of face are almost cyclical in the novel. As soon as Jaidee enters monkhood, he seeks revenge against Trade, who he believes to be his wife's killers. He secrets into Trade headquarters, where he is eventually caught and killed. As a message, the Trade Ministry exhibits his dismembered body and sends over his remains to the Environment Ministry. Jaidee's connection to the white shirts persists as he becomes a figurehead for their campaign to regain face. He was considered "too well-loved to be cut into pieces, to be treated like offal that is dumped in methane composters. Someone must be punished. And if Trade is to blame, then trade must be punished" (320). As an individual, his behavior not only grants

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[51] As previously discussed, Jaidee often refers to his colleagues as family members, especially as his children.

him more power, but is also used as a justification for institutional action.[52] Jaidee's previous

fame and status as a well-loved "good person" prevents him from being treated like "human

waste" or offal such as New People and refugees. Instead, the beheading and brutalizing of his

corpse incite outrage at such treatment of a Thai citizen. His previous position of leadership and

his proper Thai features maintain a following, so his actions are justified and echoed by an

institution that seeks to regain its face. Jaidee's murder functions as an excuse to blame and

punish the Trade Ministry by attacking their allies: transnational corporations and their factories

or sites of production. They take to the streets to enact their revenge:

> They move in teams, hunting like jackals for wounded meat. Small shrines to Jaidee
> have appeared before store fronts and homes. His image surrounded by flickering
> candles and draped with marigolds, displaying solidarity and begging for protection
> against white shirt rage. Accusations fill the airwaves on National Radio. General
> Pracha speaks of the need to protect the Kingdom from those—carefully unnamed—
> who would topple it. (289)

In their desire for vengeance, the white shirts become animalized. They are predatory in their

rage and strengthen their group solidarity through violence. Jaidee has become a new, saint-

like martyr used as an emblem to signal solidarity. By becoming such a figure, he has lost his

human, individual status and has become a religious idol. His social identity, thus, has gained

power by converting him into a tool for the strengthening or creation of community both within

the institution as in the general public. His death has become an excuse for political propaganda

to shore support and anger at a perceived threat.

As discussed in previous chapters, group belonging and solidarity is best fixed or

entrenched through factional violence. In *American War* this occurs with the conflict between

the North and South, in *The Power* group belonging is established with the gender/sex binary

and the struggle for women's supremacy in the Bessaparan revolution and the Cataclysm, and

in *The Windup Girl* factional violence is performed by the opposition between the Trade and

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[52] Bacigalupi portrays two individual characters whose actions have massive, institutional effects: Jaidee and
Emiko (discussed in later sections). However, Jaidee is eliminated due to his counter-identification with the
dystopian society's neoliberal values similar to Sarat.

Environment Ministries. In all three novels, these groups must seek dominance and eliminate the perceived threats to their lifestyles enacted by their enemy Other. Threats to one's group, or in this case the Thai nation, creates bonds for Thai citizens and support for those who openly seek their defense. The governmental institutions of the Thai Kingdom are based on their power and rule over the Thai people, who, theoretically, share a common ancestry which is what binds the social group: "Leaders can justify their actions and unite disparate classes and groups only through an appeal to the 'will of the people'" which creates and incites a more populist movement (Smith 12). Thus, in this case, General Pracha announces the need to protect the "will of the people" and unite Thai citizens against a common enemy, which justifies the white shirts' growing rage and violence. Of course, this defense against a threat is not really based on true worry and protection, but on a desire to regain or save face and maintain institutional power. As previously mentioned, the corruption of white shirts speaks to their desire to acquire wealth and social relevance instead of protecting and defending the environment and Thai niche. Because this "collective ethos" or ecological morality is no longer shared, "it can impose its claim to commonality only through violent means. In this sense, the collective ethos instrumentalizes violence to maintain the appearance of its collectivity" (Butler 4). Thus, the white shirts resort to rage and violence so as to better foment their collective unity, elevate social identity, and reclaim their social influence and power.

In fact, Bacigalupi demonstrates the Environment Ministry's ideological hypocrisy when discussing their exploitation of foreign scientists and technologies to maintain their independence from the global market and dominion of an extensive seedbank:

> *Farang* brought across at great expense, foreign experts used to transfer the viruses of their knowledge, the invasive concepts of their generip criminality to the Kingdom, the knowledge needed to preserve the Thai and keep them safe in the face of the plagues. […] Some of them have become *boddhis* in their own right, merciful spirits, dedicated to the salvation of an entire kingdom […] Teacher Lalji, looking like a small wizened *saddhu,* and the AgriGen Saint Sarah. The twinned *boddhis.* Male and Female, the calorie bandit and the generipper. The thief and the builder. (Bacigalupi 305, emphasis in original)

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Despite the Environment Ministry's supposed hatred of invasive, foreign elements, they rely on such technology to attain the appropriate knowledge to survive as a nation-state and retain their institutional power. Such "invasive concepts" of "generip criminality" are adopted and exploited by the Thai Kingdom for national socioeconomic and physical benefit. As such, the Environment Ministry needs to create an artificial differentiation between foreign agents: the *farang* enemies who seek the exploitation of the Thai Kingdom and are allies of the Trade Ministry; and the helpful "foreign experts" who are generippers and calorie company constituents but allies of the Environment Ministry. Thus, the latter's social identities are constructed in the social consciousness as "boddhis" or religious figures and spirits that protect the Thai Kingdom. There is no true distinction between Lalji and Sarah and other foreigners, so they must be construed as saddhus and saints. The dichotomy between twinned boddhis, male and female, thief and builder, speak to a notion of yin and yang, i.e., of a natural balance within the nation. However, this construction is false: one is a calorie bandit and the other a generipper, the very people who manipulate the natural order for economic gain. Yet the Environment Ministry, via its institutional power, instills such beliefs within Thai society and participates in the hierarchization of social identity: foreigners who ally with the Environment Ministry are revered as saints, those who ally with Trade are invasive threats.

As a means of justifying this hypocrisy, the Environment Ministry internally considered such foreign actors as tools to benefit the Thai Kingdom:

> *Take any tool you can find. Make it your own,* Jaidee said in times past, explaining why they consorted with the worst. Why they bribed and stole and encouraged monsters like Gi Bu Sen. *A machete doesn't care who wields it, or who made it. Take the knife and it will cut. Take the* farang *if they will be a tool in your hand. And if it turns on you, melt it down.* (306, emphasis in original)

These allies have lost their humanity and simply become public icons and institutional tools. They are crafted to become the Thai's own instruments, even though they are "monsters" or the "worst." Rebellion will be extinguished or "melted down" and the foreigners will lose their

legacy or status as local heroes or saints. This is a weak justification for participating in the system which they publicly condemn. By considering these workers tools, they enact capitalist and neoliberal conducts that commodify sentient beings and exploit them for their labor capital. This regard of *farangs* as tools in their hands eliminates any possible agency on behalf of these workers, but also depersonalizes any negative consequences since the hand that holds these tools is an institutional power which cannot hold personal accountability. The Environment Ministry, as an institution, is responsible for any effects on nature and the population that their investigation could have. However, the references to machetes and knives connotes the violent actions they have conducted against nature; yet, there is no responsibility assumed on behalf of the administration. The *farang* are knives that cut, but, as an institutional power, the Environment Ministry wields the knife and inflicts damages, choosing its victims.

Access and control of the Thai seedbank is considered "informational power" over genetic material, food security, and so living matter. And as Braidotti suggests, "What the neoliberal market forces are after, and what they financially invest in, is the informational power of living matter itself" (61). As such, all living matter, i.e., humans, flora, and fauna, are commodified, consumed, and used for profit: "Seeds, plants, animals and bacteria fit into this logic of insatiable consumption alongside various specimens of humanity" (63). Within the novel, both ministries fight for control over this informational power, i.e., the heart of the nation, because, with it, they not only control the economy but also the dystopian society itself. Association with the seed bank grants them the power to construct social identities and unite the population, allies becoming "good people" and enemies becoming detrimental to the "will of the people" and invasive. Ironically, when Anderson first approaches Trade Minister Akkarat for access to the Thai seedbank, the latter refuses: "I may want to see General Pracha with his hair and eyebrows shaved off, living in a forest monastery and despised by all, but on this, at least, he and I agree. No *farang* should ever touch the heart of us. You may take an arm or a leg

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from our country, but not the head, and certainly not the heart" (Bacigalupi 217, emphasis in original). Despite the factional animosity between both ministries, Akkarat considers them united against a larger enemy Other, the foreign invader. However, it seems that he is unaware that, thanks to the Environment Ministry, foreigners are already "touching the heart" of the Thai Kingdom.

Throughout the narrative, tensions between the two ministries increase. As previously discussed, as a result of Jaidee's murder, the white shirts begin to mobilize and increase their brutality. According to Gurr, in a violent mobilization, leaders openly and progressively voice perceived public grievance and "commit their followers to strategies of protest or rebellion. But once a group is committed to a particular strategy, self-sustaining conflict dynamics tend to develop: fighting groups and their opponents get locked into action-reaction sequences from which it is difficult to escape" (189). Bacigalupi displays this vicious cycle of violence between the two human factions as Jaidee attacks Trade shipments, Trade kidnaps and kills his wife, Jaidee attacks Trade headquarters and is killed, and the white shirts react violently to such a murder: "Violence, they understand. A soft Environment Ministry they ignored or scoffed at. But this Ministry—one with its batons swinging and spring guns ready to cut a body down—elicits a different response" (Bacigalupi 296). The characters within the novel believe that the only unifier and sustainer of power in this neoliberal dystopia is violence. It is the truth universally acknowledged that a soft approach causes ridicule and disregard, and, in contrast, a hard, rigid approach causes different reactions as it enforces citizens' awareness. Just as the *farang* scientists are weapons, machetes and knives, to be unjustifiably and hypocritically used, so too do the white shirts utilize batons and spring guns to create fear and obeisance, and thus gain power over society.

Trade Minister Akkarat seeks to profit from white shirt aggression by utilizing Kanya, Jaidee's former second-in-command and Trade Ministry spy, to attack Environment General

Pracha's allies as a way of angering them and eliminating previous favoritism and corrupt behavior. Pracha's closest friends and beneficiaries of economic preferential treatment "will now be enforced against as vigorously as the yellow cards in their towers. […] *This is the shape of our world,* she thinks. *Tit for tat until we're all dead and cheshires lap at our blood*" (302 emphasis in original). Through institutional power, the Trade Ministry is able to shift and devalue the enemy faction's social identities as they are granted the same status as abhorred yellow cards. Thus, this conflict and tension for power also entails a desire for power over social identity construction. This "particular strategy" of factional violence and bid for power is further sustained in the dystopian society whose "shape" enables the "tit for tat" that is incredibly difficult to escape. It seems that with the end of the passage, Bacigalupi alludes to the only viable conclusion within such a neoliberal dystopia: the end of humanity and rise of the posthuman. While these humans eliminate each other in these "action-reaction sequences," the posthuman cheshires are the stronger species, withdrawn and displaced from society's workings, and thus able to disidentify and overtake humanity, as symbolized by the consumption of their blood: humanity's lifeforce and energy source.[53]

A public revolution and mutual coup finally occur with the death of the Somdet Chaopraya, the Child Queen's protector and legal guardian, whose dark and insidious tastes have garnered him a terrifying reputation. The Somdet Chaopraya stands as an icon of the neoliberal dystopia of the novel. He is described as a man "intoxicated on [his] power and influence, [his] ability to bring nations to heel with the threat of a SoyPRO embargo. A hard, brutal man" (328) who is the head of the Thai government and has control over most institutional and administrative functions. The death of the Somdet Chaopraya symbolizes the death of the Thai Kingdom, and both ministries blame each other:

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[53] The novel repeatedly equates blood, especially that of nonhuman or dehumanized and commodified figures, with calories. With the consumption of their blood or calories, Bacigalupi renders humanity as lower within the natural order.

> It is one thing to plot coups and counter-coups, another to reach inside the palace. She feels like a bamboo leaf drowning in floodwater currents. *So we all go,* she tells herself. *Even the richest and the most powerful are only meat for cheshires in the end. We are all nothing but walking corpses and to forget it is folly.* (396, emphasis in original)

The Somdet Chaopraya exemplifies the palace itself, and the tension between the simple "action-reaction sequence" is undermined by his murder, calling for outright war and full destruction of the opposing faction. Kanya's thoughts reflect the nature of this dystopian system: the "richest and most powerful" remain individuals whose social identities are controlled and consumed by society. Any individual power and resistance are subsumed by dystopia so that individual bodies are "walking corpses" with no agency. However, the fact that humanity will eventually end up as "meat for the cheshires" signals their ultimate demise and the onset of posthuman power. In fact, Kanya's sensation of being "a bamboo leaf drowning in floodwater currents" foreshadows the ending of the novel in which a flood and destruction of the dike system eradicates human life within the city of Bangkok. Only the posthuman remains.

The fact that the leader's murder was committed by a New Person is also of special relevance as to the species' seizing of power. However, the humans within the novel are unable to believe that a single individual, with no institutional coercion or support, could perform such a momentous act. While investigating the crime, they consider this to be the act of a "demon" or "wild animal" as it is "the sort of thing a military genehack would do. We've seen this sort of activity in the north, where the Vietnamese operate. They use Japanese windups as scouts and shock troops" (397). By continuing to devalue and dehumanize Emiko, the Environment Ministry agents believe her to be an object or weapon used by foreign powers to destabilize the nation: an institutional power play. The white shirts are unable to consider this as an act of individual power, and instead focus on politics and factional tension: "Trade will say that we failed in this. That we allowed this animal into the country. They'll try to take advantage. Make a pretext out of it to seize more power […] We have to find out why this windup was here. If Akkarat has set us up, has used the Protector as a pawn, to seize power" (397). General Pracha

blames institutional power and leaders, "Trade" as an institution will attempt to seize the Environment Ministry's power, and Emiko's actions are attributed to the ministry's efforts to do so because she is nothing but a "whore and a windup" (400). Both ministries suspect and blame each other for this murder and are unable to decontextualize this crime.

Massive violence breaks out between both factions, as "people are shouting about white shirts and the death of their Queen's protector. Angry voices, ready for a riot. The storm is brewing. The battle pieces are being aligned" as the "political parties are already at work" (408) endeavoring to capitalize on such effusive reactions. Individuals are simply "battle pieces" that are used to gain or cement institutional power. The violence creates a populist movement on both sides in which "for every professional unit on the street, there are others, the volunteers and student associations and civilians and loyalists, mobilized by political factions" (447). Everyone is on the streets fighting to establish their status as Thai citizens, royal nationalists, and "good people." The political parties manipulate this nationalist ideology to their advantage as they seek pawns in their machinations and coups. However, by becoming these battle pieces, they all seek to claim allegiance and loyalty to the Child Queen and the factions and their enemies become indistinguishable. But Hock Seng's fellow refugee friend questions, "Does she even exist?" (447). The Child Queen is, thus, another political pawn to be used by the neoliberal dystopian society and its institutions to acquire submission and loyalty. She serves as an entity through which citizens construct their social identity as loyalist and nationalists, an icon which allows for group following and belonging.

The riots and violence incur more neoliberal practices and cement this economic ideology once the Trade Ministry gains control of the government and the white shirts surrender. Akkarat opens the Thai market and invites calorie company representatives and foreign traders into Bangkok and the seedbank:

> Kanya studies the people who used to be called calorie demons and who now walk so brazenly in Krung Thep, the City of Divine Beings. Crates of grain are coming off the

ship and being stacked on megodont wagons, the AgriGen logo prominent on every one. Seeming to sense her thoughts, Akkarat says, "We've passed the time when we can hide behind our walls and hope to survive. We must engage with this outside world." […] He turns to another *farang* and shakes hands with him in the foreign style. Speaks with him using the *Angrit* language and sends him on his way. (490–91, emphasis in original)

Where once calorie men were persecuted and victimized by white shirts and Thai citizens, they are now triumphant and enjoying the Thai Kingdom's resources after participating in the infrastructural warfare and destabilizing the Kingdom's institutions. The effects of the open market and globalized trade are visible with the brazen use of corporate logos and patented grain. Akkarat is a proponent of globalization and rejects previous isolationist practices. The "walls" or barriers that protected the Thai Kingdom and maintained its status as a nation-state are falling down as they are an obstacle to Thai survival within a neoliberal world. Bacigalupi shows the effects of corporate neo-colonization as Akkarat speaks in the Western foreign language and adopts their customs. In doing so, he loses social power: the foreigners do not assimilate and adopt his traditions and language, he must bend to theirs. The Western neoliberal "corpocracy" ultimately acquires the most institutional power that constructs social identities.

5.2.2 Action-Reaction Sequences: Humanity's Inability to Gain Individual Power

Jaidee is a representative of a good person and Thainess, but since he rejects neoliberal ideals by defending closed borders and markets, within this dystopian setting, this is insufficient to achieve individual power and survival. Instead of acting like most corrupt white shirts and requiring bribes and small shakedowns from the locals, "he chose a true enemy, an implacable and relentless one" (Bacigalupi 279). Reminiscent of Sarat in *American War*, Jaidee counter-identified with neoliberal society and so attacked the Trade Ministry, which, as the defender of the dystopian society, is both implacable and relentless in its destruction of any enemy or dissenter.

