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Disturbing Dystopia: Surveillance in 21st-Century Feminist  
'Dystopian' Fiction

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# 1. Introduction

Dystopian fiction once functioned as a warning of bleak, speculative futures (Engélibert 311), but nowadays, dystopian narratives have become a reality, particularly in light of women's reproductive rights. In Leni Zumas's *Red Clocks* (2018), embryos are treated as people and abortion as well as in vitro fertilisation (IVF) are banned across the United States, restricting women's reproductive freedom. In Louise Erdrich's *Future Home of the Living God* (2017), pregnant women suspected of carrying healthy babies are detained in state-run facilities and forced to give birth. Both novels depict devastating legal and political circumstances surrounding women's reproductive rights that initially appear to be speculative fiction; however, on closer consideration, the fictional worlds portrayed in these works of literature are no longer mere speculation. Instead, considering the political developments unfolding in the United States during, or as a result of, the first and second Trump administrations, it has become increasingly difficult to distinguish fact from fiction. South Carolina, 2025: Legislators are debating the passing of Senate Bill S. 323, "an almost total ban on abortions, identifying it as the crime of homicide" (League of Women Voters of South Carolina). The Women's Rights and Empowerment Network further states that it would "[b]an all medication abortion," "[r]emove exceptions for rape, incest, and fatal fetal anomaly," and "[r]edefine embryos as full legal persons, threatening [...] IVF." The boundaries between dystopia and contemporary, real-world politics are no longer clear-cut, which raises questions about how to read, interpret, and classify dystopian literature in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

*Red Clocks* and *Future Home of the Living God* do not portray speculative futures (Engélibert 320); instead, they should be read as feminist 'dystopian' texts that draw from and resemble contemporary reproductive politics in the United States (Zumas, qtd. in Sugiuchi; Erdrich, qtd. in Atwood & Erdrich). Although earlier dystopian literature also functioned as a

response to state surveillance, the authors of these novels were predominantly male (Cavalcanti 66; Engélibert 320, 321; Franková 211). Moreover, they situated their narratives in the distant future and included futuristic technology (Engélibert 320; Marks 58, 3). In contrast, surveillance in *Red Clocks* and *Future Home of the Living God* relies on already existing laws, systems, and institutions. These novels explicitly address contemporary concerns that predominantly affect women and which have intensified throughout the 21<sup>st</sup> century. By situating their narratives in the near-present time and depicting scenarios that have already happened or may happen soon, such as the reversal of *Roe v. Wade* in 2022 or the passing of the proposed abortion ban S. 323 in South Carolina (Davis 324; League of Women Voters of South Carolina), Zumas and Erdrich challenge conventional definitions and characteristics of dystopian fiction. Their novels are particularly relevant to this thesis, not only because they were published in the 2010s and written by female authors, but also because they engage with themes of bodily autonomy, reproductive rights, and surveillance. In *Red Clocks*, Zumas depicts a version of the United States in which abortion and IVF are no longer legal, single women are prohibited from adopting, and embryos are granted full legal rights (Zumas, *Red Clocks* 32). The novel follows four women, whose lives are shaped by these laws in different ways and reveals how seemingly minor legislative changes can have profound consequences for women in their everyday lives. Erdrich's *Future Home of the Living God* centres on Cedar, a pregnant Ojibwe woman affected by how the government copes with an evolutionary crisis, namely by detaining pregnant women and forcing them to bear children (Erdrich 266). Thus, both texts centre on the ways state mechanisms regulate and control reproduction, presenting dystopian landscapes where female bodies become sites of surveillance.

Both novels explore how power structures shape identities, particularly those of marginalised groups who are especially subjected to control and surveillance. George Hawley defines identity politics as “a form of politics built around mostly fixed demographic attributes”

such as race and gender (8). According to Howard J. Wiarda, “[i]dentity [p]olitics from the beginning was linked to the underlying idea that some groups in society [...] are uniquely oppressed” and “[t]hat one’s identity as a woman, [...] or any marginalized person made one particularly susceptible to violence, ostracism, and oppression” (150). This dynamic is reflected in *Red Clocks* and *Future Home of the Living God*, which illustrate how systems of surveillance disproportionately affect specific individuals. Zumas and Erdrich engage with identity politics by depicting how the characters’ gender and race shape their experiences of surveillance and control, reinforcing the idea that power structures do not affect everyone equally. However, as Kimberlé Crenshaw argues, identity politics “frequently [...] ignores intragroup differences,” failing to account for the intersectional experiences of marginalised groups, particularly women of colour (273). Crenshaw posits that identity can be seen as a site of oppression because “power has clustered around certain categories and is exercised against others” (298), which is particularly relevant for *Red Clocks* and *Future Home of the Living God*, as both novels depict how oppression is exacerbated by factors such as gender and race. *Red Clocks* examines the impact of legal and political structures on four diverse women, while *Future Home of the Living God* foregrounds Indigenous identity; therefore, surveillance in these novels is not a universal experience.

Two main arguments will be examined within this thesis. Firstly, I contend that the nature of surveillance in *Red Clocks* positions this novel not as a conventional dystopia but as a paratopia, which describes a more plausible narrative than usually depicted in dystopia (Zumas, “Leni Zumas on ‘Red Clocks’” 3:12-3:20). Instead of relying on authoritarian regimes or futuristic technologies (Marks 58, 3), this novel illustrates how surveillance is enacted most insidiously through everyday structures that limit women’s reproductive freedom alongside restrictive laws. This analysis will identify the elements that characterise this novel as a paratopia as opposed to a traditional dystopian narrative, with a focus on how surveillance

impacts the lives, identities, bodies, and choices of female characters. Secondly, I argue that *Future Home of the Living God* illustrates how Indigenous women such as Cedar already live in a reproductive dystopia, which is perpetuated through advances in settler colonial surveillance technologies such as the medical surveillance of pregnancies. *Red Clocks* and *Future Home of the Living God* challenge the assumption that dystopias are set in speculative, futuristic contexts and foreground the gendered, racialised, and embodied dimensions of surveillance, which are more insidious when embedded in everyday situations or disguised as care. Ultimately, these arguments are significant because they demonstrate how contemporary feminist ‘dystopias’ reconfigure and expand upon the conventions of the dystopian genre.

By analysing two 21<sup>st</sup>-century dystopian novels, particularly in terms of how their female protagonists are subjected to reproductive surveillance, this thesis is situated within and contributes to the fields of dystopian literature, feminist approaches to dystopian fiction, surveillance studies, as well as Native American and Indigenous studies. In contrast to ‘classic’ dystopias such as George Orwell’s *1984* (1949) and Aldous Huxley’s *Brave New World* (1932), contemporary feminist ‘dystopias’ are situated in the near-present (Hinchcliffe 418), making them less speculative and challenging the genre’s defining characteristic of portraying a distant future (Engélibert 320). *Red Clocks* and *Future Home of the Living God* exemplify this shift, as they respond to specific 21<sup>st</sup>-century threats to reproductive rights and draw from legal and political realities in the United States (Claeys 60; Engélibert 320; Zumas, qtd. in Sugiuchi; Erdrich, qtd. in Atwood & Erdrich). In these novels, surveillance emerges as a central mechanism through which the government exerts control over women and their reproductive autonomy. In *Red Clocks*, surveillance is enacted through institutions and structures such as medical facilities and the family, whereas in *Future Home of the Living God*, surveillance occurs within a reproductive dystopia, where the protagonist is subjected to medical surveillance. Erdrich’s novel extends beyond gender and incorporates the intersection of gender

and race by portraying how settler colonial practices shape and influence reproductive politics, which is achieved through the regression to brutal methods such as family separation within Native American communities (National Native American Boarding School Healing Coalition; Linjean and Weaver 3). Thus, surveillance in these novels is not merely enacted by the state through changes in legislation; instead, it is also embedded within societal norms and the characters' everyday life as well as embodied in their actual bodies.

In order to allow for the contextualisation of my arguments and the analyses of *Red Clocks* and *Future Home of the Living God*, it is necessary to research and provide explanations of several concepts and theories. Firstly, Zumas's concept of paratopia will be introduced as a central analytical framework to aid in my analysis of *Red Clocks*, particularly how it diverges from traditional dystopian narratives and instead constructs a world that, with regard to reproductive rights, closely resembles our own. Louis Althusser's theory of interpellation and his concepts of Ideological State Apparatuses (ISAs) and Repressive State Apparatuses (RSAs) as well as Michel Foucault's biopower and biopolitics will be employed to show that surveillance in *Red Clocks* operates most insidiously through everyday structures. Secondly, the concepts of settler colonialism and colonial paternalism, along with concrete historical examples of Euro-American settler-colonial practices, serve as the foundation of my analysis of *Future Home of the Living God* and the ways the protagonist already lives in a reproductive dystopia. Together, these frameworks and concepts provide the groundwork for the analysis of surveillance on the basis of one's race and gender in contemporary 'dystopian' fiction that could not be analysed otherwise, situating the novels within the context of women's reproductive rights and the increasing lack thereof as well as reproductive politics in the United States.

This thesis provides in-depth analyses of two feminist 'dystopian' novels, *Red Clocks* and *Future Home of the Living God*. The first part of this thesis offers an overview of the relevant theoretical background, including dystopian literature, surveillance within dystopian

literature, and reproductive rights in the United States. It will also situate these two novels in the broader context of contemporary feminist dystopian literature and scholarship. The main part of this thesis consists of detailed analyses of the two selected novels, particularly in relation to their depictions of women's reproductive surveillance, which respectively culminate in a reflection on whether a reconfiguration of the dystopian genre is warranted and whether there is any room for resistance.

