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Praxis

**A Peer-Reviewed Journal of
The Department of English
University of Rajshahi**

Editor

Dr. Md. Sakhawat Hossain

Associate Editors

Dr. Mahbuba Hasina

Dr. Md. Alamgir Hossain

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Editorial Preface

Praxis: Journal of the Department of English, University of Rajshahi is committed to maintaining rigorous academic and ethical standards in the publication of scholarly research in the English language, linguistics, and literature. As a double-blind peer-reviewed journal, *Praxis* ensures that all submitted manuscripts undergo an impartial and thorough evaluation process, safeguarding both academic integrity and intellectual merit.

The journal adheres strictly to a policy of originality. Submissions are unpublished and not be under consideration for publication elsewhere. Any form of plagiarism, including self-plagiarism, is considered a serious breach of academic ethics and results in immediate rejection. Authors are responsible for ensuring the authenticity of their work and for properly acknowledging all sources in accordance with recognized citation standards.

To maintain disciplinary coherence while encouraging intellectual diversity, *Praxis* accepts contributions primarily within the fields of English studies, linguistics and English Language Teaching. Interdisciplinary work is welcomed, provided it demonstrates a clear and substantive engagement with these core areas. All manuscripts are written in English and follow either the MLA (9th edition) or the APA (7th edition) style, depending on the disciplinary orientation of the paper.

The journal enforces a structured submission protocol. Manuscripts fall within the prescribed length and include an abstract and a brief author bio-note. Submissions are accepted in both print and digital formats, prepared according to specified formatting guidelines. To ensure equitable representation, each author is permitted to submit only one manuscript per volume. In cases of joint authorship, full disclosure of all contributors and their institutional affiliations is required.

The editorial board reserves the right to make necessary revisions for clarity, coherence, and consistency without altering the substantive argument of the work. Final decisions regarding publication rest solely with the editorial board, based on reviewers' recommendations and the journal's standards. Individual authors, and not the Editorial Board, are responsible for the views expressed in their writing.

Through these policies, *Praxis* seeks to uphold excellence, transparency, and fairness in academic publishing, fostering a scholarly environment that values critical inquiry, methodological rigor, and intellectual responsibility.

In Memoriam: Professor Dr. Idris Ahmed Md. Sakhawat Hossain

I had the privilege of being a direct student of Professor Dr. Idris Ahmed, and the memory of his classroom remains one of the most formative experiences of my intellectual life. He was not a teacher of abundance in number, but of precision and distinction; he took relatively few classes, yet each one bore the mark of rare excellence. His lectures were events that were often animated, lucid, and deeply engaging, without ever obscuring the depth of his scholarship.

What set him apart most strikingly was his method. He had the remarkable ability to render even the most extended and complex texts into something graspable without diminishing their intellectual weight. With a lightness of touch and a finely tuned sense of humour, he guided students into the depths of a text as if it were the most natural of movements. His wit was never ornamental; it was pedagogical and it was an instrument through which difficulty dissolved and insight emerged. Many of his students would testify that his classes were filled with mirth, yet never lost their seriousness of purpose.

In demeanour, he was at once formal and disarmingly intimate. His English was impeccable, measured, and refined, reflecting a deep command of language and tradition. Yet he was not bound by rigidity; at moments, he would slip into Bangla, often to delightful effect, using humour to draw students closer into the discussion. He had a characteristic habit of addressing students as “thou,” a gesture that seemed to collapse distance while invoking an older, almost Shakespearean intimacy. Standing before the class, he maintained an alert and penetrating gaze so that no student could afford inattentiveness, yet none felt excluded or disengaged. His presence commanded attention without coercion.

His intellectual range was formidable. He possessed a sharp and integrated knowledge of English literature, history, philosophy, and the broader Christian and Western intellectual traditions. Yet his scholarly vision was not confined within conventional disciplinary boundaries. His doctoral work on the literary techniques of *Surah Yasin* remains a landmark contribution that demonstrates his courageous attempt to bring Islamic textuality into the sphere of literary criticism. In doing so, he opened a space for dialogue between traditions that are too often kept apart.

Born on 31 December 1938, Professor Dr. Idris Ahmed completed his MA in English from the Department of English, University of Rajshahi, in 1960, and qualified in the then Special East Pakistan Civil Service (EPCS) examination. He joined the Department of English at the University of Rajshahi on 10 March 1973 and served there with distinction until his retirement as Professor on 30 December 2004. He passed away on 16 May 2022, leaving behind a legacy of intellectual brilliance, pedagogical excellence, and humane values.