Although neoliberal karmic theology is used within Thai society to assuage its citizens in that death is transient and leads to rebirth, "the truth is that Jaidee is dead and they will never meet again and whatever Jaidee earned for his next life, whatever incense and prayers Kanya offers, Jaidee will never be Jaidee" (274). His social identity is fully erased by the dystopian society due to his desire for individual power in fighting such an implacable and formidable enemy, i.e., the dystopian system and power structure. Unlike Sarat, Jaidee is a well-known figure, and his death was greatly publicized. His Thainess still granted him an elevated status within Thai society, regardless of his counter-identification with neoliberal ideals. As a famous member of a large institution and by creating familial bonds within such a group, his death caused outrage at the "fall of the Tiger. The slaughter of their father. The living saint, fallen" (Bacigalupi 274). His death grants him the status of martyr as his social identity is exploited for institutional gain. The power he achieves is not truly his as a real, living individual, since after his public loss of face and humiliation he was excommunicated and excluded from society. Instead, the Environment Ministry appropriates his individuality and manipulates his social identity to incite public enmity against the Trade Ministry in an attempt to acquire more power. Jaidee is no longer identified as a true person, but his memory completely assumes the identity of tiger, father, and living saint. Ironically, this last moniker was granted to him posthumously, as he was never a living saint when actually living. With the connotations of these titles granted to Jaidee, the Environment Ministry gains authority through notions of Thainess—in reference to the native animal—and family and kinship as well as religious allusions.

As opposed to Jaidee, Hock Seng exalts neoliberal ideals but does not embody Thainess. Reduced to subhuman yellow card status, he clings to individual power and an elevated social identity. Thus, instead of simply surviving within the Thai Kingdom, he makes plans to profit and rebuild his trade company. Like the characters in *The Power* who adopt neoliberal ideals and thus gain or maintain power, Hock Seng attempts to do the same within *The Windup Girl*

through plans of stealing the SpringLife factory blueprints and selling them to the Dung Lord in exchange for permits and investment in a trading company. Hock Seng still considers himself a businessman, instead of a refugee, and thus, presents himself to Thai capitalists as such: "Tell the Dung Lord that Tan Hock Seng, head of the Three Prosperities Trading Company has a business proposal. Deliver my note to him and you will also profit greatly" (109). He continues to present his social identity as a prosperous trader, head of a trading company that no longer exists. His past neoliberal practices inform his self-construction, as he believes that any contact and support he sets up will allow him and his colleagues and surrounding personnel to "profit greatly" as well.

In the age of economic inequality brought about by globalization, "economic grievances become much more acute when they are attached to feelings of indignity and disrespect" so that what is considered to be "economic motivation actually reflects not a straightforward desire for wealth and resources, but the fact that money is perceived to be a marker of status and buys respect" (Fukuyama 7). Thus, money and economic gain contribute to the construction of an elevated social identity. When meeting with the Dung Lord and his associates, he feels no fear because he understands that "Dog Fucker is a businessman. He is not a white shirt, puffed on national pride or hungry for a little more respect. Dog Fucker works for money. Acts for money. He and Hock Seng are different parts of the economic organism, but underneath everything, they are brothers" (Bacigalupi 109). Those whose social identities are primarily formed by the nativist ideology of the Thai Kingdom are rigid and exclusionary. Businessmen, whose social identities are influenced by the neoliberal capitalism of the novel are united. They value money and profit above all as their group identity, or brotherhood, is oriented by the "economic organism" of the novel. All Hock Seng's acts are informed by his desire for money, which in turn grants him power.

However, what Hock Seng fails to understand is that the Thai Kingdom, as a dystopia, constructs rigid, exclusionary social identities. Although he is informed by and upholds neoliberal practices, he does not adopt nativist ideology nor acquire Thai forms of power. As such, he does not fully embody or identify with Thai society and so will always be considered the Other: "Every time he makes plans for his future, he seems to fail. Every time he reaches forward, the world leans against him, pressing him down" (111). Hock Seng wishes to rebuild his empire but is unable to do so due to the social pressures of the world pressing down against him. The individual power granted to him by profit and money is insufficient since he does not fully acclimate within society. Thus, as an individual, he fails as the world or dystopian society leans against and oppresses him.

Because Hock Seng has previously lived through a revolution, he is more attuned to antecedents that signal growing displeasure and social unease. Hock Seng realizes that a "storm is coming. Bloodshed and mayhem on the horizon" (405) and he believes himself better prepared for this eventuality, for "this time, he is ready. Hock Seng smiles to himself, examines his little bunker with its stores of money and gems and food" (405–06). Hock Seng continues to fight for a future solely using capitalist practices of storing capital and commodities. This is insufficient, though, because he does not factor in the nativist dystopian aspect and his lack of social identity and power. He cannot adequately prepare for this chaos and finally realizes this:

> Hock Seng feels old. Too old to still be striving against a fate that clearly wishes him destroyed. Another whisper sheet tumbles past. The headline screams of windup girls and murder. Amazing that Mr. Lake's windup could cause so much trouble. And now everyone in the city is hunting for her. He almost smiles. Even if he's a yellow card, he's not as disadvantaged as that sorry creature. He probably owes her thanks. If it hadn't been for her and the news of Mr. Lake's arrest, he supposes he would be dead by now, burned in the slums with all his jade and cash and diamonds. (463)

He understands that within the confines of this dystopian society, "fate" will wish his counter-identified social identity "destroyed." Because of Emiko's rebellion, or her power as a posthuman individual, in the murder of the Somdet Chaopraya, she is hunted. As Hock Seng

now understands his place within Thai society, he knows that his status as a yellow card grants him subhuman treatment and hierarchy. He realizes that Emiko's status as a "sorry creature" is much worse, inferior, and disadvantaged. If not for her actions, though, he would be dead among his material profit and capital. As another ripple effect or consequence to her self-defense, Hock Seng is able to live and survive society's fate. Emiko's action, thus, creates a small social rift that permits the existence of counter-identifying individuals. Although Hock Seng remains a part of this system in his ideals and acceptance of his status, Emiko's actions have granted him existence.

Throughout the novel, the tension between institutional and personal power is cyclical, based on action-reaction sequences. For example, as a reaction to the Environment Ministry burning her village because of plague spread, Kanya is recruited to infiltrate its headquarters and spy for the Trade Ministry by the local *jaopor* or "country godfather, working in concert with the enemies of the white shirts. Seeking revenge for the usurpation of his power" (388). These desires for revenge, thus, function as a response to the usurpation and elimination of personal autonomy and authority. However, this is prevented in a dystopian society and only leads to the sublimation of social identity as individuals become puppets for either Ministry. In Kanya's case, she is constantly referred to as serving two masters as she is under the influence of both the Environment and Trade Ministry.

As a Trade agent and Thai citizen, Kanya initially identifies with the neoliberal dystopian society and supports the ministry's bid for power. However, she is slowly influenced by Jaidee, the actual living person, not the Environment Ministry's icon. As such, she begins to adopt his beliefs as well as his social identity when she replaces him after his fall from grace and later death. By the end of the novel, after the violent conflict between both Ministries in which Trade is successful, she is disgusted by the invitation of foreign businesspeople and their access to the Thai seedbank.

Kanya, assumed to be a Trade sympathizer, is granted the role of leading the calorie company correspondents into the seed vaults, which triggers her to ponder

> the nature of loyalty. Better to give up a limb than to give up the head. The Kingdom survives when other countries fall because of Thai practicality. Kanya glances back at the *farang*. Their greedy pale eyes scan the shelves, the vacuum-sealed containers of thousands of seeds, each one a potential line of defense against their kind. The true treasure of a kingdom, laid out before them. The spoils of war. (493)

So far, she has been loyal to and defended institutions who have betrayed Thai citizens in exchange for a free market, economic power, and administrative authority. Kanya begins to understand that loyalty is not owed to the dystopian society that is uncaring of its individuals, but to the "head" of society, its citizens and the safeguarding of their future via seeds. She realizes that while the ministries were fighting each other, the *farang* were leading an infrastructural war and were the truly triumphant side as they've gained the nation's treasure and resources. Instead, Kanya chooses to value the power of individuals and Thai citizens instead of institutions. She regards the social identity of Thais as those "who carry the lifeblood of this country, not this city. Our people carry the names that the Chakri gave us, and it is our people who are everything. And it is this seedbank that sustains us" (494). As the capital of the nation and home to its administrations and government, Bangkok is traditionally given the utmost importance as the last bastion of humanity against nature and human chaos. Kanya understands that this power afforded to the city is a social construct, since "it is not the city, it is the people that matter. What good is a city if the people are enslaved?" (494). Within a neoliberal dystopia, however, people and individuals do not matter. Social identities are constructed to better influence the masses, while citizens lose their worth and individuality. With this revelation, Kanya completely counter-identifies with the dystopian society and attempts to dismantle it and protect those lives she deems valuable: Thai citizens and their future descendants. Like Sarat in *American War*, she removes those she wishes to protect from danger, and in an act of self-immolation, she destroys the dike and levee system of the city and floods

Bangkok, making it uninhabitable for humanity. As an individual, her social identity shifts as she is empowered by her sense of loyalty to her people.[54]

5.3 The Posthuman Body

The depiction of the body and its relation to social identity within *The Windup Girl* is entrenched in posthuman discourse. Posthumanism is described as an evolutionary stage in which the human species is displaced by a modified and mutated species, leading to "a new era in human progress, the Posthuman Age" (Dinello 5). According to Rosi Braidotti, "the common denominator for the posthuman condition is an assumption about the vital, self-organizing and yet non-naturalistic structure of living matter itself" (2), which shows how the construction of the subject is, in fact, cultural and man-made. As such, posthumanist critique denaturalizes the essentialist or biological foundation that elevates the human species within the world's social hierarchy. In her work, Braidotti posits that the term "human" is differentiated and discriminatory, traditionally used to relate to those considered to possess reason and logic (i.e. Caucasian men). Instead, he promotes the differentiation and individuality embodied by the posthuman subject. In fact, according to Kim Toffoletti, the female posthuman figure allows for "conditions of possibility or ways of thinking that look beyond the phallocentric, or male-centred, subject of humanism" (10) by allowing the female body to escape such pre-conceived confines. In keeping with this criticism, Bacigalupi portrays Emiko through her "windup" female body as such a posthuman subject capable of escaping or subverting the loss of individuality entailed by the limiting, humanist social identity promoted by the novel's neoliberal dystopia.

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[54] This creates a change in the geographic space of the neoliberal dystopia since humanity must flee Bangkok to survive. However, social conditions do not truly change as the Thai Kingdom and its citizens relocate to a different area and continue the ingrained hierarchies and status quo.

In her seminal work, *The Cyborg Manifesto*, Donna Haraway places the posthuman figure within a material embodiment characterized by both biological and mechanical or technological elements. In doing so, the posthuman becomes multiple and unlimited by transgressing corporeal boundaries. Haraway argues that "bodies are maps of power and identity" and cyborgs "are no exception. A cyborg body is not innocent; it was not born in a garden; it does not seek unitary identity and so generate antagonistic dualisms without end" (*Simians, Cyborgs, and Women* 180). As the embodiment of posthuman subjects, their corporeal fluidity and biological transgression allow them to construct a new social identity, eradicate limited and exclusive collectives, and refute humanist binaries of the subject vs. the Other.

Within the new technological era, the materiality of human bodies cannot fully be combined with machine and technology. N. Katherine Hayles describes the body as "a physical structure whose constraints and possibilities have been formed by an evolutionary history that intelligent machines do not share" (284). As such, the relationship between humans and technology can be symbiotic or one of displacement, "but there is a limit to how seamlessly humans can be articulated with intelligent machines, which remain distinctively different from humans in their embodiments" (284). The posthuman body, though, acts as a mediator or intermediary space within these two boundaries. In fact, Carey Wolfe further analyzes the boundary transgression or intermediation of the posthuman body which "names the embodiment and embeddedness of the human being in not just its biological but also its technological world, the prosthetic coevolution of the human animal with the technicity of tools and external archival mechanisms" (*What Is Posthumanism?* xv) and thus, decenters the human subject. *The Windup Girl* portrays the relationship between the progressively decentered humans and their better adapted posthuman counterparts. To maintain superiority, humans attempt to classify posthuman bodies according to desirable and worthy humanist ideals, and,

in turn, utilize them for neoliberal purposes as labor power and instruments within the Thai Kingdom's economic structure.

5.3.1 Neoliberal Posthumanism: Commodification of Bodies

The Thai Kingdom maintains a strict humanist and nativist hierarchy for its residents. "Latent (if not blatant) inequality is an inherent part of the neoliberal economy" and these disparities are embodied by "the signs of power and oppressive practices [that] can thus be read directly off the bodies in signs of malnutrition, ill health, harmful beauty practices, and physical violence" (Harjunen 33). Thai citizens are the superior "race", i.e., the self or "us" social identities. The Other or inferior social identities consist of "yellow card" refugees: discriminated against for not being Thai citizens but tolerated because they are fully human.

The resulting social inequality is inscribed upon the bodies of these displaced persons. In an excerpt describing the refugee Hock Seng's struggle to survive and cohabit with other compatriots, he remembers "struggling to breathe as the bodies of his fellow refugees stank and rolled about him. Remembers how his belly pressed against his spine" as he killed a man for personal gain (Bacigalupi 195).[55] The excessive amount of dehumanized bodies speaks to the inequality of the novel's neoliberal economy. Their smell and sunken stomachs reflect the malnutrition and desperation which lead Hock Seng to commit an act of physical violence in an attempt to rise in the social identity hierarchy. This need for survival—to be of value as a commodity within the dystopia—is linked to his body's needs: sustenance, hygiene, shelter. Thus, his body leads him to commit this crime as he reminds himself, "*You were starving. There was no other way*" (195, emphasis in original). His devalued social identity, a sign of the Thai Kingdom's oppressive practices, is thus embodied and signaled by his starvation.

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[55] Of note is that this passage is ambiguous in its description of the reasons behind Hock Seng's crime. It is unclear whether he killed the man to take his job or for consumption and food.

The novel's society is characterized by ecological catastrophe due to rising water levels, constant appearances of epidemics, and an energy or calorie deficit. To counteract such a lack of energy, bodies of the Other are commodified for labor power. The "yellow card" or Malaysia Chinese migrant refugees are treated as inexpensive and non-sentient instruments of labor. Victims of religious and racial genocide by the so-called Muslim "green headbands" or natives of Malaysia, they had to flee their country and seek refuge in the Thai Kingdom. Yet, because their niche is not native to the Thai Kingdom, they are considered subhuman, their only value residing in their bodies as energy sources as they are exploited for their calories and cheap, disposable labor. In a scene reminiscent of many migrant groups searching for work, the yellow cards crowd together "trying to look hopeful as they wait for labor opportunities that have already faded in the heat of the afternoon. And yet still they try to look vital, try to show that their bony limbs have calories to spare, if only someone will allow them to burn" (193). Their previous social identities and power hierarchies are worthless in the Thai Kingdom, which places their sole value on the calories produced by their bodies. Once this energy has been consumed, their bodies become worthless to Thai citizens and companies.

This reductive social identity and value placed upon bodies of yellow card refugees only permits them to perform menial, labor-intensive tasks in exchange for abhorrent living conditions. In his attempt to navigate and prosper in such an inhospitable environment, Hock Seng visits the Dung Lord mobster, who has gained power from dung or refuse as an energy source. He witnesses how the Dung Lord's elevator is operated by consuming the calories or energy of yellow cards' bodies that act as weight for the elevator's pulley system. The "ballast men slide into view in the secondary shaft. They squeeze out of the lift and dash for the stairwell in a herd. One of them catches sight of Hock Seng. Mistakes his look. 'There aren't any more places. He has enough of us already'" (194). As a "herd," they are reduced to work-animal status and the sheer number of yellow cards hopeful and wishing to look vital to complete such

tasks signals the abundant supply of such commodities. In such a capitalist, supply-and-demand structure, they become worthless. Their bodies are no better than the dung used by the mobster to power machinery. As such, the body becomes a "possession, a property of [an external] subject, who […] makes decisions and choices about how to dispose of the body and its powers" (Grosz 8). In this neoliberal dystopian setting, it is not oneself that has control over one's own body, but the Thai Kingdom that constructs one's social worth and transforms the embodied subject into an instrument or tool, a property of the dystopian state to be disposed of and used up as it demands.

The lowliest and most abhorred figures within the social hierarchy of the Thai Kingdom are genetically engineered species, including New People, who are considered illegal objects that must be exterminated on the grounds that they are perceived to defy the tenets of niche and nature: they are not local to the Thai habitat, and they are not naturally created. Ironically, if Emiko were still under the patronage of her Japanese master in the Thai Kingdom, she would be accepted and protected by those who now hunt her and wish her dead. With "stamps and a passport, she was not a transgression against niche and nature, but an exquisite valued object" (Bacigalupi 153). With this, Bacigalupi signals the constructed nature of such social identities. Although New People are deemed abominations or inadequate by the Thai Kingdom, they are still accepted and esteemed due to bureaucratic policy. Additionally, when this paperwork expires, by means of corruption and bribery, their illegal status is disregarded if they prove useful as commodified objects—producers of entertainment or sources of energy—which proves how market needs trump nativist ideology and administrative authority.