## 2. Theoretical Background

This chapter establishes the theoretical framework necessary for analysing the ‘dystopian’ novels *Red Clocks* and *Future Home of the Living God*. Firstly, the concept of literary genre is presented, along with how genre classifications can change over time. In the context of this thesis, dystopia is understood as a genre that is subject to change; therefore, dystopian works can be reclassified according to changing political and societal contexts. Recognising the fluidity of genre boundaries is crucial, as the proximity of Zumas’s and Erdrich’s novels to contemporary circumstances challenges conventional definitions of the dystopian genre. Secondly, an overview of dystopian literature, including its characteristics, aims, and emergence in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, will be provided. Particular attention is also given to feminist contributions to the genre. Thirdly, surveillance as a feature of dystopian fiction and a central concern in the novels under consideration will be examined. Finally, this chapter offers an overview of reproductive politics and women’s reproductive rights in the United States during the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries. This theoretical background highlights the ways in which the events depicted in Zumas’s and Erdrich’s novels resemble current political trajectories (Zumas, qtd. in Sugiuchi; Erdrich, qtd. in Atwood & Erdrich), particularly the prohibition of abortion in various states and territories within the United States. By tracing developments from *Roe v. Wade* in 1973 to *Dobbs v. Jackson Women’s Health Organisation* in 2022, the novels are situated within ongoing debates about women’s reproductive autonomy. These theoretical considerations serve as the foundation for my analyses of *Red Clocks* and *Future Home of the Living God*, which I approach as feminist ‘dystopian’ novels that explore surveillance and patriarchal control over women’s bodies.

## 2.1. The Literary Genre: Can Genre Classifications Change?

Dystopia is one of the genres according to which literature can be classified, but such a classification may also change in retrospect. Vera Nünning and Ansgar Nünning state that “[o]ne of the most important [...] categories in literary studies is that of the literary genre” (31) which they define as follows: “The term [...] is derived from the biological term *genus*, and refers to a group of literary works that share significant characteristics in terms of content, form and/or function” (31). They further explain that literary genres “enable us to classify the multitude of texts, and [...] impose some order onto the [...] chaotic and diverse proliferation of literary works” (Nünning and Nünning 30). In terms of genre classification, they assert that “[v]arious criteria are employed in order to classify and differentiate between genres,” including “thematic criteria” (31). According to Nünning and Nünning’s definition, I argue that dystopian fiction constitutes a distinct genre of literature, as it allows for a classification of various works of literature based on their themes. However, they also address that “single genres [...] are subject to historical change” and should be understood as “historically conditioned [...] forms of convention” (Nünning and Nünning 31-32). This is further addressed by Jean-Paul Engélibert who describes dystopian literature as “a profoundly historical genre” and explains that “[l]ater readers, living in a transformed society whose [...] values, or beliefs have changed, might not identify as dystopian what was spontaneously understood as such when the text was written;” in other words, “readers always refer to the common beliefs [...] of their time in order to put them into perspective” (312). Thus, novels that were previously described as ‘dystopian’ may no longer be classified as such, as societal and political circumstances have changed over time.

Recognising the fluidity of genre classifications is central to this thesis since, without allowing for the redefinition of genres such as dystopian fiction, *Red Clocks* and *Future Home of the Living God* cannot be accurately classified as literature that reflects contemporary

political realities as opposed to distant dystopian futures. While Silvia Martínez-Falquina briefly addresses that “there is a renewed emphasis on [...] generic blurring” and that “this strategic blurring of genre borders and between dystopia and realism in recent dystopian novels by women, which deal with gender [...], is an incisive critique of the present state of affairs” (“Feminist Dystopia and Reality” 276, 280), she has not explored the precise ways this is achieved. In accordance with Nünning and Nünning (31-32), I argue that novels that have been classified or marketed as ‘dystopian’ can be retrospectively assigned a different literary genre or subgenre. For instance, the restrictions on reproductive rights in the 21<sup>st</sup> century may warrant such a re-classification of traditionally ‘dystopian’ novels or perhaps even the introduction of a subgenre of dystopia which highlights that these novels do not necessarily portray a far-away future; instead, they may depict societies or political regimes that resemble contemporary circumstances. Jennifer Kiesewetter and Robin Schmieder elaborate on this by claiming that “[t]he line between what is fact and what is fiction is becoming increasingly blurred, causing people to struggle to differentiate between what is already part of their lives and what has not found its way into reality (yet)” (3). *Red Clocks* and *Future Home of the Living God* constitute such cases, as Zumas and Erdrich problematise the genre boundaries and conventions of dystopian literature by blurring the lines between what is reality and what is fiction. While both novels draw from the conventions of dystopian literature, their proximity to contemporary realities allows the authors to expand upon the dystopian tradition of portraying speculative futures, showing the need for subgenres such as Zumas’s paratopia (Zumas, “Leni Zumas on ‘Red Clocks’” 3:12-3:20).

## 2.2. Dystopian Literature: Characteristics and Aims

There is some debate surrounding the definition of dystopian fiction. According to Etymonline, ‘dystopia’ refers to an “imaginary bad place,” consisting of the Greek prefix *dys-* ‘bad’ or ‘abnormal’ and *topos* ‘place.’ Gregory Claeys offers two definitions of dystopia, namely, “inverted or negative utopias, or anti-utopias, on the supposition that they aim to satirize the failure of utopian aspiration in real life,” which “is an adequate reflection of the first wave of dystopian fiction” in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and, in the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries, “a state or condition characterized by malevolence, fear, social and political breakdown, and disorder” (61). Moreover, he asserts that “[t]he clarity of the genre is muddled further by the routine introduction of science fiction elements,” as dystopian literature can be seen as both “perpetuating a particular political regime [...], while also serving to expose the threat of potential technological development (usually computers, robots, nuclear power, and [...] the internet)” (Claeys 61). Similar to Claeys, Engélibert suggests that “[d]ystopia can be understood as a satirical painting of present-day society,” but adds that this present-day society may be “an anticipation of what it may become, a warning against certain of its tendencies or a denunciation of a historical dynamic” (311). Based on Claeys’s and Engélibert’s definitions, I argue that both *Red Clocks* and *Future Home of the Living God* portray “a state [...] characterized by [...] social and political breakdown” and “a warning against certain [...] tendencies” (Claeys 61; Engélibert 311).

Dystopian literature has increasingly emerged as a prevalent genre since the 19<sup>th</sup> century, gaining prominence from the early 20<sup>th</sup> century onwards, and has frequently served as a medium through which authors engage with the societal events, political circumstances, and technological advancements of their time. A brief historical overview of the dystopian genre is necessary for understanding how this tradition persists in dystopian novels of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Peter Marks et al. posit that the 19<sup>th</sup> century symbolises a significant emergence of dystopian

themes, asserting that it “witnesses the rise of dystopia” (10). Similarly, Claeys identifies a distinct shift towards dystopian narratives, characterising it as a “dystopian turn” in the 1960s and the early 2000s, while also drawing attention to “the negative experience of humanity in the twentieth century,” including Leninism, Stalinism, and Nazism (54, 55). Claeys also states that “[s]uch regimes, based on the principle of fear, the isolation of individuals from one another, and the cultivation of deliberate distrust through paranoia and misinformation, coupled with widespread surveillance of the population can be characterized as dystopian” (56). In the late 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries, “[e]cological disaster” and “the election of Donald Trump as President” along with “the evident racism, misogyny, and Christian fundamentalist intolerance” (Claeys 60), have become more prevalent. This is expanded on by Engélibert, who mentions that “after the end of the Cold War and the collapse of the USSR, other threats became more visible: overpopulation, climate disruption, mass extinction of wild species, pandemics, technological risks, etc.” (320). I argue that some of these issues have influenced – and are influencing – contemporary authors of dystopian novels, including Zumas and Erdrich.

21<sup>st</sup>-century ‘dystopian’ literature, such as *Red Clocks* and *Future Home of the Living God*, continues this tradition of mirroring contemporary concerns, specifically surrounding bodily and reproductive autonomy. Engélibert stresses “that fiction represents real society and constitutes a pertinent description of its functioning” (311), which applies to Zumas’s and Erdrich’s novels, as both draw attention to real-world issues surrounding reproductive rights by depicting governments that restrict women’s bodily autonomy. *Red Clocks* depicts a society in which abortion and IVF are universally banned across the United States (Zumas, *Red Clocks* 32), thus infringing upon women’s reproductive rights. When juxtaposed with the present-day legal landscape in the United States, where abortion is currently illegal in several states (Centre for Reproductive Rights, “Abortion Laws By State”), the thematic elements within Zumas’s narrative can be interpreted as a critique of contemporary issues, thereby increasing the readers’

awareness of current circumstances and serving as a warning against potential future consequences. Similarly, *Future Home of the Living God* highlights how the state enforces control over women's bodies and their reproductive autonomy by detaining them in birthing facilities and repeatedly forcing them to give birth (Erdrich 266). Martínez-Falquina supports this notion, arguing that authors frequently depict current circumstances as dystopian to expose global issues such as "injustice, powerlessness, and violence" ("Feminist Dystopia and Reality" 270). Therefore, I contend that *Red Clocks* and *Future Home of the Living God* exemplify this role of dystopian fiction – drawing attention to current political or societal issues – in portraying oppressive systems and regimes. Both Zumas and Erdrich employ dystopian narratives to encourage reflection on the society in which they and their readers live, and to criticise the increasing restriction of women's agency and control over their bodies.