Dedication



Professor Dr. Idris Ahmed

(31 December 1938-16 May 2022)

This Volume is dedicated to the cherished memory of Professor Dr. Idris Ahmed—a teacher of rare brilliance, a scholar of profound humanity.

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Digital Eyes, Dystopian Lies: *The Handmaid's Tale* and the Politics of Modern Surveillance

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Abstract

The Handmaid's Tale by Margaret Atwood portrays Gilead as a gendered regime characterized by ritualized visibility. The fundamental principles of this system of control are scarily similar to those that stalk the world of digital surveillance today. The paper analyzes Gilead as a panoptic architecture, a blueprint for the engineered invisibility of contemporary surveillance by providing a gender-conscious synthesis of Foucault's theory of panopticism and Zuboff's conception of surveillance capitalism. It suggests that surveillance is a hybrid process, one which occurs at once through an explicit, ritualized surveillance (uniforms, shaming in public, "The Eyes") and an implicit, computational surveillance (data mining, profiling, predictive nudging), and supports this argument with a close textual reading of the novel and an interdisciplinary interest in surveillance studies. By so doing, it discovers that both have similar detrimental effects: they lead to self-censorship, destroy privacy, and disproportionately affect women and other marginalized communities. The paper also examines how today's encryption wars, obfuscation tactics, and collective legal and technological activism can be better perceived and interpreted in alignment with the resistance patterns in Offred's coded speech, clandestine acts, and other such micro-resistances. Lastly, the paper contends that we need to work out an ethics of limits that should help determine purposes in such a way that will guarantee fair and open approval of individuals and improve fairness in the use of surveillance technology, and thus, it transforms the literary critique into a prescriptive intervention into the current debates on privacy, power, and digital justice, instead of a descriptive account of them.

Keywords: Surveillance, Surveillance Capitalism, Panopticism, Feminist Critique, Ethics, Privacy and Autonomy

1. Introduction

1.1 Background

Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985) portrays a dystopian society that perpetually needs to prescribe the totalitarian control based on religious notions and omnipresent surveillance. Surveillance in Gilead is employed in both the physical and psychological realms of the people to keep them under the rulers' thumbs and thus perpetuate their power. The handmaids are at the center of a surveillance state that defines nearly every aspect of their lives and restrains them in just as many ways. This might just be the ultimate surveillance society, with "The Eyes", Gilead's secret police, watching virtually every move, word, and even thought one makes within the social world of Gilead. Power is understood in the novel in relation to their means of government surveillance, which denies individual agency, especially that of women.

Such an idea of Gileadean surveillance culture can be employed rather effectively as a caution against totalitarianism. As Offred navigates this heavily policed landscape, she wonders how even the most minimal acts of rebellion would be extremely dangerous. Inevitably such a background would set the reader thinking about how today's surveillance works, not just in totalitarian states but also in everyday society with all its developed digital monitoring, face recognition and data

collection of our own private lives. This is also highlighted by Ivan Manokha: modern means of surveillance through fast communication and information technologies increases the self-discipline and self-censorship of individuals, which promote the power inequalities in society (219).

1.2 Research Rationale

A great deal of critical work about *The Handmaid's Tale* has by far examined Gilead's panoptic surveillance in a Foucauldian or a state-power framework only. But less attention has been paid to the connection between Gilead's ritualized visibility—its uniforms, scripted and manipulated language, as well as public shaming—and today's engineered invisibility built right into the digital mode of surveillance, where data extraction, predictive profiling and subtle “nudges” take place without overt coercion. This paper for the first time attends to this gap by placing Atwood's dystopia in the context of surveillance capitalism and feminist surveillance studies, demonstrating how control transfers from architectural attention to computational inference, differentially and disproportionately impacting vulnerable groups on the basis of their sex.

Based on the visibility and concealment as depicted by Atwood, we find a deeper reflection of the modern digital surveillance systems: both systems create self-censorship, both turn people into discrete bits of information, and both operate on the internalized discipline of their subjects. The contemporary iterations of it, such as algorithmic recruitment platforms, psychographic political ads, and so on, prove that the Gilead of today no longer requires any uniformed enforcers, “The Eyes”, or even any concrete walls; now it can work just as well with code and data streams instead. This is what qualifies Atwood's novel as not only a politically futuristic anticipation of potential models of surveillance, but also a normative resource that enables us to challenge the ethics of surveillance and develop modes resistance tailored to fit our contemporary assemblages of states and platforms.