As posthuman subjects, New People are a genetically engineered species whose embodiment of the technological or machinist is inscribed within their DNA via gene-splicing equipment. Sheehan defines genetic engineering as involving "DNA alterations made through the insertion of 'corrective' genetic material, using either viruses or the transplantation of

hybridized cells," which informs the cybernetic age with "a new dualism: information versus matter, data versus flesh" but maintains an emphasis on the body that "emerges from reproductive techno-genesis" (253). At the beginning of the novel, Emiko's female, posthuman body is genetically engineered as a companion, secretary, and sexual object: a tool for the humanist collective. Her hybridized DNA and corrective genetic materials are manipulated to better suit these occupations. Timothy Morton connects such genetic engineering to neoliberal capitalism by arguing that "it turns life forms into private property to enrich huge corporations" (86). As a genetically engineered figure, Emiko is also considered private property that contributes to Japanese wealth and corporate efficiency. Her body becomes commodified capital: the site of entrepreneurial administration, consumption, and sexual desire.

Referencing Mike Featherston and Susan Bordo, Hannele Harjunen, considers neoliberal capitalism "as having a key role in promoting certain types of bodies as beautiful, desirable, or socially acceptable," which increases the importance of bodily appearance that influences "body shaping practices" to create normatively attractive, healthy, and youthful bodies (28). These governing practices place the body within a site of regulation and sociopolitical control influenced by "capitalist consumer culture [which] is an illustrating example of neoliberal governmentality" (29). According to Featherstone, "Consumer culture latches onto the prevalent self-preservationist conception of the body, which encourages the individual to adopt instrumental strategies to combat deterioration and decay," and this combines "with the notion that the body is a vehicle of pleasure" (170). As opposed to the neoliberal dystopia in *The Power* in which women adopt masculinist matriarchal values and shape their bodies to optimize their strength, power, and efficiency, New People are more conclusively considered objects and instruments of labor for production and pleasure. Their bodies, hence, are youthful as they seemingly do not age or show signs of physical deterioration. Mizumi-sensei, Emiko's mentor as a child in the crèche, is described as "100 years old and

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terrifying. An early New Person, her skin was nearly unaged" (Bacigalupi 221). In fact, New People are completely immune to human diseases, which Emiko makes clear at the end of the novel when "She shrugs. 'I am New People. Your sicknesses do not frighten me'" (488). The advanced genetic engineering has participated in neoliberal body-shaping practices to achieve ageless and fit bodies that represent an aesthetic ideal, granting both visual and sexual pleasure.

Featherstone continues this analysis by distinguishing between the inner and outer neoliberal capitalist body:

> The inner body refers to the concern with the health and optimum functioning of the body which demands maintenance and repair in the face of disease, abuse and the deterioration accompanying the ageing process. The outer body refers to appearance as well as the movement and control of the body within social space. (171)

Within the novel, New People's outer and inner bodies are optimal. Not only are they immune to disease and aging, but any signs of abuse are quickly healed. Their appearance is attractive and useful for humans because they are created and altered to embody specific roles within society. New People are Japanese creations that were produced to substitute human labor power: "We are an old nation; our young are few. Good girls like Hiroko fill the gap. We are not the same as the Thai. We have calories but no one to provide the labor. We need personal assistants. Workers" (Bacigalupi 422). As opposed to the Thai Kingdom with its abundant supply of humans as an energy source and workforce, the Japanese lack such commodities.

Thus, New People's bodies occupy this social space that controls their appearance and their movement and constructs them to be "loyal, thoughtful, and skilled. And a necessary tool. She is as necessary as a hoe for a farmer or a sword for a samurai" (422). Their inner bodies—characterized by immunity, youthfulness, loyalty, and thoughtfulness—combine with their skilled and pleasing outer bodies to create efficient and necessary tools who lack any individual agency or control. Ironically, these posthuman subjects who are created utilizing the most advanced scientific technology, are considered the equivalent of almost medieval, pre-scientific tools: farming hoes, connoting abundance and fertility, and samurai swords, connoting

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discipline and regulation. Yet, their equivalence to such instruments proves humanity's ignorance regarding human progress and developmental evolution: these tools are obsolete and no longer necessary within the world of the novel. Thus, by continuing to cling to outdated modes of abundance and regulation, humanity does not truly understand New People's posthuman potential. They should not be considered tools that require guidance, supervision, and constant updates to newer models, but figures whose inner and outer bodies are the best adapted species to survive the hostile, ravaged world of the novel.

The optimization of New People's bodies is achieved through the inclusion of different genetic, posthuman variants and congenital perfection. This functions as a indication of what the neoliberal dystopian society views as optimum and aspirational, which, in turn, must be legitimized and recognized within society as such. When discussing optimization, Jansen and Wehrle emphasize the ways in which a new, aspirational way of life is legitimated: "Optimization is only real if it is visible, evaluated, and recognized by others: it is thus, even when it pertains to the lived body, still very intimately connected with concerns surrounding body images" (48). New People's appearance and outer bodies—their perfect poreless skin and physical beauty—thus function as visible markers of what neoliberal dystopian society considers desirable. Coupled with enhanced senses and speed, New People are aesthetically pleasing and efficient instruments of labor. Their inner body is also a reflection of this optimization and perfection. New People have mixed DNA so that their genetic disposition forces obedience and a desire to please a master. Their heightened sexual responses that derive sexual pleasure regardless of consent or abuse, as well as sterility, highlight New People's, and Emiko's, true purpose as pure, desirable sex objects. As such, their body is a site of capital and sexual production. Emiko's physical disposition and genetic framework force her to enjoy her subjugation and service. She is not only an ideal worker, but an ideal sex worker.

Recognizing her true purpose in such a neoliberal dystopian society, Emiko works as a sex slave for humans who find her both an abhorrent figure that goes against what they consider to be their natural habitat or niche and an optimal, desirable commodity or "novelty" (Bacigalupi 50). As a *fille de joie* or sex worker, Emiko's social identity is "the woman-as-commodity, usually figured as a prostitute" and her existence is "situated where capital and sexuality meet" (Roberts 821). She is brutalized and oppressed by her clients, who embody the male-centered humanist subject of the Thai Kingdom. Her sexual exploitation and her genetic and corporeal disposition to please her human "superiors" are constructed to comply with market demands which make "her an object that humans can treat with repugnance or with utilitarian apathy" (Hageman 295). Bacigalupi portrays such apathy, repugnance, and consumerist desire for Emiko's body that inform her social identity in scenes in which she is sexually abused by the human Kannika in front of a crowd of Thai men.

> The men sweat and watch and shout for more for the price of their admission. More men are holding her down, hands on her ankles and wrists, freeing Kannika for her abuse. Emiko writhes, her body shaking and jerking, twitching in the ways that windups do, in the ways that Kannika excels at bringing out. The men laugh and comment on the freakish movements, the stutter-stop motions, flash-bulb strange. […] Emiko moans again as her body betrays her. She cries out. Arches. Her body performs just as it was designed—just as the scientists with their test tubes intended. She cannot control it no matter how much she despises it. The scientists will not allow her even this small disobedience. (Bacigalupi 54–55)

Emiko's body and genetic design is on display for the visual and sexual pleasure of humans in this excerpt. Although they laugh at her "freakish movements" designed to differentiate her from humanity, they gaze at her sexual experience and consume her body and its display. Thai sexuality and sexual desire are rooted in notions of the body and physical appearance. In turn, this acts to introduce subjects into social existence by defining those who are the consumers and agents of desire and sex, and those who are the objects, recipients, and productions of such lust and eroticism.

While she is being abused, Emiko recognizes the audience's gaze and desire that form her social existence as an object or Other, which, like her inability to resist these commands and her body's ingrained performance, she initially has no control over:

> He stares intently, as if he is examining an insect under a magnifying class: fascinated, and yet also repulsed. She has the urge to snap at him, to try to force him to look at her, to see her instead of simply evaluating her as a piece of genetic trash. […] She can feel the crowd's eyes on her, a physical thing, molesting her. She is utterly exposed. [..] She is nothing but a silly marionette creature now, all stutter-stop motion—herky-jerky *heechy-keechy*—with no trace of the stylized grace that her mistress Mizumi-sensei trained into her when she was a girl in the crèche. There is no elegance or care to her movements now; the telltales of her DNA are violently present for all to see and mock. (53–54).

Humanity's intense scrutiny of Emiko's body, which informs her social identity, is oxymoronic: they are fascinated by their own creations and capabilities, but simultaneously repulsed by New People's "unnatural" status as "genetic trash."

The juxtaposition between repugnance and fascination is reminiscent of Frantz Fanon's notion of the racialized body of the colonized person that is fabricated by the colonist. The colonized figure is a producer of wealth and an object of fantasy and violence which produces a mix of revulsion and desire. Subjugation of the colonized Other occurs via an economic process (e.g. the objectification and commodification of the racialized body) and an internalization or "epidermalization" of their inferiority written on the body (Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks* 4). In the case of *The Windup Girl*, the humans' fascination speaks to the posthuman potential, but their repugnance signals their rejection of a new social structure or hierarchy; this serves to foreshadow the conflict between the human dystopian society and the posthuman figures that come to displace humanity by disidentifying with the neoliberal dystopia. This evaluation and spectatorship is almost corporeal or physical in nature. It is considered violent and abusive against the posthuman in its molestation and exposition of Emiko's vulnerabilities. By attempting to maintain society's status quo or human superiority, the audience deems Emiko a toy or marionette for their use and enjoyment, who is reduced to

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her DNA, marking her social identity as innately different and inferior and making her visible for all to mock. Although she wishes for her "clients" to truly acknowledge her worth, Emiko becomes a subhuman object: an insect or a toy, so that her abuse is considered not truly painful but a spectacle unworthy of empathy or sympathy, simply physical attraction.

This scene marks the human endeavor to maintain control and superiority of the posthuman via corporeal manipulation and commodification. Emiko is the Other while the human spectators and abusers are the subject. Her desirability is a reflection of the subject's desire, in that the perception of "the other's body as desirable means converting the other's sexual "physiognomy" into a set of signs addressed to the subject […] It is only the sensory, perceiving subject, the corporeal subject, who is capable of initiating (sexual) desire, responding to and proliferating desire" (Grosz 109). Thus, this corporeal desire is actually an act of human supremacy that attempts to constitute the desiring, dominant, sensitive subject and the desirable object. The men ridicule and laugh at Emiko's "freakish movements" as her body shakes, twitches, and jerks at her abuse at the hands of a human, all of such actions functioning as "signs addressed" to their amusement and pleasure. Emiko is posthuman, a threat to the natural order and humanity's essential superiority, so she is Othered, abused, and mocked. This reveals "the utility built into humanist discourse for maintaining the exploitative structures of capitalism-as-usual" (Hageman 295) that subordinates all non-human entities to commodification and exploitation. The men in this excerpt all have the ability and opportunity to touch and hold Emiko down for the price of admission. Her body and its abuse are simply a business transaction used for human entertainment. Emiko's ultimate shame and symbol of mankind's supposed technological and social superiority within the Thai Kingdom occurs at her climax, when "her body betrays her" and performs as it was designed. With this, Emiko believes herself enslaved to humanity, which does not permit her even slight disobedience. Due

to her body's instrumentalization and commodification for male pleasure, she has no control over her own body both socioculturally and physically speaking.

Although this passage superficially depicts Emiko's inferior, Other identity within the natural order of the novel's neoliberal dystopian society, a more extensive reading questions such positioning. Bacigalupi describes the abusive and oppressive humans in this scene as undesirable and repugnant. They slobber and "sweat and watch and shout" as she is abused, contrasting with Emiko's own optimal and sweatless body. Throughout the beginning of the novel, Emiko attempts to fit in with society by acquiescing to attempts at "'normalization', understood as oppression through dominant norms" (Jansen and Wehrle 43). Thus, in the previous excerpt, she solely focuses on her abnormal, designed body in comparison to normalized human bodies. However, one could say that her body is "optimal" because it is, as Jansen and Wehrle define such a term, "unrestricted" by human norms and conventions (43). As the men's object of desire and with such an optimal body, she is aspirational and desirable but unattainable. That is, as such a posthuman figure, humanity wishes to use her, and scientists imbue her body with all that they wish humans had but can never achieve. Her body is unrestricted, whereas theirs is not.

In fact, the body's optimal movements will only feel natural once they become "part of an altered, rehabitualized body schema" (43). Once Emiko realizes the unrestricted, optimal potential of her body she no longer considers its movements to be freakish or "stutter-stop" but natural and graceful. She begins to wonder "if she has it backwards, if the part that struggles to maintain her illusions of self-respect is the part intent upon her destruction. If her body, this collection of cells and manipulated DNA—with its own stronger, more practical needs—is actually the survivor: the one with will" (Bacigalupi 49). She begins to deconstruct humanity's superior hierarchy of "self-respect" within the biological natural order once she embraces the

notion that her body is not limited to its genetics and blind obedience, but one with a will and a greater ability to survive in a hostile dystopian society.

By becoming unrestricted and liberating her body from is predetermined confine, Emiko rids her body of the symbolism in which it was "'the biological', 'the genital', the predestined depositary and the phobogenic object of culture" (Fanon cited in Marriott 175). She breaks with her previous notions of corporeal genetic entrapment and thus begins the process of rehabitualizing her body schema. As Kurtz aptly notes, these "illusions of self-respect" are "social and political structures that have required her to fulfill her role as a passive and subservient New Person" (189). This marks the first instance of Emiko's "disidentification" with the neoliberal society by realizing that she is subjugated by said society within the novel and by reshaping her consciousness surrounding her body and breaking with such limited identity construction.

Emiko's "disidentification" with the novel's society further takes root when questioning whether her social identity is based upon geneticism or behaviorism. The novel is in constant tension between attributing posthuman identities and actions a basis in their body (nature) versus ideology (nurture). Emiko's body and genetics were not enough to simply allow her to serve humans. In Japan, she was trained in a crèche by her mentor, Mizumi-sensei, to fully acquire all the skills required to be of service. Part of her teaching was understanding that

> there are two parts to a New Person's nature. The evil half, ruled by the animal hungers of their genes, by the many splicings and additions that changed them into what they were. And balanced against this, the civilized self, the side that knows the difference between niche and animal urge. That comprehends its place in the hierarchies of their country and people, and appreciates the gift their patrons provide by giving them life. Dark and light. *In-Yo.* Two sides of a coin, two sides of the soul. (Bacigalupi 221–22)

As a racialized figure,[56] Emiko's division between her desire to serve her patrons or rebel against them—i.e., the "two sides of the soul"—evokes W.E.B. Du Bois' notion of double

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[56] Although this dissertation focuses mostly on Emiko's posthuman status, it is important to note that she also belongs to other traditionally oppressed groups, and they inform her social identity: she is an Asian, female illegal immigrant.

consciousness. Du Bois defines this concept as "this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity," which leads to feeling a sense of "two-ness" with "two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body" (5). By imagining herself through the eyes of others, Emiko disciplines and "civilizes" herself. She suppresses any "animal urge" that rebels against her "niche" or order in society. These "two warring ideals" in her body or dual sides of a coin reflect the natural binary that is instilled by neoliberal dystopia: us vs. them, dark vs. light; nature vs. nurture. She is reviled as an animal whose genes and splicings have transformed her into something other than human: posthuman. It is through the process of civilization and culture that she acquires her niche and can control her "animal urge."[57] Such nurture has instilled within Emiko the perceived knowledge of a hierarchy, and, in doing so, her identity has been socialized. Emiko, unlike her Thai companions, believes herself to have a soul, albeit divided. This civilized self, or soul, is what grants her access to the dystopian society and gives her a social existence.

Within this dystopia, she must surrender her agency and body in service to humanity, whose contempt and pity justify her utilization and commodification as society sees fit. Emiko was created and trained in a crèche that

> had no illusions about the many uses a New Person might be put to, even a refined one. New People serve and do not question. She moves toward the stage with the careful steps of a fine courtesan, stylized and deliberate movements, refined over decades to accommodate her genetic heritage, to emphasize her beauty and her difference. But it is wasted on the crowd. All they see are stutter-stop motions. A joke. An alien toy. A windup. (Bacigalupi 52)

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[57] This notion of animal urges is quite ironic given that when Emiko first learns of these "two sides" of her soul, she is only aware that her corporeal, animal nature is what has been ingrained with absolute obedience. However, further knowledge regarding the full extent of Emiko's body—her super senses, power, and speed— makes quite clear the reasons behind such "civilizing" indoctrination is to maintain New People ignorant of their bodily capacities and subservient to the social hierarchy. Her posthuman status grants her the ability, as previously mentioned by Haraway, to eradicate such "antagonistic dualisms without end" later within the novel.

In this excerpt, the Thai and foreign spectators who watch her sexual abuse are incapable of viewing Emiko's social identity on the basis of her trained behaviors, such as the "stutter-stop" movements reminiscent of Japanese geisha courtesans. Instead, their only perception is based on her transgressive nature, her role as a windup toy whose body is an instrument at their disposal. According to Hageman, products or "machines are restricted in becoming what they might be when manipulated according to the demands of market forces" (295). As such a commodity, Emiko's social identity is limited according to her expected utility, and in order to escape such restrictions she must remove herself from the "demands of market forces" by differentiating herself from human society.