While these societal critiques are elements common to both earlier and contemporary dystopian fiction, Zumas and Erdrich contribute to and expand upon the established traditions of dystopian literature by situating their narratives in proximity to the present and including a range of different female characters. Ildney Cavalcanti characterises dystopian literature as "a major vehicle for our [...] fears" and Engélibert similarly states that it "has a complex relationship with the fears [...] of its readers" and "the sense of a [...] warning against what might happen if the tendencies it brings to light are not effectively countered" (Cavalcanti 66; Engélibert 320, 321). This is well demonstrated in both *Red Clocks* and *Future Home of the Living God*, as I consider the circumstances depicted in these two works an extreme continuation of the current situation in the United States, particularly in light of women's reproductive rights and autonomy. However, while Engélibert claims that "readers [...] are transported to imaginary worlds, different from their own, often worse, sometimes apocalyptic" (320), this is precisely what differentiates *Red Clocks* and *Future Home of the Living God* from other dystopian novels, as contemporary 'dystopias' resemble current political trajectories in

the United States and, in accordance with Jade Hinchcliffe, are situated in the near-present time: “Twenty-first-century dystopian fiction is set more or less in the present—or in the very near future” (418). Both novels draw from current reproductive policies (Zumas, qtd. in Sugiuchi; Erdrich, qtd. in Atwood & Erdrich) and illustrate the extensive measures to which state mechanisms can resort to impose restrictions on women and to exert control over their bodies. Furthermore, Hinchcliffe asserts that 21<sup>st</sup>-century dystopias distinguish themselves from earlier dystopian novels through introducing several main characters as opposed to “the lone protagonist, who is often a white male” (418). This phenomenon is exemplified by the inclusion of a multitude of female perspectives in *Red Clocks* and *Future Home of the Living God*, whose protagonists differ in aspects such as age and race. This can be seen as an indicator of how modern ‘dystopian’ works are influenced by, yet also further develop, dystopian themes in literature.

Zumas’s and Erdrich’s novels are relatively recent, valuable additions to the feminist dystopian literary canon. According to Milada Franková, “dystopian writing seems to have been a primarily male domain;” however, “since the mid-twentieth century [...] women writers have [...] contributed to the development of the genre” (211). She speculates that this may be attributed to a “shift in emphasis from the affairs of rule and government [...] to anti-war and ecological affairs” that “provided the themes that women writers have felt called upon to embrace” (Franková 213). For instance, I identify Ursula K. Le Guin’s *The Eye of the Heron* (1978), Margaret Atwood’s *The Handmaid’s Tale* (1985) and Octavia E. Butler’s *The Parable of the Sower* (1993) as canonical 20<sup>th</sup>-century dystopian novels written by women. Building on this feminist dystopian tradition in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, I believe that *Red Clocks* and *Future Home of the Living God* constitute two highly relevant examples of feminist ‘dystopian’ fiction in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, as they are set in the present time or in the very near future and mirror current political conditions in the United States.

For female authors like Zumas and Erdrich, the dystopian genre can become a space for criticising how systemic oppression manifests itself through the control of bodies, reflecting real-world struggles faced by women, such as the denial of access to abortion. Meghan Hurley-Powell posits that “[w]omen writers [...] employ the feminist dystopian genre to emphasise that women can resist gender-based oppression [...] in a way that non-feminist dystopian literature might not” and describes it as “a unique [...] subgenre of women’s literature [...] dedicated to exploring [...] feminist resistance” (1, 2). In line with the assertions made by Hurley-Powell, I argue that both *Red Clocks* and *Future Home of the Living God* should be understood as feminist ‘dystopian’ narratives, as their female protagonists are subjected to patriarchal control over their bodies in different ways; nevertheless, they attempt to resist governmental surveillance to the best of their abilities.

### **2.3. Surveillance in Dystopian Literature**

Surveillance is a prominent theme in dystopian literature throughout the centuries, although the form it takes differs depending on when they were published. According to Hinchcliffe, one reason for the genre’s importance to surveillance studies is that, in contrast to earlier dystopian literature, which “were published before major events important to surveillance studies, such as 9/11, and [...] major technological developments such as the internet,” contemporary works are influenced by the technological age in which security and surveillance are a part of everyday life (421). Moreover, while earlier dystopias predominantly illustrate “surveillance in disciplinary societies,” dystopian fiction of the 21<sup>st</sup> century represents “control societies, where we are monitored on the go” (Hinchcliffe 421). Marks argues that dystopian literature “provide[s] us with [...] narratives and characters through which we can imagine surveillance worlds similar to [...] our own, and in which we see individuals [...] responding to the existence or development of surveillance regimes, technologies and protocols” (3). In *Red Clocks* and *Future Home of the Living God*, Zumas and Erdrich portray societies in

which surveillance is a prevalent part of women's everyday lives, bearing resemblance to current political regimes such as the first and second Trump administrations.

Surveillance technologies have evolved beyond traditional state control, increasingly involving surveillance within both the public and the private spheres. Florian Zappe and Andrew S. Gross contend that the nature of surveillance has progressed from being primarily “a ‘top-down’ system of oppression” to an “open society” and “a more effective, because more hidden, system of total control,” indicating a transition “from Big Brother to the Panopticon” (13). Foucault states that the effect of the Panopticon is “to induce in the inmate a state of conscious and permanent visibility that assures the automatic functioning of power” and addresses the existence of “centres of observation disseminated throughout society” (*Discipline and Punish* 201, 212). However, concerning contemporary surveillance practices, Zappe and Gross describe not only the concept of Big Brother but also the Panopticon as outdated, stating that “surveillance practices become detached from the institutions and even further dispersed within the socio-cultural realm, infiltrating more areas of private, public and professional interaction, where they [...] exert a more total [...] influence on how we conduct our lives” (14). Similarly, Hugh Davies asserts that “[s]urveillance is no longer simply the stare of the state, but our permanent and mutual gaze at each other” (169). Both *Red Clocks* and *Future Home of the Living God* reflect the contemporary evolution of surveillance practices, as outlined by Zappe, Gross, and Davies. In these novels, surveillance is not merely a top-down imposition carried out by the state; instead, it has become a part of everyday life.

Contemporary feminist ‘dystopian’ fiction, such as *Red Clocks* and *Future Home of the Living God*, presents forms of surveillance and control that explicitly target women's bodies and reproductive rights, extending beyond state surveillance. According to Marks, “[f]eminism has been a powerful and transformative force in modern and contemporary society,” as reflected in the literature's exploration of “the gendering of visibility and of surveillance” (86)

to which women are especially subjected. Marks posits that literature provides a space for “exposing how women are particularly vulnerable to surveillance powers, especially those enforced in male-dominated societies” (86). I argue that this phenomenon continues in 21<sup>st</sup>-century dystopian literature, as seen in *Red Clocks* and *Future Home of the Living God*. Rather than relying solely on state surveillance through laws that restrict the choices women can make over their bodies, both novels illustrate how surveillance functions more insidiously through everyday structures and is embodied in the actual bodies of their subjects. This is in accordance with Zappe’s and Gross’s claim that surveillance has evolved beyond the concept of Big Brother and the Panopticon (14), increasingly infiltrating the private lives of citizens and imposing control over their bodies.

Feminist ‘dystopian’ fiction of the 21<sup>st</sup> century is frequently set in the near-present time, draws from current politics and legislation surrounding reproductive rights, and foregrounds the surveillance of women as a central mechanism of control. Martínez-Falquina contends that “the current reality of precariousness, risk, and uncertainty has brought on the commodification of bodies, especially female ones, and while this affects women everywhere, it is poor and marginalized women who are most at risk of the recent regression in women’s rights” (“Feminist Dystopia and Reality” 272). To illustrate this, she mentions “the passing of more restrictive reproduction laws in the United States and the continuing violence against women everywhere” and refers to *Red Clocks* and *Future Home of the Living God* as “recent feminist dystopias which denounce the patriarchal control over women’s bodies” (Martínez-Falquina, “Feminist Dystopia and Reality” 272), supporting their classification as feminist ‘dystopian’ literature. While I concur with her argument that “feminist dystopias function as warnings aimed at prompting people to actively engage in the fight against [...] the attack on women’s reproductive rights” and “that this motivation is related to the way these novels are strategically positioned between dystopia and realism” (Martínez-Falquina, “Feminist Dystopia and Reality”

273), there is insufficient emphasis on the nature of surveillance as well as how it reduces women to objects of state control and their reproductive functions. Martínez-Falquina briefly discusses how the governments in *Red Clocks* and *Future Home of the Living God* attempt to exert control over women and mentions the repercussions these laws have for the female protagonists in both novels (“Feminist Dystopia and Reality” 273-275); however, the specifics of surveillance and how it affects women both physically and emotionally are not sufficiently explored. Close analyses of the forms surveillance takes will be conducted to identify how the protagonists’ identities in *Red Clocks* and *Future Home of the Living God* are shaped by larger social and political forces and power structures, and how their bodies become sites of control.

#### **2.4. Reproductive Politics and Rights in the United States**

A brief overview of reproductive politics and women’s reproductive rights in the United States, especially in the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries, is necessary to understand how the events that unfold in *Red Clocks* and *Future Home of the Living God* resemble current political trajectories. Rickie Solinger defines reproductive politics as “a late twentieth century term,” which answers the question of “[w]ho has power over matters of pregnancy and its consequences?” (2, 3; original emphasis). She posits that “[t]hroughout American history, reproductive politics has involved debates about women’s reproductive capacity as a social resource” and that it is a relatively recent development that “girls and women publicly placed themselves at the center of the arena of reproductive politics” (9). According to Solinger, throughout the 1960s and 1970s, citizens “were beginning to imagine and speak publicly about a world in which women could legitimately and legally make a great many fertility-related decisions” and abortion was seen as “matter of women’s rights to control their reproductive lives and health” (178, 182). While abortion was considered a crime in the United States from the mid-19<sup>th</sup> to the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century (Solinger 10), the laws surrounding abortion rights changed in the 1970s. In 1973, Roe

v. Wade, “the [...] Supreme Court decision that legalized abortion,” was passed and, as a result, “pregnancy rates have declined, and so have rates of marriage,” while “single motherhood” has become more common (Solinger 3, 185, 211, 212).