1.3 Research Questions

In this paper, we will discuss how Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* forecasts and critiques contemporary surveillance. The following questions will guide this study:

1. In what ways does the novel represent surveillance as a visible ritual and a psychologically oppressive act, and how does this foreshadow digital logics of surveillance?
2. How do Gilead's methods of surveillance resemble, differ from, and shed light on modern algorithmic surveillance in surveillance capitalism?
3. In what ways do surveillance practices in Gilead and digital contexts target women and other minorities differentially, and what kind of gendered harms result from these systems of control?
4. In what ways do types of resistance in the novel have bearing on current discussions about ethics and regulations related to surveillance?

1.4 Research Significance

This paper makes the following contributions to literature and surveillance studies:

1. Hybrid surveillance and comparative lens: *The Handmaid's Tale* is reimaged as template for the emergent state–platform hybrid surveillance; the ritualized visibility of Gilead's totalitarian regime is overlaid with engineered invisibility of data extraction today. In doing so, it creates a comparative apparatus through which the two disparate forms of

surveillance—one overt and ritualistic, the other covert and algorithmic—each go about enacting their own normalisation of compliance in different yet convergent manners.

2. Interdisciplinary and gender-oriented synthesis: The work attempts a synthesis of Foucault's notion of panopticism, feminist critiques of monitoring, and Zuboff's conception of surveillance capitalism in order to offer a rich interdisciplinary explanation that not only records the structures of control but also highlights how they differ in the lived experiences of marginalized groups, especially women. Therefore, it proposes to extend the feminist critique of contemporary methods of surveillance.
3. Modes of resistance: It identifies the modes of resistance of *The Handmaid's Tale*—code speech, silence, secrecy—and positions them in a dialectical relation with such contemporary internet practices as encryption, obfuscation, and data defence technologies.
4. Ethical implications: The paper's last section claims that the novel can help to develop a certain ethics of limits—ethics marked by the restriction of purposes, meaningful consent, and protection from discrimination. Practically, this then positions literary analysis as a comment on culture and as an intervention in ongoing debates about how surveillance technologies should be governed and managed.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Margaret Atwood's dystopian novel *The Handmaid's Tale* describes a world where surveillance has evolved from just a means to control the population to a means to create an individual's identity, and therefore dictates the rules and norms of society. In the Republic of Gilead, a totalitarian society ruled entirely by men, they have developed networks of overt and covert surveillance systems, "The Eyes", to monitor and discipline its citizenry—especially women. As Offred reflects upon the constant observation of herself and her fellow Handmaids she states, "Perhaps it was a test, to see what I would do. Perhaps he is an eye" (Atwood 28). Consequently, this widespread surveillance creates a climate of paranoia and encourages self-censorship among the populace, which ultimately sustains the totalitarian rule of Gilead.

Foucault's concepts of panopticism and biopower provide the theoretical lens to understand the nature of the surveillance of the people of Gilead. According to Foucault, "[d]isciplinary power [...] is exercised through its invisibility," and it is the visibility of the subject (in this case the body) that ensures the continuation of the power structure (Foucault, *Discipline and Punish* 187). In Gilead, this is achieved through the constant observation of the women, making their bodies "docile bodies" that are completely obedient to the needs of the state for reproduction (Khan 426). This is consistent with David Lyon's definition of surveillance as "any collection and processing of personal data, whether identifiable or not, for the purpose of influencing or managing those whose data have been garnered" (2).

Furthermore, the feminist critique of surveillance in *The Handmaid's Tale*, demonstrates how the totalitarian regime utilizes the female body as a site of control. For example, scholars like Chahinez Messlem, contend that Gilead constructs new forms of bodily identities creating a hierarchical system of visual representation and function based on sex and class (38). Handmaids are fertile women that are used for the sole purpose of reproduction, while the Marthas are women that serve the household functions of the Commander and his wife, and the Aunts are older women that serve as the enforcers of the regime's ideologies. In addition to visualizing the hierarchy of the

three groups through their uniforms, their subordination is reinforced by the fact that they wear uniforms of different colors.

The surveillance system that governs the lives of women in Gilead produces suspicion among people who are subjected to it and destroys relationships. In her account of going on a walk with a woman, Offred states, “the truth is she is my spy, as I am hers” (Atwood 29). This example illustrates the panoptic model where individuals internalize the gaze and participate in their own surveillance (Foucault, *Discipline and Punish* 204). The same type of surveillance is observable in the public sphere as well, such as when the Japanese tourists and Offred and Ofglen encounter each other, one of the translators for the tourists asks if he can take a photograph of them. Offred refuses to be photographed as a reminder of Aunt Lydia’s cautionary words: “Modesty is invisibility, [...] Never forget it” (Atwood 38-39). Again we see how Gilead has embedded surveillance into a moral code, using invisibility as a means of control.