As technology advances, New People's bodies can also be improved and refined. In line with neoliberal consumption that discards an older product in favor of the newer model, Emiko's master abandons her in favor of an upgraded version. Said optimization of Japanese New People and their consequent updates and newer models are reminiscent of the notion of perfectibility "that often inspires these corporeal reimaginings, spurred by a faith in technological progress" (Sheehan 245). This shows how the body's desirability is in a constant process of social legitimization that must constantly progress and be aspirational in order to remain powerful and relevant in a neoliberal market.[58]

In *The Windup Girl*, Emiko constantly reflects on her treatment by her Japanese master, Gendo-sama, and consequent abandonment. She remembers how he would tell her that "she is perfect. Optimal. Delightful. She grimaces at the old bastard's voice as she yanks again on the line, hating him, hating the old snake who loved her and discarded her. […] She will die because she is optimal, but not optimal enough for a return ticket" (Bacigalupi 283). The constant

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[58] This concept of perfectibility influenced by technological progress is reminiscent of the advertisements encountered in *The Power* that sold instruments and substances to make women's electrical power more efficient and perfected. In this case, the process of social legitimization of women's corporeal desirability is made aspirational through consumerist propaganda, whereas in *The Windup Girl*, New People themselves are the commodities sold for consumption.

repetition of "optimal" highlights the commodification and instrumentalization of her body, which, once outdated, is quickly discarded by her owner: "Efficiency is the essence of neoliberalism. In a neoliberal society, individuals maximize their earnings potential in the marketplace by turning their bodies and minds into units of free-floating capital" (Shivani 77). Thus, more efficient bodies are worth more capital. Emiko's corporeal optimization expires when a newer model is recognized and legitimized.

Her social identity in the Thai Kingdom where she has been abandoned is neither perfect nor delightful as her poreless body makes her overheat in the humid and hot weather. Emiko is described as a "hothouse flower, dropped into a world too harsh for her delicate heritage. It seems unlikely that she will survive for long. Not in this climate. Not with these people" (Bacigalupi 88). Due to her changed genetic conditions, she is originally considered optimal to conduct certain tasks, but not to survive in harsh climates and near ecological catastrophe as she is better suited to more luxurious and calorie-consuming environments. Throughout the novel humans constantly underestimate her based on her posthuman body, signaling their ignorance to their imminent displacement and their own unsustainable survival and relationship with nature.

One can recognize that Gendo-sama's love for Emiko did not stem from true affection based on an interpersonal relationship, but the love of a consumer for his useful new toy. Just as with the farmer's hoe or the samurai's sword, Emiko is cast aside in favor an upgraded object as her body is now not the most optimal of all New People. When recognized by Anderson Lake as an abandoned, outdated model, Emiko feels a visceral shame: "'You were dumped by Mishimoto, weren't you?' Emiko fights the sudden flood of shame. It's as though he has sliced her open and gone rooting through her entrails, impersonal and insulting" (64). This simple statement evokes a physical reaction in her body as she recognizes her outdatedness and commodification. She is not a soulless, unfeeling machine or toy that is uncaring of her

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displacement. Her body marks her social identity as this later version of a New Person and therefore replaceable, but it also is physically affected by such degradation and irreverence.

By using such a matter-of-fact, impersonal tone, Anderson's dissection of Emiko's precarious and traumatic situation resembles the geneticists and scientific creators that construct Emiko in a test tube, evaluating her and stripping her of any corporeal protection. As a reaction to such disregard, Emiko uses her wit and deductive reasoning to guess at Anderson's true intentions in the Thai Kingdom:

> She lets him see some of the contempt she feels for him. "Not, maybe, a man from the Midwest Compact, perhaps? Not a company man?" She leans forward. "Not a *calorie man,* possibly?" She whispers the last words, but they have their effect. The man jerks back. His smile remains, frozen, but his eyes now evaluate her the way a mongoose evaluates a cobra. (64, emphasis in original)

Calorie men are almost as reviled in the Thai Kingdom as New People, and Anderson is working under cover. With such a statement, Emiko proves her own intelligence and strength. She is no longer a vulnerable, hothouse flower, but a "cobra" that can hurt Anderson. Although Anderson attempts to use her body to construct an oppressive social identity, Emiko manages to counteract his measures and elevate her status, and, as a result, Anderson informs her of a New Person enclave that lives free from human oppression and interference.

Emiko "used to glow brightly. She was built well. Trained well. Knew the ways of pillow companion, secretary, translator and observer, services for her master that she performed so admirably that he honored her like a dove, and released her into the bright blue arc of the sky" (Bacigalupi 146). She was a highly skilled laborer that would "glow brightly" with praise and satisfaction at efficiently performing her duties. Yet, these tasks as secretary and companion or supportive partner highlight the body as a "utility-maximizing machine" entrenched in "a genetic calculus [which explains] the inevitable dialectic of domination of male and female gender roles" (Haraway, *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women* 169). In *The Windup Girl*, Bacigalupi makes it clear that Emiko is a victim of genetic breeding and social conditioning. Her social

identity is determined by gender roles and predetermination as her only occupations and utilities are entrenched in traditionally established roles and duties for women. Like an animal, Emiko must have a master on whom she is wholly dependent until she is abandoned.

Emiko is both a dependent and a caregiver, and as such, according to Richard Hardack, has needs as "natural caregivers whose proclivities society has somehow perverted" (54). Thus, Emiko cares for her master by providing companionship, linguistic support, or secretarial tasks which are perverted by society to solely require bodily and sexual capital. After her abandonment, Emiko becomes aware of this social perversion: "She supposes she should feel grateful, but she instead feels used. As used by this man with his questions and his words as those others, the hypocritical Grahamites and the Environment Ministry's white shirts, who wish to transgress with her biological oddity, who all slaver for the pleasure of intercourse with an unclean creature" (Bacigalupi 66). Her caregiving nature as a dependent is thus perverted. Of note is the juxtaposition between describing Emiko as an "unclean creature" and a "dove" that is set free. The dove, a traditional symbol of innocence and peace, is discarded in favor of "the pleasure of intercourse with an unclean creature." Her social identity is limited to her body as an object of desire and labor power within the sex industry. Nonetheless, the use of the "dove" and its symbology is of special import in that it serves to foreshadow Emiko's role in the final flood of the novel. Reminiscent of the Noah's Ark parable that wipes clean current society, the dove acts as a symbol of hope and renewal, a disidentification with the previous perverted and corrupt system.

5.3.2 Subversion of Neoliberal Inequality: The Rise of the Posthuman

Within the novel, the posthuman figure is considered an unnatural animal, which justifies its mistreatment and exploitation. Humanity constructs a social identity in which the animal is "always lying in wait at the very heart of the constitutive disavowals and self-constructing

narratives enacted by that fantasy figure called 'the human'" (Wolfe, *Animal Rites* 6). The animal is positioned as the Other to the human, and for humans to gain superiority and social identity, the "full transcendence of the 'human' requires the sacrifice of the 'animal' and the animalistic, which in turn makes possible a symbolic economy" (6). By equating the posthuman characters to their genetically engineered animal counterparts, the dystopian society in the novel establishes itself within a group identity defined as "human" as opposed to the animal Other.

Through this symbolic economy—i.e., the valuing of certain symbols above others and therefore their classification into meaningful characterizations—humans can participate in a "noncriminal putting to death" of both animals and humans by assigning them an animal Other status (Derrida, "'Eating Well'" 112). Neoliberalism, in its attempts to commodify animals and the Other, has led to the "industrialization of what can be called the production for consumption of animal meat" in the service of human well-being, which includes "manipulations of the genome, the reduction of the animal not only to production and over active reproduction (hormones, genetic crossbreeding, cloning, and so on)" for consumption and animal end-products ("The Animal That Therefore I Am" 394). Thus, the neoliberal dystopian society of *The Windup Girl* considers animals as sacrificial objects to be exploited and manipulated based on mankind's more worthy and superior needs. Animals are solely valued and classified according to their bodies, which become "parts of human economic constellations and human-centered ecosystems: They are economic resources, commodities and means of production for human use" (Noske 185). Yet, as will be discussed in this section, Bacigalupi subverts this superiority and differentiation by elevating the posthuman subject.

The beginning of the novel quickly establishes the role of the posthuman, or genetically engineered figure, and its tension with the human subject. The Thai Kingdom only deems acceptable those posthuman creatures created for utilitarian purposes, as all others are redundant and a threat to the natural order. The novel provides acceptable versions of

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genetically engineered animals such as megodonts, whose bodies produce energy for Thai factories: "Megodonts groan against spindle cranks, their enormous heads hanging low, prehensile trunks scraping the ground as they tread slow circles around power spindles. The genehacked animals comprise the living heart of the factory's drive system" (Bacigalupi 11–12). The novel's first glimpse of these animals portrays them as mechanistic and lacking in sentience. Their lives consist of slowly winding cranks in circles, but their vital position as the "living heart of factory's" system that energizes its machines is not recognized via their treatment and mindless labor. As with the yellow cards, these "genehacked animals" and their bodies fulfill an economic purpose by providing necessary calories and power sources. Thus, they are tolerated and deemed acceptable, despite their transgression of the natural order.

However, these animals are not as compliant and dim-witted as humans are initially led to believe. In an instance of rebellion, one such megodont in Anderson's factory breaks from its chains and labor: "The megodont wheels and fixes its attention on Anderson, eyes flickering with Pleistocene rage. Despite himself, Anderson is impressed by the animal's intelligence" (27). Bacigulapi refers to the animal's rage as stemming from the Pleistocene era. Although initially a genetically modified animal, its DNA still originates from ancient mammoths, and its rage at animals' millenarian abuse and exploitation for economic gain lingers and reaches a climax. The megodont's sentience and intelligence question the justification and validity of such exploitation for solely human benefit, dismantling what allows humans to capitalize on animals' bodies.

The conflict between the posthuman megodont and its human handlers ultimately ends with the former's death. Its body is a testament to the exploitation and abuse it faced as its eyes stare at Anderson, "nearly human, blinking confusion" (29). Of note is the fact that its intelligence and proximity to humanity through "nearly human" eyes caused Anderson to sympathize and feel pity for such a creature:

Anderson wonders what the animal is thinking. If the neural havoc tearing through its system is something it can feel. If it knows its end is imminent. Or if it just feels tired. Standing over it, Anderson can almost feel pity. The four ragged ovals where its tusks once stood are grimy foot-diameter ivory patches, savagely sawed away. Sores glisten on its knees and scabis growths speckle its mouth. Close up and dying, with its muscles paralyzed and its ribs heaving in and out, it is just an ill-used creature. The monster was never destined for fighting. (29)

Like Emiko and the other posthuman creatures of the novel, this megodont was simply an "ill-used" creature. Its body shows the signs of such manipulation on behalf of a neoliberal capitalist system that created and maintained it for economic benefit. For the first time, Anderson wonders whether these genetically engineered figures can feel and think, if they are self-aware in knowing that their end is imminent. Ironically, although this megodont dies, this passage can be extrapolated to discuss humanity's displacement in the novel: they are not truly aware that their presence in the world is no longer sustainable and their end is imminent, to be succeeded by the posthuman subject. Anderson recognizes the treatment of the megodont as "savage" as its body is disfigured and devastated by malnourishment and mistreatment. There is no culture of care and conviviality or symbiosis with these creatures: they are used at the hands of humans and their wellness is ignored in favor of fast, efficient, and economical expenditure of their bodies.

Even in death, the posthuman body is exploited for human gain. The megodont's carcass is taken apart and used for its meat and energy. Its body is dismantled and it takes the appearance not of "an animal at all, more a child's play set for building a megodont from the ground up" (36). This notion of a toy, an object of entertainment and amusement for the human, is common throughout the description of the posthuman body. As previously discussed, Emiko is constantly referred to as a "Japanese toy," and in the scene of the megodont's rebellion and consequent slaughter, the animal is considered as such also: "Bones protrude from the corpse like coral rising from an ocean of deep red meat. Blood runs from the animal, rivers of it […] The beast held gallons of it. Untold calories rushing away" (31). The megodont is described

organically, its body closer to nature and the natural order than the humans in the novel comprehend. Bacigalupi's comparison of the posthuman creature's body to the ocean is indicative of the novel's conclusion: just as the ocean rises and destroys Bangkok, so too will the posthuman body eventually and unstoppably rise and displace the human. Regardless of their current exploited status and social identity as "toys" and objects, their intelligence, sentience, and capable, adaptive bodies that hold "untold calories" of energy and strength will later allow them to acquire superior social identities within the new post-flood social system, or lack thereof.

Perhaps the most relevant subversion of the neoliberal inequality of posthuman bodies within the novel—apart from New People—are the cheshires. Bacigalupi introduces the genetically engineered cheshires as well to subvert the rigid control of the dystopian society and hint at Emiko's own role in creating a new world via her disidentification. The cheshire species were originally created as a whim of wealthy capitalists, a symbol of humanity's hubris, unintentional and redundant consumerism, and ultimately a foreshadowing of their displacement. They were created as a gift for a birthday party and as a symbol of decadence, when the birthday girl

> turned as old as Lewis Carroll's Alice. The child guests took their new pets home where they mated with natural felines, and within twenty years, the devil cats were on every continent and *Felis domesticus* was gone from the face of the world, replaced by a genetic string that bred true ninety-eight percent of the time. (38)

Due to such neoliberal and consumerist desires, with no regard to their effects in the natural world or any ecological consequences, cheshires function as signals of the delegitimation of the natural order that places humans as superior creatures. In an incredibly short period of time, this species manages to adapt to their environment and become hierarchically superior.

Although fabricated by humans, these neo-felines establish their own intervention in the biosphere and evolution of species by wiping out the domestic cat.[59]

Realizing the cheshires' threat to the perceived natural order of the environment but incapable of controlling their expansion and growth, humans consider them "devil cats" and eerily describe their chameleonic adaptability as flickering and "fading in and out of view as their bodies take on the colors of their surroundings. They shade red as they dip into the blood pool" of the megodont's carcass (38). The depiction of the cheshires' interaction with blood echoes the previously established connection to nature and the posthuman with the megodont's ocean of blood. This natural unnaturalness, a manufactured creature with a deep connection to nature, produces within the posthuman beings a monstrous ontology. This in-between status marks the cheshires as monsters, so they become "disturbing hybrids whose externally incoherent bodies resist attempts to include them in any systematic structuration. And so the monster is dangerous, a form suspended between forms that threatens to smash distinctions" (Cohen 6). The hybrid state is written in their genetic makeup, but also in their chameleonic fur, thus subverting any "systemic structuration" that places humanity as a superior social identity and others the posthuman.

The notions of danger, monstrosity, and threats are evoked with the images of blood being consumed by the cheshires that produce a sinister, unnerving feeling within the characters. In Jacques Derrida's *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, the author discusses the feline gaze and cheshire cats as the gaze of the Other (377) . Within the novel, the cheshires' gaze functions similarly to Derrida's cat, as a seemingly interpellating encounter between the human and animal. However, as Hageman points out, unlike Derrida's instance, in which the human can discontinue such an encounter, in *The Windup Girl*, humanity is unable to do so since "cheshires are ever-present, and their unceasing gaze is a relentless reminder of their existence

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[59] Due to Emiko's strong sense of kinship with the cheshires, one can interpret that New People will also act as cheshires and displace humans, i.e. Homo Sapiens, in the evolutionary structure.

for which people are partly responsible and which they are unable to control" (296). The flickering state and wide eyes of the cheshires create unease and eeriness for the human characters in that they have created an Other that threatens their hierarchic place as masters and creators and cannot extract themselves from or easily eliminate such threats.

These predatory and carrion cheshires are highly reproductive and adaptive to their surroundings, as well as incredibly hard to eliminate: "They are clever, thriving in places where they are despised" (Bacigalupi 37). Their social identity and status as despised and hunted by the Environment Ministry officials of the Thai Kingdom has little effect on the survival and population growth of the posthuman creatures. Their bodies—inflated procreation rates and camouflage—allow them to overcome such neoliberal social limitations. Bacigalupi creates an apt correlation with Carroll's Cheshire cat and the Wonderland world humanity inhabits but is no longer native to; cheshires shimmer and camouflage themselves, an appropriate posthuman symbol of the unnatural creatures that better naturalize themselves than the originals.

In fact, Bacigalupi makes apparent the artificial systemic structuration of the natural order constructed by humanity, by frequently referring to the characters in the novel using animalistic terms as opposed to the anthropomorphizing of intelligent and sentient animals previously discussed. As a prominent white shirt and official of the Environment Ministry, Jaidee is often referred to as a tiger or the Tiger of Bangkok, while his coworkers in the ministry become truly animalistic. In a scene of violence and corruption, Jaidee witnesses his men and is reminded of "animals fighting over a carcass. His men feeding on the offal of foreign lands while the scavengers probe and test, the ravens and cheshires and dogs all waiting their own chance to converge on the carrion" (76). In this excerpt, those who believe themselves superior to all posthuman creations and seek their destruction based on their transgressive, unnatural nature, are analogous to said creatures. Bacigalupi overtly compares the white shirts destroying

trade materials, using their bureaucratic power to enact violence and gather supplies, as to carrion creatures, especially cheshires.