While abortion remained legal until *Roe v. Wade* was overturned in 2022, it nevertheless was – and still is – a controversial issue throughout the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> and the 21<sup>st</sup> centuries. According to Solinger, “Bill Clinton, the first president to support abortion rights,” was “lifting several restrictions on abortion,” while “George W. Bush has used his office to reinstate restrictions and to elevate the legal status of the fetus over the interests of pregnant women” (229, 230). Susan F. Wood posits that “[t]he Obama Administration showed strong leadership on the ACA,” the Affordable Care Act, which “introduced many opportunities to expand access to health care and improve quality of care,” and “in supporting preventive services for women, including coverage of contraception,” however, “the administration has been too passive in areas related to abortion” and “restrictions on abortion and ongoing funding bans, which limit options for the most vulnerable women, remain in place” (28, 27). Janice Hopkins Tanne addresses the situation surrounding reproductive rights during Joe Biden’s presidency: “Biden’s annual address [...] made strong reference to protecting reproductive rights and in vitro fertilisation” (1). Maryanne Balkin claims that “[t]he first Trump presidency set the scene for a new era in restrictive abortion law” and “laid the groundwork for the 2022 United States (US) Supreme Court decision of *Dobbs v Jackson Women’s Health Organization* (*Dobbs*) which overturned *Roe v Wade* (*Roe*)” (135). According to Tanne, when *Roe v. Wade* was overturned, “the [Supreme] court” was “dominated by conservative justices appointed by [...] Donald Trump” who “ended the right to abortion” (1). Laura J. Esserman and Douglas Yee elaborate on this by stating that “the US Supreme Court decided that women have no constitutional right to abortion and returned the issue to individual states” and, as a result, “at least 16 states have introduced laws making abortion illegal” (1238).

These legal statutes in *Red Clocks* and *Future Home of the Living God* strongly resemble current real-world reproductive politics. In *Red Clocks*, abortion is no longer legal throughout the United States and in *Future Home of the Living God*, pregnant women are similarly stripped of their reproductive agency, as they are detained in birthing facilities and forced to bear children (Zumas, *Red Clocks* 32; Erdrich 72). The experiences of women in Erdrich's novel are reminiscent of the disembodiedness identified by Rachel Roth: "[P]regnant women [...] are treated as if disembodied from their own experience, as if they have loaned out their bodies for nine months and so have no claim over what happens to them during that time" (188). Solinger further states that pregnant women "have been forced to have Caesarian deliveries, submit to unwanted medical procedures on behalf of the fetus, medicated, forced to stay in the hospital" (235), with the latter being precisely what happens to the women in *Future Home of the Living God* (Erdrich 72, 123, 256, 261, 266). Moreover, in Zumas's novel, embryos are granted rights of life, liberty, and property (Zumas, *Red Clocks* 32), which aligns with the concept of fetal personhood addressed by Solinger: "Across the second half of the twentieth century, [...] the concept of fetal personhood gradually emerged," meaning that "the fetus could be imagined as a baby "person," [...] with "rights," which would equate abortion with murder (232, 233). Therefore, both novels illustrate how the regression of women's reproductive autonomy resembles current political trajectories surrounding reproductive rights in the United States.

### **3. *Red Clocks*: What makes it a Paratopia?**

Zumas's *Red Clocks* expands on the dystopian tradition by constructing a narrative that feels disturbingly plausible and contemporary, considering the political climate in the United States during the first and second Trump administrations and the recent legislation targeting reproductive rights, including the restriction of access to abortion in many states (Davis 324).

In an interview, the author offered a term for what she has achieved with her novel, paratopia: “*para* is [...] the Greek prefix for *to the side* or *next to* and [...] it’s almost [...] right there next to us, this possibility” (Zumas, “Leni Zumas on ‘Red Clocks’” 3:12-3:20), which represents a subtle but meaningful divergence from the established conventions of the dystopian tradition. While dystopian narratives often portray a highly distant or speculative future, such as scientific advancements and genetic engineering in Huxley’s *Brave New World* and the state’s system of organ donation in Kazuo Ishiguro’s *Never Let Me Go* (2005), paratopia is grounded in a context that more closely resembles contemporary political and legal circumstances. For example, Zumas’s portrayal of a United States where *Roe v. Wade* has been reversed is not set in a distant future; instead, it resonates with current conditions – both at the time Zumas wrote her novel and in the present time – in which access to abortion is already restricted for many women (Zumas, “Leni Zumas on ‘Red Clocks’” 3:32). Although *Red Clocks* was published in 2018, four years before *Roe v. Wade* was overturned, reading it in the current post-*Roe v. Wade* landscape of 2025 positions the novel’s events even closer to reality than at the time of its publication. I argue that the nature of surveillance in the novel and the subjects and objects it engenders position *Red Clocks* as a paratopia. The systems of legal, medical, familial, and societal control depicted in the novel are already embedded in our lived realities, both in 2018 and in 2025. Zumas’s concept of paratopia is constructed not through the lens of a distant, futuristic dystopia but through familiar and recognisable structures such as legal frameworks, medical professionals, family members, and prevailing societal norms, which exercise control over individual characters and their bodies.

Dystopian fiction depicts distant and speculative futures and often emerges in response to real-world occurrences (Marks 6; Hinchcliffe 419; Hammond 664). Through first outlining the most crucial characteristic of dystopian literature for this thesis, I aim to demonstrate how *Red Clocks* differs from the genre’s conventions and adapts them into the subgenre of paratopia.

One element of dystopian fiction is its speculative depiction of future scenarios, often portraying grim outcomes that reflect potential consequences of contemporary societal and political issues. Patrícia Vieira describes dystopian literature as a “preeminently political literary genre[s]” that depicts what Sharon R. Wilson refers to as the “ultimate flawed world” and Marks as “a considerably worse non-existent society” (Vieira 26; Wilson 1; Marks 6). Thus, dystopian literature provides its readers with ways of becoming increasingly aware of and criticising the negative aspects of the society they live in. Similarly, Keith M. Booker asserts that in dystopian literature, bleak visions are depicted to encourage readers to reflect on their world and society, while Hinchcliffe states that “[d]ystopian authors tend to comment on the issues that they explore in their fiction in real-life” (Booker 5; Hinchcliffe 419). This suggests that engaging with dystopian literature not only enhances awareness of current conditions but also acts as a cautionary warning against possible future scenarios that could emerge if certain political or societal paths are pursued or maintained. Andrew Hammond refers to dystopian literature as an “admonitory genre, which imaginatively intensifies contemporary trends in order to caution against them” (664). One prime example of this is Orwell’s *1984*, which encapsulates the anxieties of its time and, as noted by Marks et al., reveals the era’s profound anxieties regarding the potential of technology to enhance authoritarian control and restrict individual freedom (12). The temporal context of the composition and publication of *1984* is marked by the prevalence of totalitarian political systems at the time of writing and publication. Orwell, having observed the era of Stalinism in the Soviet Union and Nazism in Germany, partially based the totalitarian framework presented in his novel on these regimes (Lynskey 1:16-1:25). In contrast, Zumas’s *Red Clocks* reimagines the dystopian genre through a paratopian lens by situating her book in a plausible and not-so-distant future.

Despite the term’s significance for *Red Clocks*, the concept of paratopia has received relatively minor critical engagement within existing scholarship, and it has not been examined

which aspects of the novel make it paratopian rather than dystopian. Although scholars such as Argha Basu and Priyanka Tripathi, Hasan Nassour as well as Patricia McManus have engaged with the novel's representations of surveillance and the blurry boundaries between dystopia and current reality, only Katie Tobin and Martínez-Falquina have addressed Zumas's own concept of paratopia. Most scholars describe the novel as dystopian; for instance, "a feminist critical dystopia" and "a 'near future' dystopia" (Basu and Tripathi 296; McManus 59). In contrast, Tobin views it "not as dystopic, but as paratopic," and claims that "works of speculative fiction," such as *Red Clocks*, "offer a magnified focus of many of the horrors women and mothers have already had to endure." Similarly, Martínez-Falquina mentions that "Zumas [...] did not see her novel as a dystopia but as a paratopia" and further highlights the book's "strategic blurring between dystopia and current reality" ("Feminist Dystopia and Reality" 275, 279). However, even these two scholars have not sufficiently explored the aspects that make *Red Clocks* a paratopia. Therefore, I have identified three characteristics that position it as a paratopia rather than a 'conventional' dystopia: seemingly small changes in legislation and its rhetorics with far-reaching consequences for the characters, the occurrence of a more insidious form of surveillance in already existing everyday structures, and the centrality of intimate experiences involving the body in the mechanisms of control to which the protagonists are subjected. The modes of surveillance in this novel will be examined in conjunction with how they turn humans into "subjects," "objects," and "deviant others," categories which emerge as a result of these surveillance mechanisms and, according to Richard Jenkins, influence their treatment within society (160). Significantly, the novel exposes these subtle mechanisms through its strategic use of language: the chapter titles and the naming as well as the labelling of the characters reflect and reinforce these dynamics of categorisation and control by mirroring the processes through which they are reduced to their roles and functions.