Anyone who has lived through the era of digital technology can recognize the similarities in the methods employed by Gilead to monitor the population, and the methods being used today. As Becker observes “[t]he digital age is characterized by the omnipresence of hidden cameras and other surveillance devices,” significantly altering our perception of our right to privacy (309). Here we see the parallels between the way Gilead eliminated the private domain of the citizenry, with the all-knowing eye of the regime, and the contemporary debate regarding the influence of surveillance capitalism and how it threatens personal autonomy; as explored by Shoshana Zuboff in *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism*. Furthermore, Debasish Nandy indicates a tenuous equilibrium between national security and the rights of the individual to privacy: “The delicate equilibrium between security imperatives and the protection of individual privacy is under intense scrutiny” (13), and just like Gilead promised social order by monitoring every move of the citizenry, the conversations about surveillance capitalism, as described by Shoshana Zuboff, have brought the same consequences of losing individual autonomy as were experienced by the residents of Gilead.

In conclusion, *The Handmaid’s Tale* presents a thought-provoking critique of how surveillance can shape an individual into a subject of control and manipulate their behavior, identity and relationships. Through the comparison of Gilead’s dystopian surveillance mechanisms to modern digital surveillance, the novel highlights the relevance of surveillance studies in analyzing the power structures and erosion of privacy that occur in both fictional and real-world contexts.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This paper applies a comparative qualitative method using a theoretical lens that is composed of three distinct components: Foucault’s theory of panopticism and biopower, feminist surveillance Studies, and Zuboff’s conception of surveillance capitalism. These concepts provide a basis for comparing and contrasting the visible rituals of Gilead with the invisible engineering of digital surveillance systems. Together, these concepts enable us to analyze how both systems achieve compliance through fear and violence toward individuals and also facilitate resistance. *The Handmaid’s Tale* itself will be used as the primary source of this paper, whereas different influential books, scholarly papers, etc. surrounding surveillance, power, and gender will be used as the secondary sources. A comparison will be made of Gilead’s use of psychological and political types of surveillance to those that exist today including data tracking, facial recognition, and algorithmic profiling and to the specific experiences of women and other marginalized groups in society. The combination of all this information will be an attempt to show where the line is drawn around what constitutes ethical surveillance and its effect on an individual’s autonomy. All aspects

of the research have taken into account ethical considerations, and thus, all sources will be properly cited, and the social impacts of surveillance will be critically examined.

4. DISCUSSION: Surveillance in Gilead: A Tool of Control

4.1 The Role of “The Eyes”

In Gilead, "The eyes" represent both visible and invisible manifestations of fear; they symbolize the totalitarian regime's pervasive and all-knowing control over the populace. They utilize two forms of enforcement – both openly and secretly – to maintain their control by always watching. In Offred's paranoia—and thus the impact on her mental state due to the way such systems affect the human psyche—she thinks Nick, the Commander's chauffeur, could be an eye: “Perhaps it was a test, to see what I would do. Perhaps he is an Eye” (Atwood 28). This demonstrates how being perceived as under observation affects behavior which creates self-censorship and an internalized form of discipline—both critical components of Michel Foucault's theory of panopticism. As Foucault states: "visibility is a trap," because simply the potential for being observed will produce a society of conformists (Foucault, *Discipline and Punish* 200). The open power of "The Eyes" is especially evident when they punish in front of everyone:

There must have been a Men's Salvaging early this morning. I didn't hear the bells. Perhaps I've become used to them.

We stop, together as if on signal, and stand and look at the bodies. It doesn't matter if we look. We're supposed to look: this is what they are there for, hanging on the Wall. Sometimes they'll be there for days, until there's a new batch, so as many people as possible will have the chance to see them. (Atwood 41-42)

The above example illustrates how “The Eyes” utilize the power of sight to induce compliance using both psychological manipulation and public punishment. Their omnipresence along with the utilization of both apparent and hidden tactics makes “The Eyes” a powerful representation of Gilead's oppressive power structure.

4.2 Public and Private Surveillance

Surveillance in Gilead is both public and private, so much so that there is no part of one's life left unmonitored. Women, specifically the Handmaids, have the added burden of being monitored for their adherence to the regime's reproductive goals. An example of this is demonstrated in the relationship between Offred and her walk partner, Ofglen: "The truth is that she is my spy, as I am hers" (Atwood 29). This pervasive distrust, which is instilled into the subjects of Gilead through constant monitoring, is the reason why there cannot be any solidarity amongst the women in opposition to Gilead.