Although Jaidee somewhat recognizes this lack of distinction between cheshires and white shirts, this is insufficient to truly subvert his considerations of the natural order. As a whole, the Thai Kingdom and its people refuse to acknowledge posthuman subjectivity or social identity and its deep connection to the natural world. Instead, the neoliberal dystopian society considers these creatures transgressive, soulless, and monstrous. In an attempt to exterminate this "predatory" species, the white shirts of the Environment Ministry kill cheshires in droves. As an influence of their ideology, they believe these posthuman bodies are merely empty vessels, with no sentience, and most importantly, no souls, and thus will not exact any karmic cost or retribution for their massacre.

However, Jaidee's white shirt coworker, Somchai, shares his unease at such destruction stating that he has "killed thousands of cheshires and [has] never felt at ease" and wonders whether his family's succumbing to illness "was karmic retribution for all those cheshires" (248). Jaidee dissuades these feelings of guilt by stating that they are just "empty vessels," unnatural and therefore unworthy of souls or karmic value. Yet, "'They breed. They eat. They live. They breathe.' He smiles slightly. 'If you pet them, they will purr […] They are real. As much as you or I […] Maybe even the worst monstrosities of the Japanese live in some way'" (248). Religion and notions of karmic cost here do not dispel their natural value and consequent superiority. Although created, they are still beings that live, eat, and breathe, thus making them real and "natural." Their anatomy and biology are more powerful in constructing their social identity than Thai ideology. By equating cheshires to "Japanese monstrosities", i.e., New People, Somchai draws a direct correlation between all posthuman, genetically engineered figures.

Bacigalupi further creates a clear dualism or connection between the posthuman cheshire and New People. Emiko feels an understanding and kinship with the animals, which are considered siblings or "Sympathetic creatures, manufactured by the same flawed gods" (488) and envies their reproductive abilities. She considers them "improved for this world" and wonders about the outcome of New People if scientists would have created them first.

> If her kind had come first, before the generippers knew better, she would not have been made sterile. She would not have the signature ticktock motions that make her so physically obvious. She might have even been designed as well as the military windups now operating in Vietnam— deadly and fearless. Without the lesson of the cheshires, Emiko might have had the opportunity to supplant the human species entirely with her own improved version. Instead, she is a genetic dead end. Doomed to a single life cycle, just like SoyPRO and TotalNutrient Wheat. (164)

After the cheshires' massive takeover of their niche and complete eradication of the domestic housecat, scientists amended their mistakes and "improved" their designs to maintain sterility within New People. In a society that believes in karmic life cycles and renewal, Emiko's corporeal sterility or reproductive incapability marks her as lesser and is compared to an inanimate product like "SoyPRO" or "TotalNutrient Wheat," which provide calories and benefit humanity: a commodity. Her puppet-like movements that physically differentiate her from humanity would be eliminated and she could possibly have deadly skills like military windups. The implications of this passage are made obvious: the posthuman Emiko, without such "improvements," could have supplanted the human species.

As a posthuman figure, Emiko embodies the potential for the displacement and replacement of humanity. As previously stated, she is immune to human diseases, she has heightened senses, along with super speed and strength. However, her creation and construction as a desirable physical commodity includes markers that highlight her otherness: her strange "herky jerky" movements, her ingrained genetic and behavioral obedience as well as her poreless epidermal structure that causes her to overheat. Just as New People are better equipped

for the ecologically ravaged world they inhabit, humans attempt to restrict and place corporeal limitations on them to maintain humanity's social supremacy.

Emiko is often portrayed as a dichotomic figure within *The Windup Girl*: she is a dove and an unclean creature; a desirable object that fascinates and repulses; a representative of a posthuman future and a soulless transgressive monster like the cheshire. Kristeva discusses monstrous women through the lens of abjection as that which "disturbs identity, system, order" (4). In *The Windup Girl*, Emiko unsettles humanist notions of identity and the natural order of the neoliberal dystopian body, as Bacigalupi constructs her as a monstrous woman.[60] Drawing on Kristeva's conclusions, Creed considers abjection and its relation to monstrous women as working "within human societies, as a means of separating out the human from the non-human and the fully constituted subject from the partially formed subject" (8). Emiko's social identity as an abject "unclean creature" and "biological oddity" is firmly situated as a non-human, partially formed subject or Other. As an abject figure, Emiko can be considered "immoral, sinister, scheming, and shady" (Kristeva 4). Thus, in the Thai Kingdom, she is soulless and monstrous, a threat to the Thai Kingdom's natural order.

Emiko's bodily monstrosity is heavily policed to control such danger by establishing a boundary between the normal and abnormal. The neoliberal dystopian society constitutes identity by constructing a normativity to which the subject must be obedient and adhere. Such normalization is re-inscribed upon the body (Foucault, *Power/Knowledge* 90) by imposing physical limitations and is "maintained by policing the boundaries between the normal and the abnormal and by continuous and systematic surveillance that is both inter- and intra-subjective" and control (Lukes 96). Emiko initially attempts to adhere to the normalizing effects of her

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[60] Sarat's violent, traumatic experience with the abject in *American War* is limited and used to mold and inform her social identity as her corporeal permeability removes any previous autonomy and attempts at self-identity that allows her to welcome a Southern nationalist social identity. Emiko as an already abhorred figure, instead, is considered the personification of the monstrous abject because of her non-human status, and so her social identity is informed by such a permanent or continuous experience.

neoliberal dystopian society. As a manufactured commodity, an illegal owned "toy," and sex slave, she believes that she does not own her body, which is under external, intersubjective control. Emiko understands, "'My body is not mine,' she told him, her voice flat when he asked about the performances. 'The men who designed me, they make me do things I cannot control. As if their hands are inside me. Like a puppet, yes?" (Bacigalupi 262). Her body is subject to the rules of social normalization as she does not even own the means of her own labor. As a monster, she embodies the abject, the boundary between normal and abnormal.

In order to maintain her position and survive, she succumbs her body to external control, as a puppet.

> As precious and rare as a living *bo* tree. Her soul, emerging from within the strangling strands of her engineered DNA. He wonders if she were a real person if he would feel more incensed at the abuse she suffers. It's an odd thing, being with a manufactured creature, built and trained to serve. She herself admits that her soul wars with itself. That she does not rightly know which parts of her are hers alone and which have been inbuilt genetically. Does her eagerness to serve come from some portion of canine DNA that makes her always assume that natural people outrank her for pack loyalty? Or is it simply the training that she has spoken of? (262)

In this confession of her bodily limitations to Anderson, he catches a glimpse of her true self: "precious and rare" as if she were a "living *bo* tree," which is extinct in the novel. Her posthumanism is again connected to rare and priceless nature, as he recognizes a soul that attempts to escape the "strangling strands" of her surveilled and controlled genes and body. Although Anderson is able to perceive and recognize her soul, he still does not grant her subjectivity or a superior social identity as he believes she is not a "real person" and is therefore unable to feel anguish about her abuse.

Anderson ponders whether this loyalty and obedience or subservience stem from her canine DNA that automatically establishes the social identity of natural people, which stems from their anatomy, as the alpha or superior dog in the pack or hierarchy. Bacigalupi's inclusion of canine characteristics and DNA is reminiscent of Donna Haraway's discussion of canine companionship and use of dogs, like cyborgs, "as guides through the thickets of

technobiopolitics" (*The Companion Species Manifesto* 10). Due to their ungovernable gene flow and hybridity, dogs "have written into their genomes a record of couplings and infectious exchanges to set the teeth of even the most committed free trader on edge" (9). As such, although sterile, Emiko's body and genetics innately rebel against such control and limitations of those wishing to commodify and trade her in that those "strangling strands of DNA" may not, in fact, be so restrictive. As Anderson ponders, her restrictions may not stem from her body, but from being groomed and "trained to serve." The geneticist and behaviorist control of the posthuman within the neoliberal dystopia is a signal of society's attempts to limit Emiko's social identity. However, the fact that she has a soul, and is more sentient than humanity gives her credit for, allows for the possibility of free will and action. Not all action has been programmed into her.

Although some elements of her body have been designed to bolster her oppression and commodification, Emiko realizes that these are not the only factors that determine her body and social identity. She does not need to subjugate herself further and seeks freedom from her sexual slavery and exploitation. She realizes that the neoliberal dystopia has trained her to view natural people as her masters, and she can overcome such training by removing herself from such a social structure and deepening her connection to nature and biology.[61]

Emiko does so by strengthening her connection and knowledge to her own body. This can be apparent in the way that the depiction of her body's movements evolves. As previously discussed, Emiko's stutter-stop motion is used as a physical marker of Otherness that highlights New People's corporeal and social difference from humans to make them appear lesser and less graceful or comfortable within their bodies. Reminiscent of geisha of ancient Japanese culture,

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[61] As will be analyzed in upcoming sections, nature proves the most powerful force within *The Windup Girl*, and by accepting her corporeality and her true nature, however, "unnatural" or against niche human society has deemed her to be, Emiko gains power and constructs a powerful social identity via a disidentification and wiping clean of the current dystopian system.

her specialized design attributes her body to subjection and freakishness and demotes her natural position within the social structure.[62]

Throughout the beginning of the novel, Emiko seeks to hide any physical demarcations and blend in with humanity: "Out on the streets, she tries to blend into the daylight street activity. […] if Emiko is very careful, and fights her nature and training—if she wears *pha sin*, and does not swing her arms—she almost passes" (Bacigalupi 149). Emiko is initially disconnected from her body and attempts to fight against her nature. According to Jansen and Wehrle, the constraint or inhibition "of the moving body goes hand in hand with a constant awareness of the body as object" of its appearance and control by others (42). The notion of passing holds connotations not only of her physical presence and appearance, but also of her social identity. If Emiko distorts her physical features and inhibits her movements, she may be accepted as part of the human group and construct a more elevated, or at least tolerated, social identity.

As an entity located in time and space, the body's corporeality "imposes strict limitations upon the capabilities of movement and perception of the human agent" (Giddens 111). To escape the body's constraint, individuals must acquire trust in their mobility or motility within time and space which, as a result, allows them to acquire social agency. As Giddens states, "activity of the body, in the flow of action, is immediately involved in the ontological security or attitude of 'trust'" in one's self (66). In *The Windup Girl*, once Emiko finds herself in a threatening and deadly situation, she surrenders herself to her body, trusting it and having ontological security that her posthuman survival skills will save her: "Running is strangely easy. People move as if they're suspended in honey. Only she is moving. When she glances behind her, she sees that her pursuer has fallen far behind. He's astonishingly slow. Amazing that she even feared him. She laughs at the absurdity of this suspended world" (Bacigalupi 156). In

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[62] Cf. Emiko's sexual abuse scene with Kannika in which the audience laughs and mocks her strange movements, which serves as a justification for her mistreatment.

doing so, she discovers her enhanced, superhuman strength and speed: a mobility located in space as a material object and time as having extreme speed. Once she accepts her posthuman subjectivity and discards her desires to pass, her body's corporeality easily eliminates any limitations of movement and perception. In this newfound paradigm of extreme physical mobility, her body becomes agile and coordinated where running becomes "strangely easy" as humans are incredibly slow and "suspended" in time and space ("the world") while her corporeal motility allows her to escape such constraints and gain agency. Emiko is initially shocked by this discovery. She is bewildered by her previous subservience and fear of the human which now seems absurd after her newfound capabilities and corporeal liberation.

Avoiding the white shirts, which was once incredibly dangerous, is now deemed entertaining:

> It takes extra time to avoid the white shirts, but at the same time, it is a game. Emiko can play this game now. If she is quick and careful, and allows time between her sudden surges she evades them easily. At speed, she marvels at the movements of her body, how startlingly fluid she becomes, as if she is finally being true to her nature. As if all the training and lashes from Mizumi-sensei were designed to keep this knowledge buried. (360–61)

Emiko now fully trusts her body's capability and posthuman skills. She easily escapes and evades the Environment Ministry's agents, becoming aware of how 'optimal' she is. Her body can withstand much more than any human's, and she begins to realize her potential with its fluid movements. As such, she becomes "true to her nature" and realizes that the perceived beneficial training was used as a control mechanism by humans.

This questioning of nurture and human ideology and embracing of the posthuman body allows Emiko to construct a social identity outside of the neoliberal dystopian paradigm. She becomes self-assertive and empowered, as she starts to embrace her embodiment not as a prison but as a gift: "She is New People, and she moves through the crowds so smoothly that they do not know she is there. She laughs at them. Laughs and slips between them. […] They simply do not recognize how she graces them" (358). Whereas in *The Power* or *American War*, the

enemy Other is rigidly identified and constructed, their social identity almost inescapable, in *The Windup Girl* humanity is unable to perceive the posthuman potential and therefore properly constrain these figures to an othered social identity and subjugate them to a neoliberal dystopian structure. Thus, Emiko, as a New Person who no longer seeks to pass, is able to move smoothly through the masses undetected and unrecognized. Her laughter at this newfound subjectivity indicates her *jouissance* at her transgression and unknowability.[63] This laughter, along with its connotations of infraction and indeterminacy, can also be reminiscent of Carroll's Cheshire cat and the cheshires of the novel. Their fluidity and the eeriness of their deviance and ambiguity is now adopted by Emiko, who so frequently envied such identities.

As previously discussed in this dissertation, humanity in the novel is undergoing a period of social devolution in which the humane and the monstrous or aberrant are inverted: humanity is not humane and the monstrous posthuman is not monstrous. Although institutional power seeks to maintain humanity's hierarchy within this dystopia, it is the act of posthuman individual power that manages to disidentify with society and establish new social identities and parameters. Emiko, especially, becomes the herald "of a new race in a world about to be depleted of humans" with the ability to reorganize life and matter on her own terms after the defeat of humanity (Santaulària i Capdevila 177).

As part of her disidentification with the dystopian society, Emiko struggles against the institutional power present within the Thai Kingdom and contributes to what Foucault determines as a multiplicity of "points of resistance [that] are present everywhere in the power network" (*The History of Sexuality* 95). As opposed to previous characters within the novel that have counter-identified with the dystopian society, as well as characters such as Sarat in *American War* or Roxy and Tunde in *The Power*, Emiko does not promote or embody any belief

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[63] In *The Columbia Dictionary of Modern Literary and Cultural Criticism* (1995), Joseph Childers and Gary Hentzi associate *jouissance* with "a notion of the female suggesting disruption and unknowability" or indetermination. See pages 128; 162-163.

system of her society, and this permits her disidentification.[64] Her resistance to Thai society and its power network is effective in that it is what Foucault describes as "mobile and transitory points of resistance, producing cleavages in a society—that shift about, fracturing unities and effecting regroupings" which can undermine the network of power relations by traversing "social stratifications and individual unities" (96). As a posthuman figure, typically characterized by being multiple and unlimited by transgressing corporeal boundaries, this is also reflected in her modes of resistance. Her resistance is fluid and individual, and she constantly seeks information on the supposed New People enclave where she could be free. Slowly, she whittles away at her oppressors by producing minute fractures in their control over her.

Her first attempt to gain freedom is by asking Anderson to help her escape her living conditions with her pimp, Raleigh, and travel to the New People village. However, Anderson states that this desire is too miniscule in that white shirts may no longer control the Thai Kingdom with the ascendancy of Trade. Her reaction is not to believe Anderson and desire a change in society, but to simply resist and wish to retreat:

> She is begging for survival, and he speaks of fantasy. Emiko tries to keep her disappointment hidden. *You should be content, greedy girl. Grateful for what you have.* But she can't keep the bitterness from her voice. "I am a windup. Nothing will change. We will always be despised." (Bacigalupi 317, emphasis in original)

In this interaction, Emiko's double consciousness is evident as she struggles with her desire for freedom and her submission to social norms and ingrained habits in which said longing is deemed greedy. Anderson's "fantasy" speaks to the privilege and power afforded by his social identity as he is able to thrive within the neoliberal dystopia while Emiko is "begging for survival." As an outsider, Emiko is aware that her posthuman status within this society will

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[64] Hock Seng and Anderson retain neoliberal practices but counter-identify with nativism or royal nationalism; Jaidee and eventually Kanya are royal nationalists but oppose neoliberalism; Sarat simultaneously rejects and assimilates neoliberal nationalism; and Tunde and Roxy desire neoliberal power but also equality, and so do not accept the masculinist matriarchy.

never permit her to rise since, as is common with neoliberal dystopias, they almost always maintain the status quo through institutional power and eradicate any dissent.

She thenceforth embarks on a mission to discover the location of the New People village by herself, the "place where her own kind live and have no masters. Where New People serve only themselves. Anderson-sama may say that his people are coming, but in the end, he will always be natural, and she will always be New People, and she will always serve" (358). She recognizes that, regardless of any new rule and leadership, the neoliberal hierarchization will always grant her an inferior position versus natural humans. Her only opportunity for freedom is to withdraw from such a society and seek a community in which she is no longer inferior, commodified, and enslaved.

Unlike the other characters who counter-identify and attempt to change society, Emiko does not bother with such desires as her disidentification produces a mobile and transitory resistance, quite literally by her desire to move and leave. Emiko forces herself to "recognize that she is no longer a slave [...] She is something else. Something different. Optimal in her own way. And if she was once a falcon tethered, Gendo-sama has done one thing she can be grateful for. He has cut her jesses. She can fly free" (358). Within the novel, the networks of power utilize humanistic principles of unity to establish social stratification and groups. However, Emiko is "something else" and "different." She removes herself from humanistic value judgments as she is "optimal in her own way." A posthuman genetically hybrid figure, her embodiment fractures such humanistic unities.