The formal and stylistic choices in *Red Clocks*, particularly its chapter titles and the labelling of the main characters according to their roles rather than their names, exemplify how they are denied full personhood and are only valued for the roles they fulfil. The novel is structured around recurring chapter titles that identify its protagonists by their social roles instead of their names: “the biographer,” “the daughter,” “the wife,” and “the mender.”<sup>1</sup> Zumas addresses and explains her paratextual choice in an interview: “I wanted to call attention to the inadequacy of labels. All of us have multiple identities [...] yet we can find ourselves reduced (by immigration laws, magazine headlines, a conversation with a neighbor) to a single one” (Zumas, qtd. in Sugiuchi). This observation indicates that the reduction to a fundamental role is not merely a linguistic phenomenon but also a structural one that mirrors how institutions, laws, and societal expectations can constrain identities to a single aspect. The biographer is reduced to her professional role, which emphasises her ambition but at the same time renders her desire for motherhood as unnatural. The daughter’s identity is tethered to her family; her labelling implies dependency and a lack of agency, while the wife is entirely defined by her marital status and her worth is measured by her ability to maintain her household. Lastly, the mender is named for her healing capabilities but is still positioned at the margins of society and reduced to the services she can provide for others. Although the characters’ real names are revealed throughout the novel – Roberta Louise Stephens (the biographer), Mattie (the daughter), Susan Korsmo (the wife), and Gin Percival (the mender) – they are used only sparingly when the main characters refer to or talk to each other. Even within their own respective chapters, the women continue to see themselves through these labels rather than their names; for example, “[w]hile the biographer was hiding out in rainy Arcadia, they closed

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<sup>1</sup> While I agree with the depersonalising effects of referring to the characters by their functional roles (e.g. the daughter), I decided to keep these labels in my analysis in order to remain consistent with how the characters are presented in the novel. The characters’ actual names are used only sparingly in the novel and are less familiar to its readers. Retaining these labels allows for a clearer analysis of the novel, including how identity is shaped by and constrained through socially imposed roles.

the women's health clinics that couldn't afford mandated renovations" (Zumas, *Red Clocks* 175). The author's decision to use these rigid classifications throughout the majority of the novel highlights that the characters' identities and worth are determined by their prescribed societal roles and reflects how institutional and ideological systems impose rigid classifications on individuals, thereby stripping them of their identity and agency.

The novel's descriptive reduction of characters to their respective roles reflects that surveillance is not limited to mere observation and control by the state; instead, it actively creates categories of people. Through laws such as Every Child Needs Two, the state defines who qualifies as an ideal reproductive subject and who does not, thereby establishing specific roles for women. However, state surveillance through legislative changes represents only the most visible layer of control. More covertly and insidiously, surveillance also occurs within everyday interactions, perpetuated by family, colleagues, professionals, and the town's citizens. These more informal forms of surveillance lead the four main characters to internalise these societal expectations, according to which they regulate their own thoughts and behaviour. I argue that the surveillance technologies presented in *Red Clocks* assign women to one or more of three categories: reproductive subjects (those who comply with normative ideals of womanhood and motherhood), reproductive objects (those whose bodies become sites of control), and deviant others (those who practice resistance). These categories are the result of surveillance that the protagonists are subjected to and, therefore, do not constitute natural classifications. Therefore, I will also critically examine the categorisation of the main characters in *Red Clocks* as subjects, objects, deviant others, or a combination of these categories.

Zumas's use of language both reflects the novel's central themes of surveillance and resistance and subtly implicates its readers in the state's dehumanisation of women and its systems of categorisation. Various scholars have briefly addressed the novel's style; for

instance, Nassour comments on its “incorporation of diverse voices,” Martínez-Falquina refers to it as a “polyphonic novel,” and McManus mentions both its chapter titles and the absence of “first-person narrative voices” (Nassour 216; Martínez-Falquina, “Feminist Dystopia and Reality” 276; McManus 61). However, little attention has been given to Zumas’s paratextual and narrative choices and to their consequences, specifically, how they shape the readers’ perceptions of the protagonists by limiting the extent to which they relate to them as individuals. Crucially, the novel’s central thematic tension between surveillance and resistance is mirrored in its structure and techniques through both paratextual and narrative elements. The mechanisms of surveillance are reflected through the usage of labels rather than the characters’ names, which aligns the readers’ perceptions of them with the reductionism of their identities. In both the chapter titles and the third-person narration, Zumas consistently refers to her characters by their social categories rather than their names. As a result, she normalises their dehumanisation and makes her readers perceive them through the same reductive logic: not as complex individuals but according to their assigned roles and categories. Retaining these labels in literary criticism, although it facilitates engagement with this novel, perpetuates both the scholars’ and the readers’ complicity in the depersonalisation of women. While the third-person narration upholds these labels, the novel simultaneously also offers insights into the characters’ lives, thoughts, and feelings. Resistance is most explicitly enacted in the moments when the women’s real names are used, which only occurs in first-person narration within direct speech, where the characters talk to each other, are given a voice, and actively resist their dehumanisation. This structural tension between external labels and the protagonists’ internal complexity suggests that Zumas disagrees with this dehumanising categorisation and seeks to criticise it by drawing her readers’ attention to the dissonance between the identities imposed on the protagonists and their lived experiences. The novel’s structure, which initially makes the readers complicit, also contains the tools to question and resist their complicity.

Surveillance in *Red Clocks* does not manifest itself through futuristic technologies but rather through ideological institutions whose seemingly benign roles mask their function as tools of state control. Facilities such as hospitals and intimate relationships with friends and family members require a theoretical lens in order to be recognised as surveillance technologies. They do not resemble advanced high-tech or futuristic surveillance tools like drones or tracking devices, which tend to be more commonly associated with dystopian fiction, but they perform the same function: the observation, regulation, and disciplining of individuals. Instead of relying on technological progress, the novel's mechanisms of surveillance and control are embedded in everyday ideological institutions, including medical facilities, as well as structures like the family unit. Louis Althusser, drawing on the Marxist theory of the State, differentiates between two types of State Apparatuses: Ideological State Apparatuses (ISAs) and Repressive State Apparatuses (RSAs). Institutions and structures such as churches, schools, the family, and the legal system count as ISAs, which "function 'by ideology'," whereas "the Government, the Administration, the Army, the Police, the Courts, the Prisons, etc." correspond to RSAs, which "function[s] 'by violence'" (Althusser 96; emphasis omitted). Furthermore, Althusser distinguishes between the public and the private sphere, situating ISAs predominantly within the private and RSAs within the public sphere (97). While both ISAs and RSAs are present in *Red Clocks*, it is the ideological forms of surveillance, which are operating through seemingly benign institutions and structures, that prove most insidious, precisely because they operate ideologically and under the guise of care, influencing individual behaviour to facilitate self-regulation in accordance with state and societal expectations.

Complementing Althusser's framework of State Apparatuses, Foucault's concept of biopolitics further illuminates the ways in which surveillance in everyday situations functions as a more subtle form of control. Foucault identifies a shift in how power operates from the 18<sup>th</sup> century onwards: "a new technology of power" that "does not exclude [...] disciplinary

technology, but it does [...] modify it to some extent, and above all, use it by sort of infiltrating it” (*Society Must Be Defended* 242). This new form of power, which Foucault refers to as biopower, operates through the regulation of biological processes: “a set of processes such as the ratio of births to deaths, the rate of reproduction, the fertility of a population [...] become biopolitics’ first objects of knowledge and the targets it seeks to control” (*Society Must Be Defended* 243). Instead of replacing disciplinary power, which includes “techniques of power that were essentially centered on the body [...] and techniques that could be used to take control over bodies,” biopower “use[s] it by [...] embedding itself in existing disciplinary techniques” through “more subtle, more rational mechanisms” (Foucault, *Society Must Be Defended* 242, 244). Chloë Taylor describes the concept of biopower as follows: “Biopower is able to access the body [...] because it is internalized by subjects rather than exercised from above through acts or threats of violence, and because it is dispersed throughout society rather than located in a single individual or government body” (43). Therefore, biopolitics and biopower closely align with what I would describe as the most insidious type of surveillance in *Red Clocks*, namely the internalisation of state-sanctioned norms and values, through which the characters are participating in their own subjugation.

While foundational, Foucault’s concept of biopolitics has neglected the category of gender and feminist scholars have expanded it to account for the ways in which women’s bodies and reproductive functions are regulated. As Ruth A. Miller explains, “Foucault’s unwillingness or inability to address gender in his otherwise thoughtful work on sexuality, discourse, embodiment, and sovereignty has troubled feminist theorists for years” (67). To remedy this omission, biopolitics has since been reconceptualised through explicitly feminist frameworks that foreground how state power operates specifically through the control and management of women’s bodies and reproductive functions. Like R.A. Miller, Jean Elisabeth Pedersen also states that “Foucault failed to take gender into account in his own work” (677).

To illustrate how biopolitics historically targeted women, Pedersen mentions early anti-contraceptive policies in France, which targeted women through exercising control over their bodies and restricting their reproductive autonomy: “The exhaustive list of prohibited substances included all female methods of contraception but did not include condoms” (676, 677). R.A. Miller maintains that “Pedersen demonstrates [...] that biopolitics rests as solidly on the production of gender categories as it does on the regulation of sexuality” (68). She further argues that biopolitics is “a *feminist* concern” and claims that “biopolitical regulation has always primarily targeted women’s bodies” (R.A. Miller 68, 69; original emphasis). Therefore, feminist scholars have expanded the conceptual framework of biopolitics, moving beyond Foucault’s original definition.