This monitoring is further reinforced through the work of the Guardians and the Aunts, who serve as additional examples of surveillance as a mechanism of control. As Marcel Becker states regarding the surveillance in modern society: “hidden cameras and other surveillance devices” change people's perception of privacy (309). Gilead exemplifies this loss of privacy as women are always seen and held accountable and, most importantly, the loss of their autonomy to make their own judgments as they become submissive. Additionally, the monitoring does not stop at the boundaries of the public domain, but extends to what would be considered private domains of individual lives as well. Offred describes her living space as follows: “The door of the room [...] is not locked. In fact it doesn't shut properly” (Atwood 18). It is these intentional violations of individuals' personal space that emphasize the dual mechanisms of surveillance in the public and

private realms that Gilead employs to monitor all aspects of the lives of women, and thereby sustain the regimes hold over them.

4.3 Language and Surveillance

In Gilead language is employed as an instrument of surveillance, and of ideological constraint. Through its employment of codified speech, the regime restricts communication; therefore, dissent. Terms like “Mayday,” represent codes for covert dissident signals; acts of speech which demonstrate how language may function to be both subversive and monitored. Silences function as the means of survival for Offred, as taught to her by Aunt Lydia: “Modesty is invisibility, [...] Never forget it” (Atwood 38-39); and illustrate how the regime uses language to control women's actions and thought processes.

The notion that discourse “transmits and produces power; it reinforces it” (Foucault, *History of Sexuality* 101) illustrates how the regime utilizes the enforcement of women's silence to conform to Foucault's theory of discourse. By limiting women's ability to express themselves linguistically, the regime takes away their ability to resist. As Nazish Khan notes, the linguistic restrictions imposed upon women in Gilead enable the regime to take “control of knowledge, discourse and language” in order to retain power (426). The regime's imposition of rigid regulation upon language provides a framework for the regime's ideology to remain unchallenged and strengthens the regime's control.

5. Modern Surveillance: Echoes of Gilead

5.1 Digital Panopticons

Michel Foucault's original theory of panopticism has been revitalized in the modern digital world; it has also migrated from the confines of the physical realm to the digital realm. Ivan Manokha indicates that whereas for Foucault, traditional panopticon represented an architecture of surveillance, today's version represents a regime of “ubiquitous observation” and utilizes digital surveillance to discipline people through collection and profiling of data on them. Facial recognition software, predictive tracking systems, and algorithms/data analysis are examples of how technology is changing people's behaviors—often with no knowledge or input from the person being monitored (227-234).

This digital panopticon is in tune with mechanisms of control in Gilead, where the citizens are always under watch to ensure their compliance. Among the most striking descriptions of what it feels like to be watched by “The Eyes”, Offred describes, “[A] pier-glass, like the eye of a fish, and myself in it like a distorted shadow, a parody of something” (Atwood 19). Similarly, Marcel Becker puts it, “[T]he digital age is characterized by the omnipresence of hidden cameras and other surveillance devices” that make the individuals internalize the watchful gaze of authority, eliminating their autonomy (309). Shoshana Zuboff further explores how digital technologies are using behavioral data to develop predictive products (65).

A real-life implementation of this digital panopticon is the Social Credit System in China, where through a web of networks, monitoring would include facial recognition and digital activity tracking technologies to monitor the actions of its citizens. It rewards points for behaviors like timely bill payments or follow-through on social conventions. Those who exhibit low-scoring behaviors face punishment like being denied air travel and even intercity railway journeys, less access to loans, and exclusion from certain privileges of society. For instance, over 12 million people have been deprived of the right to fly owing to low-scoring social credit, demonstrating

surveillance's function in ensuring compliance and refiguring behavior in the form of punishment (Fullerton; Kobie).

5.2 Loss of Privacy

The erosion of privacy is one of the primary characteristics of both Gilead and the digital world. In the instance of Gilead, surveillance abolishes the notion of a private sphere, replacing it with a state-controlled gaze that enforces compliance. Offred's private moments are always shadowed by the regime's gaze, even in seemingly mundane activities: "The white wings too are prescribed issue; they are to keep us from seeing, but also from being seen" (Atwood 18). Moreover, as Marcel Becker illustrates, the new monitoring technologies "temp, nudge, seduce, and convince individuals to participate for reasons that are advantageous to the institution" (309).

Zuboff underlines it is on the erosion of privacy that surveillance capitalism thrives: "surveillance capitalists asserted their right to invade at will, usurping individual decision rights in favor of unilateral surveillance and the self-authorized extraction of human experience for others' profit" (19). The loss of autonomy, Becker adds, is exceedingly augmented by the use of algorithms to influence behavior, wherein the mere awareness of such surveillance methods has a potential effect on human behavior, even in the absence of a direct observer (309).