She metaphorically becomes a falcon, a predatory bird with great speed and eyesight that functions as a symbol of "supreme power and ability" in Asian culture (Kho 2).[65] In fact, in ancient Asian arts, falcons, or hawks, were typically depicted in a dualistic manner: either as "a hawk that belongs to a skilled owner sitting on a gorgeously decorated perch or on the arm

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[65] In fact, the Garuda, a part-falcon demi-God is currently the national symbol of Thailand.

of the well-dressed owner going out to hunt" or as "a hawk in the wild, perched on the branch of a tree in a forest or fiercely pursuing prey" (1). These traditional depictions are encountered within Bacigalupi's text. As two sides of the same coin or bearing a double consciousness, Emiko's "civilized" nature is as an animal used by her wealthy masters, Gendo-Sama or Raleigh. She is commodified and utilized for her services, until she becomes like the falcon of the latter image: a wild bird, free of its jesses, flying in the forest where the New People enclave is supposedly located or using her skills and power to survive and hunt prey.

After realizing that she can finally fly free and embrace her "animal" side, as a consequence of her resistance the neoliberal dystopian society attempts to punish her for such fancies. Emiko returns to Raleigh's brothel one final time to gain any information on the New People village, but instead, in a gratuitously graphic scene, she is abused, gang-raped, and traumatized. In a private session for the Somdet Chaopraya and his companions, her violation is worse than ever before as the "men cheer at Emiko's degradation, encouraging escalation, and Kannika, flushed with excitement, begins to devise new tortures" (Bacigalupi 363). To maintain their elevated status and social identity, the humans degrade and torture Emiko. As their own positions in society become more tenuous with the growing tensions between the Trade and Environment Ministries and the ever-increasing threat of nature, they escalate their mistreatment of their objects and commodities as a transposition to inflict violence on the enemy-Other and maintain their unified self-hood. Emiko cries out and wishes the act to stop, but it is useless:

> Emiko feels men taking her arms, pinning her down. Fingers prod her, invade her, slide in. "Oil it," Kannika whispers, excitement in her voice. Her hands tighten on Emiko's ankles. Wetness at her anus, slick, and then a pressure, cold pressure. Emiko moans a protest. The pressure lets up for a moment, but then Kannika says, "You call yourselves men? Fuck her! Look how she jerks. Look at her arms and legs when you push! Make her do her *heechy-keechy* dance." And then the pressure comes back and the men are holding her down more tightly, and she can't get up and the cold thing presses again against her ass, penetrates her, spreads her wide, splits her open, fills her and she is crying out. Kannika laughs. "That's right windup; earn your keep. You can get up when you make me come." And then Emiko is licking again, slobbering and lapping like a

dog, desperate, as the champagne bottle penetrates her again, as it withdraws and shoves deep into her, burning. The men all laugh. "Look at how she moves!" Tears jewel in her eyes. Kannika encourages her to greater effort and the falcon if there is any falcon in Emiko at all, if it ever existed, is a dead thing, dangling. Not meant to live or fly or escape. Meant to do nothing but submit. Emiko learns her place once again. All night long, Kannika teaches the merits of obedience and Emiko begs to obey and stop the pain and violation, begs to serve, to do anything at all, anything at all to let the windup live just a little longer and Kannika laughs and laughs. (364–65)

Ultimately, Emiko's most violent instance of sexual assault is based on power and obedience. The male audience who participate in her degradation forcefully tether her to the floor using their bodies and violate her with a champagne bottle. Despite her initial protest being met with abatement, when Kannika questions their manhood, and therefore their authority and power, while simultaneously debasing Emiko's status as unworthy and subhuman, the violence against her is heightened. This event does not occur on an institutional level of violence, but as an individual response to the questioning of their social identity.

Emiko's body and mind are consumed by this vicious attack as she is filled with the humans' contempt and disgust. She is defiled and degraded as her value is placed on her sexual competence and "earning her keep" in the brothel. She must please her assaulters who force her to withdraw from society and attempt to eliminate any personal power and value she may have. Her social identity is debased as she transforms further or devolves into animal status by "slobbering and lapping like a dog." Her body and its movements are a source of humor while she is clearly crying with jewel-like tears. Ironically, although her body is devalued, Bacigalupi describes these tears as "jewels" to express the true value of her body and its secretions as opposed to what her human peers consider.

In her attempts to escape and fly away as a falcon, her dual position is reverted to that of commodified tool and creature. The predatory falcon dies and dangles, while she learns to obey her gilded human master. Kannika's vicious attack seems highly personal as she delights and is excited by Emiko's debasement. As a sex worker herself, she attempts to gain social status and construct a more powerful social identity by associating with Emiko's abusers. As

such, she enjoins them to participate in Emiko's rape and thus establishes Emiko as the sole enemy Other while Kannika positions herself as belonging to the group of Thai citizens and elite. She is granted exclusive power over Emiko's life, who begs to serve her as Kannika becomes her master. Emiko, who has always considered and referred to herself as a New Person, now adopts the more derogatory term of "windup" as she begs Kannika to "let the windup live just a little longer." With this, it seems as though she has finally accepted her inferior and servile social identity and position within Thai society and any resistance has been eradicated. However, such a crisis as the one Emiko endures, "can also be an opening, a new way of proceeding, depending on how we do or do not resolve that crisis" (Ahmed 187). The narrative does not end with her brutalization, but also studies the effects of her rape.

Throughout the novel, Bacigalupi not only describes the constant building tension between the Ministries or the growing threat of natural disasters and plagues, but also the building pressure on Emiko's existence. As a consequence of her vulnerability and shock from her assault, Emiko snaps when she realizes that Raleigh was never going to allow her to leave the brothel and join the New People village: "The falcon lies dead. And then she thinks that some things are worse than dying. Some things can never be borne. Her fist is very fast. Raleigh-san's throat is soft. The old man topples, hands flying to his throat, eyes wide with shock. It is all slow-motion" (Bacigalupi 367). Emiko realizes that her sexual assault was worse than death and should have never been borne. She understands that fate as a posthuman figure in Thai society will remain the same if she does not act, so, in a fit of temporary rage, she utilizes her high speed and kills Raleigh. Emiko's swiftness is characteristic of the temporality of snapping, which is defined as "a sudden quick movement. The speed of snapping might be how a snap comes to be apprehended as a movement at all (the slower you move, the less a move seems like a movement)" (Ahmed 188). Thus, the great velocity of her actions causes an even larger impact of her snap as she manages to decimate her assaulters, especially the Somdet Chaopraya

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"who hurt her most. The man who sits and laughs with his friends and thinks nothing of the pain he inflicts" (Bacigalupi 367). This is a personal attack aimed not at the supposed injustice of an institution and dystopian society, as counter-identifying characters might do, but at a man who has so greatly victimized her. In her singular rebellion and defense of her own personhood and dignity, she gains the most individual power and enacts great change throughout Thai society.

Through this snap and act of personal vengeance, Emiko realizes her full posthuman potential and superiority to humans: "Suddenly she's shockingly fast. Fluid in her movements, strangely and suddenly graceful" (380). Not only is her body more improved and more powerful, but also her ability to resist and undermine institutional networks of power as evidenced by her killing of the Somdet Chaopraya, which unleashes a civil conflict and war between the Environment and Trade Ministries. What were once "heechy keechy" movements that were scorned and repudiated are now granting her physical and social dominance. This is indicative of what Hayles describes as posthuman reflexivity in which "an attribute previously considered to have emerged from a set of pre-existing conditions is in fact used to generate the conditions" (9). Thus, those movements which signaled her inferiority and were ingrained in her throughout her years in the crèche were naturalized as her servility and genetically ingrained obedience. Her snapping and visceral reaction to her abuse makes her forget those instilled values in New People: "discipline. Order. Obedience" (Bacigalupi 425). With this grace and power, she can fully question such narratives of pre-existing dispositions, and, as such, is able to determine that said engineered and taught attributes are constructed and used to define her social identity as inferior to humanity. Unlike characters who counter-identify with the neoliberal dystopia, she is not consumed and forgotten as the society continues its dystopian practices. This rebellion or resistance is indicative of her disidentification, and that makes her a target for both Ministries.

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Her individual power and posthumanity affect human institutional power as portrayed by the description of the corpses she leaves behind: "Blood stains everything, great swirls of it spatter the walls and drool across the floors. Bodies lie in tangled heaps. And among them lies the Somdet Chaopraya, his throat not smashed as was the old *farang,* but literally torn out, as though a tiger has fed upon him" (395). As Emiko was made to slobber and lap like a dog, so she has enacted similar violence on her aggressors with excretions, drool, and blood. These powerful men are no longer powerful, they simply are bodies lying tangled on the floor. Of note is the Somdet Chaopraya's cadaver whose throat is torn to shreds "as though a tiger has fed upon him." Emiko has become the real tiger with teeth, replacing Jaidee, who was unable to enact true change.

Those counter-identifying characters throughout this novel, and *American War* and *The Power*, have usually been depicted as the originators or willing participants in acts of violence. Emiko, on the other hand, simply snaps due to the extreme pressure and abuse she faces. As Ahmed describes those who snap, when "a snap is registered as the origin of violence, the one who snaps is deemed violent" so that "violence is assumed to originate with her" however one must understand that these actions are simply reactions and that the snap "is not the starting point" (189). Emiko, thus, does not freely participate in violent actions, but snaps as a reaction. Violence does not then limit or rigidify her social identity as it has done with the other characters of all three novels, since she is not the origin of violence nor further participates in it. In fact, although this act of snapping acts as the catalyst for a shift in regime and the consequent flooding of Bangkok, Emiko is fully removed from this physical brutality and political machinations: her individual power has had a massive impact on the dystopian society, but she has not suffered any negative repercussions.

The epitome of the displacement of humanity within the natural order occurs with the flooding of the Thai city. Throughout the novel, Bacigalupi continuously foreshadows this

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catastrophe, similar to the floods and purification of the earth in the Biblical parable of Noah's Ark. With the human characters' frequent references to water and storms approaching that indicate a fierce, cathartic purge or death, the posthuman Emiko's connection with water evokes tranquility and unity. It is necessary for her to survive as it cools her down and prevents overheating, giving her life. After her routine humiliating and sadistic experiences at Raleigh's brothel, Emiko participates in "a ritual process, a careful cleansing" (Bacigalupi 148) of her body and soul as she bathes and removes any physical and emotional stains and filth:

> Water sluices away soap and grime, even some of the shame comes with it. If she were to scrub for a thousand years she would not be clean, but she is too tired to care and she has grown accustomed to scars she cannot scour away. The sweat, the alcohol, the humid salt of semen and degradation, these she can cleanse. It is enough. She is too tired to scrub harder. Too hot and too tired, always. At the end of her rinsing, she is happy to find a little water left in the bucket. She dips one ladleful and drinks it, gulping. And then in a wasteful, unrestrained gesture, she upends the bucket over her head in one glorious cathartic rush. In that moment, between the touch of the water, and the splash as it pools around her toes, she is clean. (148)

Water, instead of this threatening entity, is used to remove impurities and shame. However, since she continues within this dystopian society that mistreats her, she cannot truly be clean. Her scars and her sadistic treatment become normalized, and she is influenced to grow accustomed to them. Society strives to keep Emiko "too tired and too hot," and too mistreated in order to oppress and prevent her from resisting too much or cleaning and scrubbing too hard. Yet, fluid as the water, Emiko's small act of resistance continues as she quenches her thirst and in "one glorious cathartic rush" she overturns the bucket and floods herself and her bathing station. This micro-flood or rush of water signals her eventual cleanliness: as her shame, degradation, and filth—instilled by the dystopian society—are finally fully clean in an instantaneous snap or point of resistance, so too will Bangkok become clean from humanity and the neoliberal dystopian society after the great flood. Emiko's individual power is present in her control over the water—and subsequent lack of fear—that so threatens the humans of the novel. Her social identity is informed by this cleansing as she discards the human construct of

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toy, tool, and commodity, and instead becomes a clean slate, or *tabula rasa*, a symbol of posthuman possibility.

After the flood, she survives in Bangkok where no human could as the copious amounts of otherwise deadly water allow her life to become "bearable" as she is cleansed by the rain and "eats well and sleeps easily, and with water all around, she does not so greatly fear the heat that burns within her. If it is not the place for New People that she once imagined, it is still a niche" (501). Emiko is thriving in the abandoned remains of human civilization for which she is better suited. This natural disaster has provided her a geographical space to originate a different form of life and build a distinctive future. She is no longer obsessed with the fantasy of reaching the New People enclave and accepts the damaged natural world and its wild imperfection and fragmentation as an unlimited and inclusive space for the posthuman Other.

Bacigalupi describes the flood of Bangkok in which the levees and pumps are destroyed, followed by the tropical monsoons when "the last attempts at holding back the ocean were abandoned" and "On the sixth day, her Royal Majesty the Child Queen announces the abandonment of the divine city" (500–01). "On the sixth day," humanity completely abandoned Bangkok, the *divine* city. Not only is this final flood reminiscent of the Judeo-Christian allegory which inundates the land and humans flee, but the connotations of this abandonment occurring on the sixth day are reminiscent of the creation of world in the Book of Genesis. According to the Bible, the Judeo-Christian God created life in the forms of both animals and humans on the sixth day: "And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth" (*Bible* Genesis 1:26). In contrast to God's original intent to grant humankind power over all the earth and its life, this flood has displaced humanity. The posthuman is now the inheritor of the earth, as this divine city has been razed and recreated for its use. There is no longer a natural order or power

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hierarchy in which the humanist figure is pure and contained. Emiko is a heterogenous hybrid, and as such, can flourish in this new environment:

> We should all be windups by now. It's easier to build a person impervious to blister rust than to protect an earlier version of the human creature. A generation from now, we could be well-suited for our new environment. Your children could be the beneficiaries. Yet you people refuse to adapt. You cling to some idea of a humanity that evolved in concert with your environment over millennia, and which you now, perversely, refuse to remain in lockstep with. (Bacigalupi 345)

Gibbons, a prolific gene hacker, comes across Emiko in this newfound state and seems to be the only human character aware of humanity's lowered place within the natural order. Humanity maintains the biblical notion that humankind has power over nature and life, and so "refuses to adapt" to the environment that has so quickly transformed into something uncontrollable and hostile to *Homo sapiens*. Gibbons understands that humanity is not exceptional or superior, and predicts its evolutionary displacement caused by natural necessity and Darwinist survival of the fittest. This evokes Haraway's considerations of posthumanism signaling "transitions from the comfortable old hierarchical dominations to the scary new networks" called the "informatics of domination" (*Simians, Cyborgs, and Women* 161), which deconstructs those codified as natural and proclaims a new world order. To maintain superiority, humanity must evolve and become hybrids or perish, but they continue to maintain humanist notions of supremacy and homogeneity. Striving after humanist purity, the unity of the subject requires members to wholly identify with the group and so force them into stifling conditions and experiences as is common with dystopia. As a fragmented, genetically intermingled hybrid, Emiko's position does not require such limitations or rigidified social identity. Her posthuman status grants her power over such constructions and liberates her from their typical confines.

When Emiko meets Gibbons, he offers her the opportunity to reproduce and repopulate the city as she "can be made fertile, a part of the natural world" (Bacigalupi 505) via a strand of hair or genetic material, unlike humans. Her limitations can be removed as he promises to help her reproduce and more. This offer further deconstructs the concepts of "human" and

"natural" as Emiko and her capability to reproduce challenge human superiority, and, like her cheshire comrades, seem to be in position to displace them in a new posthuman future.

The blank slate created in Bangkok for Emiko and the posthuman to reinscribe evokes Fanon's notion of decolonization through the *tabula rasa*: a radical shift in the social structure "changed inside out" thus, altering the (natural) order of the world into "total disorder" (Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* 1–2). Fanon considers the destructive violence incurred by the *tabula rasa* to allow those petrified or socially dead to acquire a new social identity. In this case, the posthuman figure is a symbol of ambiguous hope: Emiko has successfully disidentified with society and constructed a social identity independent from the dystopia, yet the blank slate does not inherently provide a utopian promise, as the mistakes of humans can be repeated by posthumans or worse, similar to the ways in which women constructed society after the cataclysm in *The Power*.[66] Bacigalupi, though, does allow a space for ethical posthumanism which moves away from the concept of humans as "the only subjects in a world of objects. An ethical posthumanism must work against this boundary of the human from the nonhuman, refusing this final ground of abjection" that acknowledges the self's material connection to the world and nature and embraces "multiplicity and partial perspectives, a posthumanism that is not threatened by its others" (Vint 189) and so does not require a rigid, limited social identity. Emiko, a posthuman figure, can create an alternative to the neoliberal dystopian society that is characterized by its nativist discrimination, destruction of nature, and commodification of bodies. Ultimately, she is able to liberate herself from her inferior social identity and position in the natural order with her individual power.