This feminist reinterpretation of biopolitics is particularly relevant to *Red Clocks* where women and girls are the primary subjects of state control; however, men<sup>2</sup> are not exempt from surveillance. Structures such as the family, the medical system, and laws governing reproductive rights serve as biopolitical instruments designed to govern primarily women’s lives and bodies; however, they ultimately entangle everyone, including men. For instance, the biographer’s male doctor who, after determining that there is no possibility of her becoming pregnant, chooses his words carefully when he suggests an illegal course of action – going abroad to a country where IVF is legal – as he is also subject to surveillance: “I’m curious whether – Well, have you – Let me put it this way: do you travel much?” (Zumas, *Red Clocks* 176). His indirect phrasing suggests that he is aware of the risks of even implying resistance to state laws and that biopolitical control extends beyond women’s bodies to regulate anyone within its reach. While these structures do not exert overt force, they subtly shape women’s

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<sup>2</sup> In this thesis, I refer to categories such as “man” and “woman” in the way they are used in *Red Clocks*, which presents a binary understanding of gender. My use of these terms is not intended to reinforce binary or essentialist views of gender, but to critically engage with the ways in which the novel itself reflects the gendered structures of surveillance and control.

behaviour by not only restricting their reproductive freedom, but also by creating an environment where both men and women self-regulate in order to conform to societal expectations. Through this, it becomes evident how control is embedded in everyday structures, highlighting that the surveillance mechanisms depicted in Zumas's novel operate, in accordance with Althusser and Foucault, on both ideological and biopolitical levels. Thus, *Red Clocks* demonstrates that, while surveillance also relies on top-down coercion through changes in legislation, it is the internalisation of control through familiar everyday systems that proves to be most effective and insidious.

### **3.1. Small Changes with far-reaching Consequences**

*Red Clocks*' depiction of state interference in women's reproductive autonomy resonates with real-world legislative developments throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries, reinforcing its status as a paratopia. Zumas imagines a near-future United States, in which new laws profoundly reshape women's everyday lives, restricting their reproductive freedom and the choices they can make about their own bodies. Around the novel's publication, the United States has seen both victories and severe restrictions concerning abortion rights. Martha F. Davis notes that *Roe v. Wade* in 1973 and *Planned Parenthood v. Casey* in 1992 required "[a]ll states in the US [...] to provide access to abortion at least until fetal viability" (324). However, she adds that, in 2022, in *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organisation*, both landmark decisions were overturned and abortion restrictions introduced by many states (Davis 324); similarly, in *Red Clocks*, *Roe v. Wade* was also reversed (Zumas, *Red Clocks* 51). The Centre for Reproductive Rights categorises states and territories within the United States by their legislation surrounding access to abortion: As of August 2025, abortion is legal in 24 states, 11 of which also offer expanded access; partially protected in three states as well as two territories, where it will remain accessible, but the right to abortion is not legally protected; hostile in 11 states and three territories, meaning that there will either be a total ban of abortion, it is difficult

to access or the respective states have enforced a six-week, twelve-week or eighteen-week abortion ban; and illegal in the remaining 12 states, although there are differences in the extent to which abortion is prohibited (“Abortion Laws By State”). Davis further observes that the Dobbs decision “opens the doors for states to explicitly adopt the proposition that life begins with fertilization, or even earlier,” which is the case in *Red Clocks* where the right of life is given to every fertilised egg (Davis 328; Zumas, *Red Clocks* 32). Project 2025, described by the Reproductive Freedom for All Foundation as “the blueprint for Donald Trump’s new administration,” proposes nationwide restrictions on abortion, birth control, and fertility treatments. Additionally, in the *Mandate for Leadership 2025: The Conservative Promise*, Roger Severino, states that the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) “should use every available tool [...] to ensure that every state reports exactly how many abortions take place within its borders, at what gestational age of the child, for what reason, the mother’s state of residence, and by what method” (455), which resembles what the Reproductive Freedom for All Foundation refers to as “a surveillance state to track your reproductive health.” The legislative landscape depicted in the novel mirrors contemporary concerns regarding reproductive rights in the United States, supporting its classification as a paratopia.

The situation depicted in the novel also reflects worldwide legislative circumstances surrounding reproductive rights, extending beyond the United States. For instance, Mariel Ferragamo has identified three other countries criminalising abortion, namely El Salvador and Nicaragua, where, according to the Centre for Reproductive Rights (“The World’s Abortion Laws”), abortion is prohibited entirely, and Poland, where it is permitted in cases of rape and incest (Centre for Reproductive Rights, “The World’s Abortion Laws”). Moreover, Turkey’s prohibition of elective C-sections in private hospitals, along with Recep Tayyip Erdogan’s advocacy for natural childbirth (France 24) – two more instances in which women’s

reproductive rights are restricted – further highlight the contemporary relevance of increased state interference in women’s reproductive choices that is prevalent in the novel.

The consequences of the laws presented in *Red Clocks* primarily affect single women and mothers, with men retaining the authority to make decisions regarding their bodies. While it is not explicitly stated that these laws disproportionately target women, this bias becomes evident through the rhetoric used to justify them: “[N]o adopted kid will have to suffer from a single *woman’s* lack of time, her low self-esteem, her inferior earning power [...]. Fewer single *mothers* [...] will mean fewer criminals and addicts and welfare recipients” (Zumas, *Red Clocks* 119; emphasis added). Whereas legislative figures are predominantly characterised as male, for instance, “[w]ith abortion illegal, said the congressmen, more babies would be available to adopt (Zumas, *Red Clocks* 175; emphasis added), there is no mention of single men or fathers. This is reminiscent of the real-world disparity identified by Amanda R. Haire and Christi R. McGeorge who posit that “single mothers are viewed differently than single fathers by society” (25). Martha Albertson Fineman further argues that “single motherhood [...] is deviant simply because it represents the rejection of the primacy of the sexual connection as the core organizing familial concept,” with single mothers “stigmatized and labeled as “deviant” and “pathological” [...], blamed for their inability to achieve the nearly impossible economic “self-sufficiency” outside the private, subsidized family” (48, 63). In the novel, this stigma towards single women and mothers is not merely confined to societal perception but embedded in the law under the guise of protecting children’s welfare.

In *Red Clocks*, state surveillance is enacted through a range of seemingly minor changes to legislation that have far-reaching consequences and profoundly alter women’s everyday lives by restricting their reproductive rights. This form of surveillance closely aligns with Althusser’s concept of RSAs as it functions primarily through the threat of punishment and violence and operates within the public sphere (97). One of these legislative changes, the Personhood

Amendment, seems to merely redefine an embryo as a human being, but, crucially, also equates abortion and the discarding of embryos with the murder of a human being, affecting every woman and girl considering alternative forms of fertilisation or the termination of pregnancy. Consequently, legislative measures prohibiting both IVF and abortion have been enacted (Zumas, *Red Clocks* 32, 33). Lauren B. Paulk addresses the reasons why IVF can be understood as a violation of embryonic personhood, namely when “couples [...] choose to freeze “leftover” pre-implantation embryos to use in the future, [...] these “leftovers” could be considered people” and their “destruction [...] would be tantamount to murder” (783). She concludes that “[e]mbryonic personhood implicates the right to found a family because it could preclude [...] single individuals [...] from pursuing fertility treatment” and “should be discouraged,” as “it is important that international human rights law continues to recognize human beings [...] as right-bearers under the law” (Paulk 806, 823). Isabel Karpin elaborates on this by stating that “it is the *not yet pregnant pregnant woman* who should be given legislative visibility and centrality, not the embryo” (603; original emphasis). Every Child Needs Two, another law implemented in *Red Clocks*, prohibits adoption for single and unmarried women and places restrictions on who is allowed to become a parent, requiring “valid marriage licenses” and “approval through a federally regulated agency” (Zumas, *Red Clocks* 34). What seem like seemingly small legislative requirements operate as mechanisms to exclude anyone not conforming to normative criteria. These legal reforms severely restrict the agency of both women and girls seeking an abortion and unmarried women, limiting their reproductive autonomy and their ability to decide how and with whom to start a family.

Seemingly minor changes in legislation are internalised by the individuals affected by them; however, the reach of state surveillance extends beyond the biopolitical regulation of women’s bodies by also shaping their thoughts and emotions. The daughter, who accidentally becomes pregnant, contemplates the possibility of terminating her pregnancy: “Her body will

be clean again. But it will be a crime” (Zumas, *Red Clocks* 152). Her initial use of the language of cleanliness suggests that she views her pregnancy as a form of contamination – something that makes her unclean – and that she has internalised the shame centred around female sexuality, teenage pregnancies, and reproduction. Her self-perception aligns with Elizabeth Yardley’s observation that “teenage motherhood continues to be an undesirable life path that is subject to a heavy degree of stigma” (673). Moreover, the daughter also judges herself and experiences the anxiety, shame, and guilt identified by Raquel Silva Barretto and Ana Elisa Bastos Figueiredo. Their study on the “emotional issues of women who have induced at least one abortion during their lifetime in a country with highly restrictive [...] laws” has shown that they, “[d]ue to the criminalization and, because it is a social taboo,” frequently report such emotions (Barretto and Bastos Figueiredo 3212-3216). Similarly, the biographer has internalised the societal values surrounding womanhood, motherhood, and fertility brought about by legal changes: “1. You’re too old. [...] 3. Every child needs two parents. [...] 5. You’re too old. [...] You’re too old, sad spinster” (Zumas, *Red Clocks* 10-11). Her repetition of being “too old” to conceive reflects the societal stigma surrounding older motherhood, as identified by Cleopatra M. Abdou: “Despite being more common, being an older expectant mother remains a stigmatized social identity” and such women face “medical and sociocultural messages about [...] declining fertility, a ticking biological clock” that “may have important consequences for prenatal mental and physical health” (133, 134). The daughter’s and the biographer’s respective internalisations of abortion as a crime and single motherhood, especially at a certain age, as abnormal, further reflect the state’s psychopolitical influence and reveal how thoroughly they have already adopted these changes to legislation.