An excellent illustration of an actual world event is the fact that demonstrates a loss of privacy exposed by the Cambridge Analytica scandal; during this incident, it was discovered that Facebook collected user data and used the data for political purposes (without getting permission from the users) including the 2016 U.S. presidential election. Millions of Facebook users had their personal data extracted by Cambridge Analytica for the purpose of creating psychographic profiles, then these profiles were used by Cambridge Analytica to create targeted advertisements for political campaigns, to manipulate public opinion, or to manipulate users' behavior based upon the information provided in those profiles. The use of personal data by Cambridge Analytica brought into question how government control can undermine individuals' ability to make autonomous decisions and demonstrate how weak personal data is in today's digital environment and raises ethical issues concerning users' privacy and exploitation (Guetta, Lapowsky).

5.3 Intersection with Gender

The focus of interest on women is significant in both Gilead and today's digital surveillance environments. In Gilead, women are seen as instruments of the state as the state is able to govern them through its direct control over their capability of reproduction. As Offred states, "I used to think of my body as an instrument, of pleasure, or a means of transportation, ... [Now] the flesh arranges itself differently" (Atwood 83), these views are similar to those made by feminists concerning how surveillance capitalism has taken hold of online actions of women and used them for commercial purposes to exploit their consumer behavior (Maowad). Gendered surveillance is used to reinforce and expand upon gender-based social prejudices using technologies of surveillance and to limit women's opportunities.

As an example of the application of gendered surveillance in real life, we can talk about gendered surveillance through the use of algorithms from companies like Amazon. In 2014, Amazon developed an Artificial Intelligence (AI) recruitment tool designed to automatically review resumes submitted by job applicants with the goal of reducing time spent on the hiring process. The AI tool, however, automatically downgraded resumes that contained terms referencing women (i.e., "women's") or referenced women-only schools, based upon the biases present in the male-dominant data set the AI tool had been trained on. Although Amazon attempted to mitigate the

gender-bias within the AI tool, the company ultimately abandoned the project in 2017 due to the difficulty of creating an algorithmically neutral approach to decision making (Winick; Hamilton).

Zuboff expands on these themes by identifying the shift in the locus of control in the digital age, where surveillance capitalism relies on modifying human behavior rather than relying on labor. Zuboff states, "Instead of labor, surveillance capitalism feeds on every aspect of every human's experience" (9). Becker notes, in his analysis of autonomy and its loss, that surveillance capitalism is particularly invasive for marginalized populations, including women, who are regularly targeted for both consumer profiling and nudging across all of society (309). Therefore, surveillance capitalism continues to promote and perpetuate gender-based inequality in both physical and digital environments as a means of both ideologically and economically controlling women.

6. The Implications of Surveillance: Resistance and Subversion

The Handmaid's Tale depicts a totalitarian regime where power is maintained by omnipresent surveillance and control. In order to resist this system, Offred uses small, quiet acts of rebellion and subversive actions. These actions have great importance as they allow Offred to maintain some sense of individuality, or what little is left of it, while still living in a state of hyper-surveillance. Offred secretly talks to Ofglen in code and says, "We learned to whisper almost without sound" (Atwood 14), showing how simple, yet powerful acts of defiance can occur in a totalitarian regime where there is a strong emphasis on carefulness when taking risks and being visible.

While Offred does use secret communication as one of the primary ways of resisting the totalitarian regime, it is not the only method used. Small, everyday decisions can be viewed as acts of defiance against the oppressive regime. When Offred chooses to play Scrabble with the commander, she is making a statement of independence and self-worth in a time when those values are supposed to be taken from her. This view of resistance through small acts and everyday choices supports Ivan Manokha's views on panoptic systems. Panoptic systems do not simply control an individual by watching them, but rather they create a space where the individual must negotiate power with the controlling body, creating opportunities for resistance to arise in a space of oppression (220-221, 226, 233). These acts of resistance help to show how people find ways to resist even in oppressive regimes of surveillance.

These examples of resistance will continue to resonate into the digital age. Shoshana Zuboff identifies how surveillance capitalism helps to maintain control by hiding its influence on our choices: "The goal is now to automate us", not just watch us (8). This further emphasizes why it is so important to understand and expose such systems of control. The many activist groups today who are fighting digital surveillance use tactics like encryption, anonymization and decentralized communication to bypass digital surveillance. These methods of activism are similar to the many small acts of resistance that were shown throughout Gilead.

7. Lessons for Contemporary Resistance to Digital Surveillance

There is another connection of interest between the examples of surveillance in Gilead and those in today's digital surveillance systems in terms of the forms of resistance employed to counteract these systems. In both, as Offred silently resists the oppressive forces she faces, so too do the members of society in our time employ various technologies (such as VPN) as means to declare their right to privacy and autonomy. It is primarily through acts of resistance against the pervasive surveillance systems that independence will be achieved and regained. According to Marcel Becker, the first step toward undermining or degrading a surveillance system is to identify its

mechanisms (309). This clearly illustrates Becker's idea in the manner that Offred has attempted to distort her monitored existence as a form of creating pockets of resistance.