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[66] The question of moral and ethical superiority remains a mystery. Given Gibbons' fickle nature and viewpoint of evolution as a "game of chess," it is difficult to determine whether Emiko's descendants will truly be better than their human counterparts. A utopian or egalitarian society is, thus, uncertain.

6. Conclusions

All three novels view the body as the agent of violence as well as a commodified object. *American War* focuses on the notion of rejection and indoctrination, *The Power* emphasizes the embodiment of sex/gender, and *The Windup Girl* considers the body through the posthuman lens. Ideology in all three works stems from historical social enmities that create a discourse of "us" or "self" identities versus "them" or "Other" identities. *American War* considers these enmities constructed by patriotism and nationalism, *The Power* adopts a patriarchal or masculinist matriarchal perspective, and *The Windup Girl* includes notions of nativism and postcolonialism. The final thematic axis regarding power is discussed in all three novels through the division between institutional and individual power via the enactment of violence: focusing on war, torture, and sexual abuse.

The selection of these three novels under examination is not only motivated by the presence of these three thematic axes and the depiction of neoliberal dystopias, but also by the narrative content and social context in which they are produced. All three novels identify current, twenty-first-century social crises that are either exacerbated or ignored by neoliberal politics and portray them within dystopian fiction. These novels represent relevant topics from the depiction of ecological catastrophes and the (postcolonial) exploitation of natural resources for commercial profit and the free market to the detriment of humanity's health and nature's wellbeing, to the influence and rejection of the #MeToo movement and the consequent depiction of sexual violence and the normalization and commodification of bodies. As will be later discussed, not only do the novels effectively pinpoint current social trends and their possible impact on society and our social identity, but they can also be placed within a broader generic scope and influence and participate in this new contemporary trend of dystopian fiction.

American War, *The Power*, and *The Windup Girl* culminate with an act of female rebellion in which the female protagonists refuse to be treated as commodities or "'products'

used and exchanged by men" (Irigaray 84) in power. This rejection, however, comes in three different ways. In *American War*, the reader encounters Sarat's complete self-effacement, disidentification, and sacrifice. Given the inevitability of the bioweaponry attacks, she decides to take control and, thus, end things in her own way, but she remains forgotten, and her history is at the hands of a man, her nephew. In *The Power*, women combat oppression by identifying with the dystopian society, appropriating patriarchal values, and creating a masculinist matriarchy in which they are the oppressors. Finally, in *The Windup Girl*, after extensive, unbearable brutalization, Emiko snaps and unwittingly causes the end of humanist, nativist Bangkok. Her intention is self-preservation and based purely on her own individual power, yet she has colossal public results. The direction of this new beginning is left untested and unexamined as it is unclear whether this will result in genuine social change. The only evidence all three novels provide is that the construction of humankind's social identity is inextricable from the authority of neoliberal dystopia. Any possibility of escaping or dismantling such a society is through the disdentification of a posthuman subject.

The protagonists of the novels are women, or feminine bodies, and in all three, the climax is provoked by their reaction to an extreme act of violence. If one were to consider this solely from the lone protagonists' perspective, their responses may be regarded as disproportionate to the initial act of violence: after her years of torture, Sarat decides to use her body as a bioweapon that results in the death of 110 million people; as a response to the theft and destruction of Roxy's skein and Jocelyn's incapacitation, Allie and Margot initiate the Cataclysm and restart humanity; and Emiko brutally murders her pimp and the brothel's audience after her rape. However, this could also be interpreted as a response to the recurrent aggression on feminine bodies, which would grant symbolic significance to Sarat, Allie, Margot, and Emiko's actions.

Audre Lorde defines this concept as a response to a historic, systemic abuse and persecution in which every "woman has a well-stocked arsenal of anger potentially useful against those oppressions, personal and institutional, which brought that anger into being. Focused with precision it can become a powerful source of energy serving progress and change" (280).[67] However, unexpressed anger "lies within [women] like an undetonated device" (280), and if detonated incorrectly in conjunction with fear and hatred, it could lead to an explosion and annihilation (283). In a neoliberal dystopian society with clear patriarchal roots, such as the ones in all three novels, people are raised within a system that inculcates said fear and hatred. Characters like Sarat, Margot, and Allie can only enact an annihilation of their peers because their anger stems from dread and rancor. Sarat, counter-identifying and fighting against the neoliberal dystopian system of oppression manages to also annihilate herself, whereas Margot and Allie's use of anger functions within the patriarchal, or masculinist matriarchal, structure so their actions foster personal and institutional coercion. Emiko, on the other hand, through her disidentification and acceptance of her posthumanity, no longer fears her human peers. Thus, her reaction in anger becomes said "powerful source of energy" that brings about progress and change.

Initially, when analyzing the three novels separately, the gender of the protagonists does not appear to be incredibly relevant, except in the case of *The Power*. However, upon a comparative study, the novels' focus on female protagonists and their uses of anger within oppressive and discriminatory settings becomes more than simple coincidence. In other words, Lorde's notion of the uses and explosion of anger within these neoliberal dystopias grants greater insight into all three novels' decision to portray female protagonists as well as understanding of the ways in which the outcomes produced by their respective climactic reactions are also a result of their mechanisms of identification.

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[67] Lorde's article refers to anger and rage against racism, but this can be extrapolated to encompass the emotional response to misogyny and the patriarchy.

None of the novels represents the classical dystopian dictatorships encountered in most twentieth-century novels of the same genre, as all three shift their focus to portray twenty-first century preoccupations and discuss how the notion of a neoliberal government can become dystopian. Like most dystopian novels, these three narratives are products of their times as they are deeply entrenched in current events and contain an almost prophetic analysis of society and how social identity can be rigidified and limited and how power is executed int these society.

Notions of social identity and group membership are traditionally viewed as positive and enriching because of the possibility of intersectionality. Individuals do not solely pertain to one collective; their social identity is constituted by the intersection of belonging and identifying with several groups. However, in these three novels, society transforms social identity by limiting the number of communities or collectivities to which the characters belong, ostracizing all those who are different and counter-identify or oppose the established norm. As such, the dystopian institutions or systems—the Southern nationalists, male and female supremacists, or Thai nativists, respectively—attempt to limit dissent and collective action that could result in their demise or loss of power by restricting group memberships available within society. Thus, Sarat's or Roxy and Tunde's counter-identifications, i.e., conflict or tension between these individuals and the public or group, end in their suppression or subordination.

Within these neoliberal dystopias, groups begin to erase individuality and eliminate dissent. The rebel nationalists, masculinist matriarchs, or "good" Thai nativists become more rigid and strict in their membership: relational boundaries are severed; common purposes become more influential; and valuing individuals only occurs when they identify with the dystopian system, as Margot and Allie do, and espouse the same values as the group itself. To establish clear limits that define group membership and corresponding social identities, these collectives require the Other as a form of distinguishing themselves and cementing their worth. It does not matter whether these identities and group memberships are long-established, like

the North and South enmities, or recent, with the masculinist matriarchs and Allie's religion; they serve as markers and permit favoring and prejudice. They allow the protagonists to situate themselves within the paradigm and confines of social norms and memberships, and determine, by the end of each novel, what the protagonists' relationship with the neoliberal dystopia shall be.

American War, *The Power*, and *The Windup Girl*, like most dystopias, are characterized by corporate regimes using violence and oppression to maintain power and prevent dissent. Not only does this act as a preventative measure against dissidence, but it also serves to bind and rigidify social identities and create a sense of solidarity. The novels portray how violence not only transforms identity, but also restricts the identities the characters can embody. In these dystopian societies, there is no room for intersectionality, there is only one defining or dominant element to the protagonists' identities. Sarat is solely characterized by her membership, or lack thereof, as a Southern patriot or nationalist; Margot, Allie, and Roxy are now women with power to be enforced against those without it while Tunde is a powerless, de-valued man; and the characters in *The Windup Girl* are defined by their proximity to Thainess and their status in the natural order. This adherence to a singular social identity group signals the radicalism within dystopian settings. Only Emiko, although initially ranked according to this social order, is able to step outside of this rigid paradigm via her posthuman displacement and refusal to participate in group violence. In fact, her only act of violence occurs from an interpersonal place of self-defense and survival, whereas the characters of *American War* and *The Power* view violence more so as an act against the masses or society, thereby erasing their individuality and individual actions.

Groups in the dystopian novels advocate for a unique social identity imbued with a violent purpose so as to eradicate any dissent and eclipse any other affiliations outside of the group. All three novels share in their depiction of the body its simultaneous objectification and

utilization as an agent of violence. Sarat's indoctrination and original acceptance of the Southern nationalist agenda stems from her experiences with brutality. The massacre at Camp Patience, along with several deaths in the family and perceived injustices, act as a harsh catalyst for the construction of her social identity as Sarat's body becomes an agent of violence by killing Northern officers and instigating guerrilla warfare. Like the radical homicide bombers, this indoctrination and experience of violence is utilized to objectify Southern insurrectionists' bodies. Sarat, and others like her, become devices to be controlled by these radical rebel groups to engage in further assault and violence against the North. Just like the blade Albert Gaines gifts her, Sarat's body becomes objectified and weaponized for Southern nationalist benefit.

Yet, upon her imprisonment in Sugarloaf Detainment Camp, her social identity shifts to become the receiver of brutality as a victim of torture. Due to her years of torture, her body is left marked, becoming both the site and cause of pain. Any agency and positive identification that Sarat had with Southern nationalism is annihilated as her body is manipulated and turned against her. Her previous, original corporeal markers of social identity are erased, leaving behind only the marks and effects of torture. The pain and torment she endures cause drastic changes to her body and mind, and change her social identity completely. Although her identity is warped, she does not step outside the paradigms of violence within the dystopian society. She merely counter-identifies, and, as such, her body remains an agent of violence as she uses it to spread the deadly disease that will kill millions of people.

Like Sarat, the characters in *The Power* act as agents of violence on a global scale. Instead of emulating Emiko's interpersonal self-defense on an individual level, women's newfound power from the skein is utilized on a massive and brutal scale. Similar to Sarat, Margot and Allie seek systemic and institutional righteous vengeance for their personal trauma and hardships. Thus, while at first women use the power in self-defense, their morality becomes warped with their liberation and physical dominance. They begin to mimic the previous superior

group, i.e., men, and adopt masculinist notions of desire and self-satisfaction. In so doing, they are successful because they identify with the core dystopian values of society and operate within them. Like the Southern nationalist rebel groups in *American War*, masculinist matriarchal leaders like Margot and Allie privatize the military and objectify and commodify their female soldiers' bodies. Due to her leadership status within a private military corporation and in public office, Margot's body and those bodies associated with her must be consistent and efficient for their use as marketable production of warfare, defense, and violence. An abnormal, unreliable soldier diminishes NorthStar's gains as well as Margot's social status and power as a woman and as an entrepreneur. Thus, female bodies must be normalized so as to construct and maintain reliable and efficient corporeal weapons for the benefit of private corporations.

From the onset, Alderman explicitly provides the traditional link between dystopia and violence with the initial representation of the skein. Each character's experience of the awakening of the skein organ in *The Power* occurs in moments of pain or sexual violence. Roxy does so to defend herself against her mother's murderers, Margot feels a mix of pain and pleasure, Tunde's first encounter connotes sexual violation, and the first portrayal of Allie's use of the organ is when she is raped by her foster father. Through strength and violence, they either identify or counter-identify with the dystopian society.

Elements of torture are also present within *The Power* when Alderman depicts scenes of female sexual violence against men to elucidate the ways in which their social identities begin to adopt gendered traits of brutality, domination, competitiveness, and aggression. This occurs individually in Delhi when a crazed woman attempts to assault Tunde, but Alderman provides more graphic depictions when Tunde escapes to the forest in Bessapara and a refugee camp is massacred by a privatized female militia. As victims and witnesses of these instances of torture, Tunde and Roxy, like Sarat, counter-identify as well with the dominant dystopian ideology and maintain their more egalitarian views.

In *The Windup Girl*, New People's posthuman bodies are quite literally created as commodified objects for the human species' entertainment. Whereas Sarat or women's bodies in *The Power* must be objectified from already existing physical forms, Emiko is fabricated from scratch to fit social ideals and is inherently commodified as a labor product. The optimization of New People's bodies is achieved through the inclusion of different genetic, posthuman variants and congenital perfection. New People's appearance and outer bodies—their perfect, poreless skin and physical beauty—function as visible markers of what neoliberal dystopian society considers desirable. Coupled with enhanced senses and speed, New People are aesthetically pleasing and efficient instruments of labor. Their inner body is also a reflection of this optimization and perfection. New People have mixed DNA so that their genetic disposition forces obedience and a desire to please a master. Their heightened sexual responses that derive sexual pleasure regardless of consent or abuse, and sterility highlight New People's, and Emiko's, true purpose as pure, desirable sex objects. As such, their body is a site of capital and sexual production. Emiko's physical disposition and genetic framework force her to enjoy her subjugation and service. She is not only an ideal worker, but an ideal sex worker. Thus, a key difference between Emiko's body and Sarat's or the women's bodies in *The Power* is that she is not created as an agent of violence, but as a victim on which violence is perpetrated.

As opposed to *American War* and *The Power*, in *The Windup Girl* Emiko's experiences as a victim of sexual violence and torture ultimately result in her disidentification. Although some elements of her body have been designed to bolster her oppression and commodification, Emiko realizes that these are not the only factors that determine her social identity. She does not need to subjugate herself further and her body becomes an agent of violence with the sole purpose of seeking personal freedom from her sexual slavery and exploitation. She realizes that the neoliberal dystopian system has trained her to view natural people as her masters, and she can overcome such training by removing herself from such a social structure and deepening her

connection to her own body. Emiko's questioning of such imposed human normativity and embracing of the posthuman body allows her to construct a social identity outside of the neoliberal dystopian paradigm. She becomes self-assertive and empowered, as she starts to embrace her embodiment not as a prison but as a gift. Thus, her reaction to her immense sexual torture leads to her removal from the humanistic paradigm. Her physical Otherness becomes a symbol of positive difference. The novel's climactic scene, filled with brutality and pain, is responded to by Emiko with self-defense and positive self-promotion, instead of Sarat's or Tunde's and Roxy's seeming self-sacrifice.

Whereas in *The Power* or *American War*, the enemy Other is rigidly identified and constructed, their social identity almost inescapable, in *The Windup Girl*, humanity is unable to perceive the posthuman potential and therefore properly constrain these figures to an Othered social identity and subjugate them to a neoliberal dystopian structure. Thus, Emiko, as a New Person who no longer seeks to fit in and adhere to humanistic principles, is able to displace herself and disidentify from her dystopian society.

All three novels depict the ways ideology is used to construct rigid social identities based on belonging to certain in-groups and Othering and villainizing the oppositional out-groups. In *American War*, this alienation is achieved by basing social identities on traditional nationalist enmities and constructing a Southern national identity that includes Southerners and excludes citizens of the North along geographical, cultural, and historic lines. By utilizing entrenched historic enmity stemming from the First American Civil War, Southern ideology depicts the North and its Otherness as a threat to the Free Southern State's way of life and identity.

In *American War*, neoliberal strategies employ notions of freedom from Northern oppression, a de-regulated market, and common sense to advance nationalism and national pride by creating an environment in which these ideals are normalized. This sense of belonging

is established through notions of biological and cultural kinship and heritage through one's homeland and shared history which stem from the First Civil War al this is taught to Sarat by Albert Gaines. As a recruitment tactic, she feels part of a group but remains isolated so that she is indoctrinated to immediately accept and uphold the Southern nationalist body of ideas. Gaines recognizes Sarat's status as an outcast and her yearning to belong to a group and gain a social identity, which makes her more vulnerable and, thus, more malleable to his manipulation. So, he provides her with claim to kinship to a Southern history and culture that awakens Sarat's concern and outrage at perceived injustices and crimes committed against the South, and by starting to care, she starts to identify herself with such things and forms part of a social identity. Speaking about the South's history and creating a sense of nationalist pride allow members of the nationalist group to blame society's misfortunes on the Other and promote a radicalized social ideology linked to one's sense of belonging and ancestral pride.

These indoctrinating tactics via individuals' desire for group belonging are also encountered in *The Power*. Throughout the novel, Alderman portrays notions of the chosen family and religious fealty as a site for belonging and acquisition of social identity, engineered by the arousal of feelings of loyalty to Allie as their mother. Through religious myth and iconography, Allie instills within women a profound feeling of sorority while promoting the new, masculinist matriarchal tradition and belief system. Allie's frequent Bible studies not only function as a revisionist lesson in new Scripture to espouse such ideas, but also serve as a physical and emotional place where women congregate and foment more radicalized beliefs and support for the shift in the dystopian system. The novel's relational ties are framed within religious discourse on family and companionship, accompanied by a feeling a transcendental euphoria or ecstasy, common to religious collectives.

Almost as a combination of the ideologies present within *American War* and *The Power*, in *The Windup Girl*, Bacigalupi portrays the ideology of the Thai Kingdom as a mixture of

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nationalist and religious rhetoric. Thai society is characterized by its neoliberal religious nativism, enforcing a strict, rigid collective identity that must not deviate from traditional Thai values and ways of life. All non-Thai residents are deemed inferior and rejected. Foreigners, thus, are characterized as lesser and undeserving because of their weaker or negative karma. Bacigalupi's utilization of the idea of karma implies a sense of deservedness of one's fate. The characters warrant reincarnation within such a hostile ecological and sociopolitical environment as they are made to believe that their difficulties are their own, personal fault. The neoliberal dystopian elements of society are ignored, as individuals are responsible for their hardships, not the social system itself.