These ostensibly minor legislative changes involve alterations in the language of the law that shape the lived realities of women. The “Personhood Amendment, which gives the constitutional right to life, liberty, and property to a fertilized egg in the moment of conception,”

seems to merely redefine when life begins, but, in reality, it has profound implications for women (Zumas, *Red Clocks* 32). The biographer notes that “abortion was legal in this country, but now we have to resort to throwing ourselves down the stairs,” which represents the actions of an unnamed student whose unsuccessful attempt to terminate her pregnancy through such drastic means left her injured (Zumas, *Red Clocks* 51). Her remark points to both the physical danger and, through her use of the collective “we,” the normalisation of such acts under the Personhood Amendment. These changes in legislation, meant to protect the life of embryos, in practice, produce life-threatening consequences for pregnant women and girls, as they may turn to more dangerous means of attempting to abort their baby and reclaim control over their bodies. Similarly, the federal ban on IVF, which only forbids the specific medical procedure of “the transfer of embryos from laboratory to uterus” rather than explicitly banning fertility treatments, denies unmarried women, such as the biographer, access to one of the few available pathways to motherhood (Zumas, *Red Clocks* 32-33). Every Child Needs Two, as the name suggests, implies that a child’s wellbeing depends on a normative family structure – two parents, heterosexual, married – and aims “*to restore dignity, strength, and prosperity to American families*” (Zumas, *Red Clocks* 34; original emphasis). Fineman identifies this as “[t]he sexual family,” which “is an entity entitled to protection – granted “privacy” or immunity from substantial state supervision” and “remains the only form universally protected and promoted by our legal institutions” (45, 47). Alternative forms of parenting, such as the biographer’s wish for single motherhood, are delegitimised and, in accordance with Fineman, “cast as threatening and dangerous to society, destructive to cherished values” with marriage being “constructed as essential [...] to the foundational relationship of the nuclear family” and “the very basis of society itself” (47). The state’s rhetoric of restoration reinforces the illusion of a benevolent intervention and evokes a return to an idealised past, presenting the law as corrective rather than oppressive while concealing its restrictive nature.

These small changes in the language of the law shape the perceptions of individuals who resist normative roles and exemplify the discursive production of reality. Language is not merely descriptive but also has a performative function, as John L. Austin has identified: “stating is performing an act” (140). Similarly, Judith Butler defines language as “both “what” we do [...] and that which we effect” (8). In *Red Clocks*, this performative dimension of language is visible in how legal and social discourse actively produce the realities of its characters. The mender is repeatedly described in pejorative and stigmatising terms such as “unhinged, a forest weirdo, a witch” (Zumas, *Red Clocks* 43). These labels are not neutral; instead, they are performative as they not only ostracise and position her outside the boundaries of acceptable womanhood but also shape how others perceive her. During her trial, which Raluca Andreescu compares to “the Salem witch trials of a bygone era,” she is interrogated with the question of “[h]ow long have you identified as a witch?” (Andreescu 66; Zumas, *Red Clocks* 268). This presupposition of being a witch already frames her as guilty, which makes it rhetorically difficult for her to deny it, as that would further diminish her credibility. Simultaneously, it functions as an instrument of self-incrimination, designed to trick her into affirming an already constructed deviant identity. The scope of linguistic criminalisation expands from the mender to the daughter and the biographer: “The new laws turn the girl into a criminal, Gin Percival into a criminal and the biographer herself [...] into a criminal” (Zumas, *Red Clocks* 267). The repeated phrase “into a criminal” signals the widespread impact of these legislative changes on three very different women. For the daughter, being thought of as a criminal produces feelings of guilt, shame, and anxiety, while the biographer’s reality is constructed by language that criminalises her reproductive choices. Through the labels used to describe anyone who resists or deviates from their prescribed normative roles, the state casts them as criminals and deviant others and their acts of autonomy as deviant behaviour. In doing

so, language actively produces the social realities of women and girls, aligning with Austin's and Butler's theories of the performativity of language.

Rather than inventing new means of surveillance, the state relies on existing tools, including those of transnational agreements and border controls. As the daughter attempts to flee to Canada to undergo an abortion, she faces cross-border surveillance: "Canada has an official agreement with the United States. We've agreed to stop you from breaking *your* country's laws in *our* country" (Zumas, *Red Clocks* 246; original emphasis). What is referred to as the Pink Wall is initially introduced as a theoretical concept but soon becomes a reality: "They hadn't closed the border to abortion seekers yet;" "The border control can detain any woman or girl they "reasonably" suspect of crossing into Canada for ending a pregnancy" (Zumas, *Red Clocks* 75, 89). Upon their return to the United States, women are stripped of their ability to attempt to evade the law again: "Your photo and driver's license [...] will be distributed to every border patrol office in Canada" (Zumas, *Red Clocks* 248). This occurrence reflects Peter Adey's assertion that "borders have long been deemed the blueprints for [...] surveillance societies" and that "borders are increasingly involved in capturing bodies" (193-194). In contrast to dystopia, where surveillance often occurs through "rapidly evolving technology and overwhelming, impersonal systems" (Marks 3), such as the Thought Police in *1984* or The Eyes, the secret police in the totalitarian regime of Gilead in *The Handmaid's Tale*, the enforcement of the Pink Wall exemplifies how paratopian control is implemented through already existing bureaucratic systems. The daughter's situation reveals how external surveillance transcends national borders as agreements with neighbouring countries expand the government's reach. This transnationality of surveillance further underscores the reach of these legislative changes. No longer restricted to the United States, this seemingly small redefinition of when life begins transforms into an international system of control over women's bodies and reproductive choices.

The state is not limited to implementing surveillance mechanisms but also enforces compliance through legal means. While McManus claims that “the state is present only in terms of its effects, its laws and its manner of implementing them” (58), this assertion neglects its active role in restricting women’s freedom and reproductive autonomy. The mender, a healer living in the forest who assists women with tinctures and herbs and operates outside the boundaries of state-sanctioned care, serves as an example of how the state’s surveillance mechanisms are not limited to the prohibition of abortion and the restrictions on parenthood but are actively enforced through legal prosecution. When the mender is placed “under arrest for medical malpractice” (Zumas, *Red Clocks* 163), this measure can be seen as a tool of the state’s legal apparatus through which it not only punishes alleged wrongdoing but also controls who is entitled to provide medical care to the women already affected by these restrictive laws. Through their active enforcement and by redefining the mender’s non-state-sanctioned reproductive care, including pregnancy terminations, as felonies, the state reveals its active role in enforcing compliance. While these laws initially appear only to target specific reproductive acts – the implantation of embryos and abortion – they create legal frameworks that also allow for the state’s prosecution of anyone, even if these changes in legislation do not directly impact them.

These examples of state surveillance, achieved through seemingly small changes in legislation and its rhetoric, exemplify biopolitical governance and biopower. Gender-based laws such as the Personhood Amendment and Every Child Needs Two represent governmental mechanisms that target women’s lives and bodies. While these legislative changes and the language used to describe them may initially seem limited in scope, they significantly influence the lives of women in the novel by imposing restrictions on who can become a mother – and under what conditions – along with limiting women’s agency and their reproductive choices. What appears small on the surface functions as the legal infrastructure for a broader system of

control, one that infiltrates both public and private spheres and is reinforced through everyday structures.

### **3.2. Surveillance through Everyday Structures**

Alongside state-sanctioned surveillance implemented through legal reforms, a more insidious form of surveillance that functions through the fabric of everyday life is also highly prevalent in *Red Clocks* and serves as another means of exercising control over women. This type of surveillance is enacted not by the government but operates within already existing structures through the characters' relations as well as the judgment, pressure, and expectations of others. Therefore, it exposes the insidiousness of ideological apparatuses on the level of the characters' ordinary lives and interactions since surveillance most perniciously occurs in already existing, everyday domestic situations. This is particularly apparent when the main characters are scrutinised by their colleagues, friends, family members, and other townspeople. Such occurrences reinforce *Red Clocks*' classification as a paratopia since the mechanisms of control are not futuristic or reliant on technological innovation (Marks 3). In contrast to dystopian fiction, which "often oppress[es] their citizens with restrictions and scarcity" and depicts surveillance "in terms of rapidly evolving technology and overwhelming, impersonal systems" (Marks 58, 3), mechanisms of control are embedded in the structures of everyday life.

Surveillance through everyday structures occurs through the pressure and dismissal exerted by family members and colleagues. The biographer's father addresses and, to some degree, covertly criticises her single status: "About time you found someone, don't you think?" (Zumas, *Red Clocks* 36). His rhetorical question provides her with a false sense of autonomy by ostensibly allowing her to either agree or disagree while simultaneously framing her single status as problematic. Through presupposing that she does not follow the 'traditional' path of marriage and motherhood, voicing disagreement would portray her as unreasonable and deviant. Though it resembles paternal concern, it functions as a form of societal judgment and

reinforces Shelley Budgeon's claim that "single women confront the knowledge that their identities are 'tainted' by their unpartnered status" (405). She further notes that the "[s]ignificance accorded to relationship status establishes what kinds of lives women should aspire to" and which ones "are granted more social recognition and value" (Budgeon 406). This is reinforced by the biographer's father's remark, suggesting that a life with a partner is more highly valued. Such comments extend beyond familial contexts and into the workplace when a colleague dismissively refers to the biographer's project of writing a biography of a little-known 19<sup>th</sup>-century female polar explorer as merely an unpaid 'hobby' (Zumas, *Red Clocks* 114). Through his utterance, he reinforces a capitalist and patriarchal logic that reflects the devaluation of women's intellectual labour, especially when it does not result in monetary gains. Suzanne Clisby and Julia Holdsworth posit that "patriarchy and capitalism are closely linked" since "women become 'othered' through the casting of men into the role of breadwinners causing women's work [...] to become [...] of lower value" (154). This perspective aligns with the devaluation thesis proposed by Paula England et al., according to which "any activity done largely by women is valued less than that it otherwise would be" (457). In *Red Clocks*, surveillance, therefore, also occurs more insidiously through the subtle ways men diminish women's efforts and aspirations unless they conform to traditional gender roles, including relationships, marriage, and motherhood, thereby aligning with the normative standards prescribed by both government and society.