In addition to the general notion of resistance against surveillance, as suggested by feminist critiques of surveillance as seen in Simone Browne's *Dark Matters: On the Surveillance of Blackness*, there exists a significant importance in collective action. Both in the context of Gilead and in today's digital world, surveillance is felt disproportionately by women and minority groups. A form of collective action that would aid in resisting the effects of surveillance would be through some form of a collective network of solidarity, as exemplified in the Mayday resistance movement in *The Handmaid's Tale*.

The current forms of resistance in today's digital age are focused upon reclaiming control over one's own personal information. Throughout the entirety of her book, especially in chapters 11, 17 and 18 of *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism*, Zuboff repeatedly advocates for an infrastructure to regulate data collection based upon the principles of user autonomy rather than corporate profits. To Zuboff, data rights are equivalent to human rights and as such should be enshrined in law (54, 479). Presently, digital resistance seeks to combine both legal activism and technological innovation as a means to disrupt the control structures utilized by systems of surveillance to maintain their dominance.

8.1 Ethical Considerations and Implications

The Handmaid's Tale can serve as a warning for the extent to which surveillance practices can be taken, as well as the extent of their devastating implications. Unchecked surveillance, as seen in Gilead, can lead to the destruction of the two fundamental aspects of democracy—personal freedom and dignity. As described in previous sections, surveillance has been used as an instrument of power in Gilead, forcing its citizens to follow the rules established by society through the use of power, force, fear, and control. Every form of power, whether it be in a regime or otherwise, carries inherent risks of being abusive to others based upon unchecked surveillance; therefore, the mechanisms of surveillance, such as “The Eyes”, that have been utilized in regimes throughout history demonstrate the great lengths to which absolutism can go when the use of power takes precedence over ethics and accountability. The consistent presence of “The Eyes” as a means of surveillance exemplifies the reduction of a citizen's rights to merely the right of being observed, thus removing the status of human beings with inherent rights and freedoms as citizens.

The same type of atmosphere of oppression that exists in Gilead today also exists in modern society—specifically in the U.S., where mass surveillance has caused many authors to self-censor. A 2013 survey of writers, conducted by PEN America, found that almost one in six of the surveyed authors had chosen not to write on certain topics out of fear that their work may have been subject to some level of government surveillance (PEN America). The omnipresence of surveillance creates a climate of distrust similar to the environment experienced by Offred in Gilead, causing individuals to limit their expression. Thus, *The Handmaid's Tale* depicts the loss of agency: an ethical crisis born of invisible, all-encompassing control. Therefore, the practice of surveillance in both physical and non-physical forms over the psychological and digital spaces has challenged the concept of individual autonomy in and of itself, creating moral concerns that require further ethical discussion.

8.2 Surveillance Without Consent

Shoshana Zuboff points out how surveillance capitalism thrives by claiming ownership of individuals' personal data and converting their experiences into data points, and also by

controlling these data points via manipulation (8). The same can be said of Gilead in *The Handmaid's Tale*. The state takes ownership of women's reproductive systems, and thus, converts them into "two-legged wombs", i.e., "ambulatory chalices"—essentially, as Offred contemplates, they are converted into mere reproductive tools with no identity (Atwood 146). Therefore, they become mere commodities. We could see this example as an ethical violation where surveillance is utilized to extract benefits for institutions from specific people for the purpose of exploitation or commodity production.

This concept is applicable to today's world as well. Tech giants, including Google and Facebook, collect large amounts of personal data, usually without the consent of the users, to develop user profiles that are then sold to advertisers. An actual example is Facebook's method of obtaining data not only from registered users but also from non-users (e.g., through their web browser history or friends) to enable it to create "shadow profiles" that improve its ability to deliver targeted advertisements (Wagner). Additionally, Zeynep Tufekci illustrates that Facebook's use of targeted advertising through user data demonstrates how personal data is collected and exploited to alter consumer behavior while furthering existing power inequalities (156). Zuboff states that "[s]urveillance capitalism operates through unprecedented asymmetries in knowledge and the power that accrues to knowledge" (11). Essentially, surveillance capitalism represents an exploitation of human behavior for profit—the manipulation of individuals for financial gain, not as active participants with control over their own desires, but as commodity items of data. Algorithms used on websites like Amazon and YouTube illustrate another example of this concept where individuals are reduced to their footprint – their previous behaviors – and those past behaviors are utilized to provide personalized content and advertisements, thus creating profit for the corporation.