Belonging and acceptance require collective objectives and interests through group cooperation and collaboration. This is best achieved via the objective of fighting against a common adversary. In order to establish a rigid, social identity that belongs to one sole collective, the dystopian society constructs an ideological Other. In *American War,* the neoliberal dystopia must be maintained, thus Southern citizens are prevented from easily recognizing the ruinous nature of neoliberal signs and trinkets. Southern nationalist ideology creates supporting propaganda that blames Southern misfortunes on the Northern enemy Other or "them," while simultaneously defending and endorsing a Southern nationalist social identity or "us." Southern ideology within the novel legitimates its nationalist social identity by constructing a rival Other with which to be contrasted and, in doing so, gain justification for the secession.

Throughout her upbringing, Sarat is solely surrounded by Southerners and their propaganda. She lacks a nuanced, diversified perspective of society and the world around her. In order to belong to the social group of nationalist Southerners, the past must be idealized foregrounding the ideas of the free market and Southern liberty. However, as a result of her

counter-identification, she later refutes these notions and views all of society, both North and South, as her enemy Other.

Similarly, Margot and Allie participate in the shaping of the enemy Other within *The Power*. In this case, they base themselves on the tradition of the battle of sexes and identify men as their historic rivals. Allie's religious ideology serves her to establish an oppositional dichotomy with men, not only repudiating their group but also associating notions of war and violence with them. Allie, thereby, defines their social identities as violent Others who may seek to separate and hurt these members of the group. Allie makes the redundancy and exclusion of men clear when she promotes the notion of women living and banding together without the need for men in any way. Her exclusionary tactics are based on the principles of sisterhood and solidarity. After having established the feelings of religious transcendence and a need for group belonging and acceptance, she has already enticed women with her positive messages of loyalty which makes them more amenable to discarding men as part of their social collective.

In *The Windup Girl*, the formation of the subject or self is also created through the presentation and confrontation of the Other, in this case the foreigner and the posthuman figure. Whereas nationalist ideology in *American War* created the Northern and Southern division, and the masculinist matriarchal system divided those between Man and Woman, in *The Windup Girl*, nativist ideology establishes the contraposition between Thai citizen as the self and the foreigner (i.e., yellow card refuge or illegal alien New Person) as the enemy Other. The rejection of the Other is caused by hatred at its unnatural status that affronts the niche and nature and by fear of its contagion and spread to take control of Thai society.

The dystopian societies within the three novels employ violence as a means of further oppressing the enemy Other and gaining both institutional and individual power. In the novels, power is mainly achieved through collective brutal action. These dystopias examine the ways

in which the state, or individuals mimicking the state, impose violence to achieve certain ends or how the presence of power informs the creation of communities.

Like the other characters in dystopian novels, Sarat does not have plural, intersectional social identities: she only recognizes and is recognized by the solitary and exclusive social identity of belonging to the Southerners, specifically Southern insurrectionists. Thus, in the novel, the enmity between the North and South and Sarat's constant quest for revenge is a result of her violent dystopian experiences, which make her adhere to only one social identity group and force her believe she has no choice. In essence, violence sustains and is sustained by a supposed lack of plurality of social identities. Instead of moving forward and seeking peace, Sarat focuses on the injustices done to her and her people. Her actions become defined by a sole, exclusive social identity, which equates power and control over identity with violence and revenge.

As previously stated, changing and affecting society is only possible in dystopian fiction when it is beneficial and is used to maintain said dystopia. Working within the social paradigm of dystopian violence for counter-identifying or rebellious purposes only serves to eradicate or suppress the characters' social identities. Sarat attempts to gain individual power through her personal revenge against Bud Baker, her torturer. However, this leaves Sarat unsatisfied and her thirst for power unquenched. Inflicting pain on a single individual is not enough to gain enough power that will allow Sarat to regain her previous social identity or enact change within the dystopia. The damage inflicted on her is too great and systemic, so the violence she inflicts on this individual level is insufficient revenge and she attempts to harm the entire system itself.

Sarat's clear disdain for political and administrative power, coupled with her obsession with revenge, leads to social and personal nihilism. As a result, her revenge culminates in her anonymity and self-destruction as she is unable to assimilate and accept this dystopian social authority. Although she is successfully indoctrinated, her all-consuming desire for revenge and

her radical notion of cyclical violence in which blood can never be unspilled prohibit her from understanding, and therefore promoting, more productive social nuances that do not result in nihilism. She simplistically equates power with revenge and violent agency, ignoring the importance of institutional and political control, which blinds her to the true power dynamics of her society.

However, choosing peace and leaving violence behind is also unacceptable within a neoliberal dystopian society. For example, when Roxy learns of her father's initial betrayal and murder of her mother, instead of continuing the cycle of death and brutality, she chooses to forcefully retire him and take up the family business. In choosing peace and true justice, Roxy counter-identifies with the normative power structure that demands conflict and violence. As a consequence, she is made to suffer. Her father and brother—her only remaining male family— join forces to steal her skein and incapacitate her. Although she manages to survive and attempts to recover her skein, she is too late. Society does not allow her to hold power if she does not comply with its norms.

As opposed to Sarat's desire for vengeance against society or Roxy's refusal to engage in retribution, Margot and Allie seek and fight for power while remaining within society's normative masculinist paradigm and striving for misandrist objectives and rewards. The two women have no general desire to counter-identify or eliminate the power structures already established; as they recognize that by supporting the institutional authority of system, they can gain control and power for themselves. Margot and Allie pursue power and leadership out of self-interest: the former seeks financial gain whereas the latter desires the safety that power provides. Thus, they do not seek social justice, but instead embrace a system and operate within the masculinist power structure of the novel, constructing social identities that identify with this neoliberal dystopia. Although both characters initially begin their journey as victims of patriarchy attempting to dismantle such oppression, they reach masculinist matriarchal power

and authority and are resistant to relinquishing these in favor of a non-dystopian society which would potentially remove their power. In fact, Allie does not wish social identities to be able to shift freely between patriarchal and masculinist matriarchal power structures. With the cataclysm or Armageddon, she wishes to freeze all identities to encompass rigid social identification. Because she plans this "apocalypse," she is able to warn her loyal followers so that they can survive and therefore repopulate the world according to their own doctrine and further entrench these ideological views and gain social power.

The characters of *American War* and *The Power* operate within the paradigm of their respective dystopia's power structures, but Emiko is the only character who truly acts in self-defense and can enact change. She is also the only character in all three novels who only harms and uses violence against a small group of people who immensely hurt her, regardless of their social and institutional positions. However, the humans within the novel are unable to believe that a single individual, with no institutional coercion or support, could perform such a momentous act. By continuing to devalue and dehumanize Emiko, the Environment and Trade Ministry agents believe her to be an object or weapon used by foreign powers to destabilize the nation: an institutional power play. Because they continue to function within the social and logical paradigms of the dystopian society, both ministries suspect and blame each other for this murder and are unable to decontextualize this crime.

Other characters counter-identify and attempt to change society, but Emiko does not promote or embody any belief system and does not bother with such desires because her disidentification produces a mobile and transitory resistance, quite literally by her desire to move and leave. Although the networks of power utilized humanistic principles of unity to establish social stratification and groups and permit only a rigid social identity, Emiko removes herself from humanistic value judgments; as a posthuman genetically hybrid figure, her embodiment fractures such humanistic unities.

These three novels are also representative of a tendency that can be applied beyond the scope of this dissertation. The purpose of this dissertation, thus far, is to serve as an anticipation of current trends within twenty-first century dystopian literature. Not only are the depictions of dystopian society now characterized by neoliberalism, but the three representations of identity and the mechanisms of identification encountered may also serve to indicate a tendency within this genre. Although due to their relative newness and recent publications it is still difficult to decipher the impact of these novels within the broader definition of the genre, one can still analyze the effect these novels have had on a smaller temporal scale.

Despite being written prior to the 2016 US Elections, El Akkad's *American War* is lauded as a prescient novel that forecasts the Trump administration, the Republican Tea Party, and the Alt-Right movement, and their devastating economic, political, and ecological policies. In fact, Shadi Hamid aptly identifies *American War*'s analysis of the American conflict and society as foretelling possible realities and social divisions. *American War* tunes into current political strife that leads current analysts to treat "the risk of civil war more seriously" and calculate the probability of civil strife at about sixty percent because the country meets all five conditions that make this more possible with a collection of economic, ideological, and sectarian grievances and the existence of organized and effective rebel groups to mobilize the population (Hamid, paras.17–18). Influenced by his work as a journalist, El Akkad steeps his novel in reality and unravels this "much more, quieter, civil war that's been going on for decades" (Crawford, para.7).

The author situates his novel within Western dystopian tradition, but also identifies its placement within Middle Eastern literature. Writers such as Basma Abdel Aziz and her works *The Queue* (2013) and *Here is a Body* (2021) are representative of dystopian fiction within the Middle East. Although these maintain depictions of more classical, totalitarian regimes, Aziz

also imbues her works with the beginnings of neoliberal ideology. In a New York Times article, *American War* is equated to coming-of-age young-adult dystopian novels such as Suzanne Collins' *The Hunger Games* Trilogy (2008-2010) or Veronica Roth's *Divergent* Series (2011-2013) and finds resemblance in Sarat's social identity with the typical "feisty, unconventional girl forced by the harsh conditions of the dystopian world in which she lives to prove herself as a warrior" in these popular series (Kakutani, para.8). Michiko Kakutani also situates the novel among other classics by comparing *American War* to the haunting ecological disaster in Cormac McCarthy's *The Road* (2006) as well as Philip Roth's devastating "look at the fallout that national events have on an American family" in *The Plot Against America* (2004) (Kakutani, para.1).

Critics also locate *The Power* within the larger discourse of the #MeToo movement and as a work that constructs a dialogue with other prominent utopian and dystopian novels. Ella Holden considers the novel a tribute to classical dystopian fiction by authors such as Orwell, Huxley, and Zamyatin in its "indictment of the damaging rhetoric of careerist politicians, but above all [as] a warning of the perils of inequality in a world reluctant to restore balance" (Holden, para.5). Alderman's novel can be considered part of a larger discourse that includes speculative media such as *Wonder Woman* and *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, that imagine a female-led society or group. Ron Charles, in *The Washington Post*, defines the novel as "one of those essential feminist works that terrifies and illuminates, enrages and encourages" (Charles, para.1). Alderman's book has been described as a critical inversion of Charlotte Perkins Gilman's *Herland* (1915) as well as revision of Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985) "for a millennial generation" (La Ferla, para.4) as Alderman states that the novel was dedicated to and influenced by her mentor, Margaret Atwood. *The Power*'s widespread popularity and influence has led to Amazon Prime buying the rights to a television series which is currently in post-production.

While *American War* and *The Power* are primarily situated within the sub-genres of climate change and feminist speculative fiction, respectively, most analysts compare *The Windup Girl* to cyberpunk novels like Paul McAuley's *Fairyland* (1995) and Ian McDonald's *River of Gods* (2004) and locate it especially as an extension of the work of William Gibson, namely *Neuromancer* (1984). Its inclusion of a posthuman protagonist and such an overcrowded and chaotic environment is also reminiscent of Philip K. Dick's *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheepy?* (1968) as it culminates in a process of dehumanization, but also re-humanization, of the non-human. Moreover, Tom Idema also considers the novel as part of the tradition of flood narratives and compares it to Maggie Gee's *The Flood*, Amitav Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide*, Barbara Kingsolver's *Flight Behaviour*, and Nathaniel Rich's *Odds Against Tomorrow* (Idema 52). As such, all three novels are influenced by and contribute to an extensive history of popular and prominent dystopian and speculative fiction, which can be further elucidated by the recognition they have received for their impact on the genre.

Among the accolades that exemplify *American War*'s effect on dystopian literature, are its position as a finalist for both the 2017 Rogers Writers' Trust Fiction Prize and the 2018 Arthur C. Clarke Award. The novel was featured on Canada Reads 2018 and also won the 2018 amazon.ca First Novel Award and the Kobo Emerging Writer Prize in 2017, and was included by the BBC News in 2019 as one of the top 100 novels that have shaped the world.[68] Within this list, *American War* is featured in the "Crime and Conflict" category among notable works such as *The Children of Men* (1992) by P.D. James, *Rebecca* (1938) by Daphne Du Maurier, *Regeneration* (1991) by Pat Barker, and *The Talented Mr. Ripley* (1955) by Patricia Highsmith.

The Power has also received much praise and notoriety after its publication. It was named one of The 10 Best Books of 2017 by The New York Times Book Review as well as

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[68] See https://www.cbc.ca/books/margaret-atwood-l-m-montgomery-carol-shields-featured-on-bbc-s-list-of-100-novels-that-shaped-the-world-1.5350098 and
https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/articles/494P41NCbVYHlY319VwGbxp/discover-100-amazing-novels-with-brand-new-bbc-sounds-podcast for more details.

one of former U.S. President Barack Obama's favorite books in 2017. In Great Britain, the novel won the prestigious 2017 Baileys Women's Prize for Fiction.

The Windup Girl is perhaps, of the three novels, the book with the most critical acclaim. In 2009 it was named the ninth best fiction book by *TIME magazine* and was named one of five of the best climate change novels by *The Guardian*. *The Windup Girl* also won the 2010 Nebula Award for Best Novel, the meritorious 2010 Hugo Award for Best Novel along with China Miéville's *The City and the City*, the 2010 John W. Campbell Memorial Award for Best Science Fiction Novel, the 2010 Crompton Crook Award, and the 2010 Locus Award. It also received international and translation awards such as the Japanese Seiun Award for Best Translated Long Fiction, the German 2012 Kurd-Laßwitz-Preis, and the French Planète SF Award in 2012.

As a result of these prestigious accolades and recognitions, these novels have also participated in the formation and construction of new twenty-first-century neoliberal dystopian trends. In novels such as *The Girl with All the Gifts* (2014) by M.R. Carey and Atwood's *MaddAdam* Trilogy (2003-2013) that depict the non-human and apocalyptic spread of a virus that changes human anatomy, one can understand their influence and interaction with all three novels. In *The Girl with All the Gifts*, Melanie seems to embody a different, transhuman figure similar to Emiko's and the notion of fungus infection that spreads throughout the globalized world recalls the society of *The Windup Girl*. The influence of the environment and transformation and normalization of bodies is also present within *American War* and *The Power* respectively. The *MaddAdam* trilogy also features a neoliberal corporate society that has created genetically engineered, hybrid, non-humans comparable to *The Windup Girl*. The global pandemic of the first novel is reminiscent of Sarat's attempts to kill millions of people with The Quick while the religious sect in *The Year of the Flood* could influence Alderman's depiction of Allie's neo-Abrahamic movement.

Since the novels are recently published, their influence on literary media remains to be further observed. However, instances of similar representations of social identities in neoliberal dystopias are more obvious in other forms of more immediate media, which indicate their participation in a more general tendency. For example, the graphic novel and TV series *The Boys* details the exploitation and commodification of superheroes, who are later discovered to be biologically engineered, similar to Emiko and the women in *The Power*. Instead of traditional depictions of such superheroes, *The Boys* portrays an ambiguous neoliberal dystopia, controlled by a multinational corporation, and whose anti-heroic characters either identify, counter-identify, or attempt to disidentify with the powerful social collective.

The 2021 film *Swan Song* also examines the questions of social identity and replacement or suppression with the cloning of Cameron into Cameron 2.0 after being diagnosed with a terminal illness. Cameron's decision to remove himself and provide a cloned substitute unbeknownst to his family has more subtle neoliberal dystopian influence but the elements of self-sacrifice and advanced, consumerist technology that objectifies and commodifies the body—present within the three novels—can also be encountered in this film.

Based on the 1973 movie with the same title, the *Westworld* series (2016-present) shifts the focus to further sympathize with the android characters and places them in more prominent roles. This narrative alteration signals a shift in dystopian tendencies and reader sympathies by acknowledging the posthuman potential, similar to Emiko, within these characters. The androids of the series are no longer the villains but the exploited commodities of a multi-billion-dollar corporation. The settings in *Westworld* utilize traditional cultural and historic enmities and ideologies, like the three novels, to construct the characters' social identities, and throughout the four seasons, the screenwriters and directors depict all three mechanisms of identification in similar fashions as within these three neoliberal dystopian novels.

Although this dissertation acts an anticipatory glance at the trends in the dystopian genre, *American War*, *The Power*, and *The Windup Girl*, respectively, effectively showcase the new tendencies in this type of fiction by portraying current depictions of neoliberal practices and control that are more adequate to twenty-first-century Occidental sensibilities and worries. The representations of the characters' social identities—their counter-identification, identification, or disidentification—are exemplified in the novels and further the notion that dystopian societies only permit rigid identities that support the dystopian structure to thrive. In order to enact any change, individuals must displace and remove themselves from the social paradigms and norms. The commonalities within the novels that support this theory have been evidenced throughout this dissertation, and the critical acclaim and integration of the books within dystopian literature may serve as a foretelling of their influence on the genre in the future.

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