8.3 The Necessity of Ethical Boundaries

The dystopian setting of Atwood's novel emphasizes the necessity of ethical constraints to defend an individual's right to privacy and personal freedom. That Offred is able to resist the surveillance of the totalitarian regime in Gilead through small but deliberate acts, indicates that humans have a strong desire to regain their ability to act independently of those in power. Offred's recollections and her private thoughts represent an act of defiance and demonstrate the ethical obligation to safeguard individual rights even in the face of oppressive regimes. Ajiga et al. contend that technology developers should create standards for ethical use of surveillance technologies to promote trust among users and to reduce the potential for misuse of these technologies (57).

This point of view is reinforced by Zuboff and Browne on surveillance capitalism. Zuboff emphasizes that there is a disproportionate effect upon already marginalized groups when it comes to unfair monitoring by those with access to surveillance technologies (172). This can be seen today—Black and Muslim communities have been disproportionately monitored by law enforcement agencies through race-based profiling or other discriminatory practices. For example, in the U.S., the surveillance of Muslim communities by the FBI has created a negative impact upon the Muslim community creating a climate of fear and mistrust within the community as a result of post-9/11 actions (Alimahomed-Wilson 874). Furthermore, Simone Browne describes how Black people are subjected to greater levels of surveillance than other populations in both physical and digital spaces in her book *Dark Matters: On the Surveillance of Blackness* (162). Thus, it becomes important for us to place a commitment to ethical principles based upon equity and justice as a response to these inequalities, because otherwise surveillance technology may exacerbate existing systemic biases, and create an atmosphere of distrust toward institutions.

9. Suggestions for Further Research

The study provides a number of potential pathways to be followed in subsequent studies, highlighting that surveillance remains relevant today in literature and in modern society. Subsequent studies can follow the pathways below:

1. Comparative Studies:

Subsequent studies may expand upon this paper's comparative analysis by evaluating *The Handmaid's Tale* in comparison to surveillance-based dystopian novels such as Orwell's *1984* and Forster's "The Machine Stops". Comparative analyses could illustrate the differences in how different periods of literature conceptualized control and how different authors conceptualized resistance through differing societal and technological environments.

2. Gendered Dimensions of Surveillance:

Additionally, subsequent studies will need to be conducted on the impacts of surveillance on individuals based on gender and specifically examine how women and other marginalized groups are disproportionately targeted by digital surveillance. A feminist and/or postcolonial approach would provide additional insight into how power, identity, and surveillance are interconnected and how they operate in Gilead and in contemporary digital society.

3. Impact of New Technologies:

Given the rapid development of artificial intelligence (AI) and biometric technologies, subsequent studies need to evaluate how these emerging technologies are changing norms surrounding privacy, consent, and agency. Additionally, examining predictive algorithms and data-driven monitoring will assist researchers in illustrating how emerging surveillance technologies are influencing individual behavior and institutional authority.

Investigating the subject matter as stated above can provide researchers with a greater comprehension of how surveillance affects the dynamics of power, resistance, and individual freedom in fiction and reality.

10. CONCLUSION

With the analysis now laid out throughout this paper, it has become impossible to see *The Handmaid's Tale* as simply another dystopian narrative; it is more of an unsettling interpretive mirror reflecting the degree of digital surveillance present in society today. As the argument deepens between what we allow to happen to us and how those choices are quietly taken away from us through a calculated and subtle manipulation, we can see that the mechanisms of discipline that Foucault described have not disappeared but have migrated into other subtler channels—such as predictive algorithms, behavioral nudges and the trail of digital footprints that each of us leaves behind. This is also when the feminist critiques serve as a reminder that the forces of surveillance and oppression are never equally distributed—that is, they disproportionately affect those on the margins and specifically women who have historically had their bodies and behavior scrutinized. Along with the growing list of increasingly invasive and tyrannical practices and systems, Offred's small acts of defiance—the thoughtfulness of her actions, the small refusals to be submissive, the fact that she cannot completely forget her own name—evoke emotional responses and remind us that most likely people will resist in small and everyday ways, through the act of keeping one's inner self intact. Accordingly, literature calls for an ethics of limits and urges some form of restriction on the degree to which visibility or algorithmic

inference can affect one's dignity—so that one's dignity is not compromised for efficiency or convenience. Literature—with its uncanny ability to make visible the parts of ourselves and our world that we would like to have buried deep underneath the ground—allows us to address these unsettling questions while it is still possible to do so—before the systems we create define the limits of our freedom beyond our intent.

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