The storyline of the polar explorer, Eivør Mínervudóttír, signals a parallel between her and the biographer, showing that patriarchal constraints on women's autonomy persist across centuries. Both women lead lives of self-sufficiency as single, childless, and intellectually ambitious individuals, but they are reduced to the category of "woman," which subjects them to the same societal expectations of partnership and motherhood (Zumas, *Red Clocks* 36, 113) addressed by Budgeon and Rosemary Gillespie. They state that "successfully performing

femininity according to dominant cultural norms means having a sexual connection to a man” while motherhood is seen as “fixed, unchanging, natural, fulfilling and central to feminine identity” (Budgeon 405; Gillespie 43). The biographer’s experiences mirror those of the polar explorer, revealing the barriers women face when attempting to claim intellectual authority or professional recognition. Despite Eivør’s extensive expertise, she was required to pretend to be a man in order to access professional spaces (Zumas 217). When she submitted her scientific findings for publication, her authorship was denied on the basis of her gender and her paper was published under a man’s name, erasing her contribution (Zumas 299, 305). This resembles how the biographer’s work of writing the polar explorer’s biography is, despite her intellectual labour and dedication, dismissed and devalued by her colleagues (Zumas, *Red Clocks* 114). In both cases, patriarchal systems attempt to reduce their identities to restrictive roles such as mothers and wives. The similarities between the biographer and the polar explorer reveal that not much has changed between the 19<sup>th</sup> and the 21<sup>st</sup> century with regard to patriarchal systems and the societal expectations placed on women.

However, the two women actively resist the reduction of their identities and their devaluation by claiming intellectual space, Eivør through her scientific notebook and the biographer through documenting her life. The biographer directly compares herself to her and acknowledges their shared invisibility and devaluation tied to their gender and age: “Woman who is thin and ugly. Cruel and ugly old woman. [...] Mínervudóttír was forty-three when she died; the biographer turns forty-three in April. Crones to the bone” (Zumas, *Red Clocks* 218). Although she describes herself and the polar explorer as “crones” and recognises “the invisibility of older women,” along with their “devaluation with a subtle dose of ostracism” addressed by Amanda Barusch (50), the biographer also aligns herself with a feminist revaluation of the term “crones.” Ruth E. Ray defines crones as “a position of coming-into-one’s-own-authority,” which is “acquired only through time and experience” and Barusch

describes “[t]oday’s crones” as “highly individual” (R.E. Ray 112; Barusch 50). Both the biographer and the polar explorer embrace this identity by continuing to pursue their respective intellectual endeavours, contesting the reduction of their identities, and demonstrating their significance and value.

The layered intertextuality of the polar explorer’s storyline reduces the distance between the reader and the character and asserts her significance as a scientist worthy of recognition and remembrance. Several scholars have briefly acknowledged the sections dedicated to the polar explorer and her connection to the biographer. Basu and Tripathi posit that “Zumas [...] allows the readers a glimpse of the life of the polar explorer [...] from the unfinished manuscript of the Biographer” while McManus refers to the “aspect of the telling of or the erasure of the life of the nineteenth-century polar explorer,” and Martínez-Falquina addresses the occasional use of the first person (Basu and Tripathi 305; McManus 61; Martínez-Falquina, “Feminist Dystopia and Reality” 278). However, none of them have sufficiently explored its narrative technique or the meaning of its underlying layered intertextuality. Most frequently, the biographer adopts a detached third-person narrative voice through which she delivers a factual chronicle of the polar explorer’s life: “In 1841, on the Faroe Islands, [...] the polar explorer Eivør Mínervudottír was born” (Zumas, *Red Clocks* 3). This is interrupted by the biographer expressing doubt, asking questions, and crossing out words, through which she provides insights into her process of writing:

~~Mínervudottír was important because~~  
Was she important?  
[...]  
I DON’T KNOW  
WHAT I AM  
EVEN SAYING  
ABOUT THIS PERSON THERE IS NOT  
A SINGLE KNOWN PHOTOGRAPH OF (Zumas, *Red Clocks* 272-273)

Occasionally, the biographer uses the first-person through which, as Martínez-Falquina suggests, “Ro becomes more prone to resorting to her imagination to fictionalize Eivør’s life

[...] and thus projecting her own self on the life she is putting down in writing” (“Feminist Dystopia and Reality” 278). Within the primary diegesis of *Red Clocks*, the polar explorer’s biography forms a hypodiegetic narrative, which contains a metadiegetic narrative as the biographer also incorporates fragments of Eivør’s scientific notebook, recipes, and letters (Zumas, *Red Clocks* 209, 129, 217). Although they only reach her readers through two mediators, the biographer and Zumas herself, this layered narration nevertheless produces an illusion of closeness with Eivør, which contributes to fulfilling the biographer’s goal of sharing “the story of a woman the world should have known about long before this” (Zumas, *Red Clocks* 330-331). Through minimising the distance between the reader and the polar explorer, the narrative not only reverses Eivør’s historical erasure but also posthumously reclaims her place within the scientific community.

Gossip constitutes another form of surveillance within everyday structures; for instance, the rumours the mender is confronted with blur the lines between reality and fabrication, construct her as a dangerous and deviant witch-like individual, and position her as a scapegoat for the community’s fears. Mark Alfano and Brian Robinson define gossip as “a normatively laden speech act that functions [...] through ostracism” while Cathy Greenfield and Peter Williams claim that it is “a sort of intimate, micro-surveillance of individuals’ lives, having no single source, [...] but fitting into and activating the variable set of power relations found in the diverse range of institutions in which it is produced and circulated” (Alfano and Robinson 474; Greenfield and Williams 131). In the mender’s case, this “micro-surveillance” (Greenfield and Williams 131) is enacted by a network of townspeople who collectively ostracise her and whose gossip reproduces existing patriarchal power structures. In accordance with Emily Warrender, who posits that “[w]omen who deviated from societal expectations, such as being independent [...] or having unusual behaviour, were particularly vulnerable to witchcraft” as they were “seen as threats to the patriarchal order and [...] punished for challenging traditional

gender roles,” the mender’s status as a self-sufficient woman living in the woods marks her as an object of suspicion to the local community who “already think she’s unhinged, a forest weirdo, a witch” (Zumas, *Red Clocks* 43). In accordance with Warrender, I claim that “witch” is a gendered and derogatory term, reminiscent of historical accusations of witchcraft, which associates the independence of women, their nonconformity, and knowledge of herbs and treatments with danger. As Silvia Federici argues, “the witch hunt instituted a regime of terror on all women, from which emerged the new model of femininity to which women had to conform to be socially acceptable: [...] resigned to subordination to the male world” (*Witches, Witch-Hunting, and Women* 32). It is precisely because the mender chooses not to conform that she is viewed as a threat and socially ostracised, which extends beyond language and into public spaces and physical interactions, as “people stare at her” and “take their children’s hands” (Zumas, *Red Clocks* 96). Benjamin C. Ray explains that in the past, “inexplicable misfortunes [...] were often attributed to [...] witchcraft” (2) and, when an invasive and poisonous seaweed called Dead Man’s Fingers infests the waters, the townspeople similarly conclude that the mender is to blame: “it’s the witch’s fault [...] because she lured the dead man’s fingers back to Newville,” and “hexed the seaweed” (Zumas, *Red Clocks* 144, 184). The mender’s experiences illustrate how gossip operates as a form of public surveillance exercised through the community, ensuring her continued ostracism.

Women’s intellectual autonomy is perceived as a threat and undermined by accusations of witchcraft and scapegoating, which reflects a surveillance mechanism aimed at disciplining female independence and nonconformity within established patriarchal norms. The polar explorer resembles the mender as both are subjected to projections of blame and witchcraft allegations due to the specialised knowledge they possess. During one of her Arctic expeditions, Eivør warned her male companions “that vitamin A occurs at toxic levels in polar-bear livers” (Zumas, *Red Clocks* 259); however, they disregarded her valuable advice, killed the polar bear,

and prepared a stew from its liver and heart. Rather than acknowledging her expertise or accepting responsibility for their mistake, they accuse her of having cursed the stew when they show signs of poisoning (Zumas, *Red Clocks* 259). The men's response reflects a fear of autonomous and intellectual women and their knowledge, particularly when it challenges their authority and established normative gender roles. The mender and the polar explorer become scapegoats for the suffering of others, which suggests a historical continuity as, in the 19<sup>th</sup> and in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, their knowledge and practices are treated with suspicion and attributed to mystical forces as a way to discredit their expertise and to punish their nonconformity with what is expected of women.

Surveillance within the family occurs primarily through the husband's and father's reinforcement of gendered expectations, which are internalised and further perpetuated by his offspring. In the private sphere of her home, the wife is under surveillance over her domestic labour, both by her husband, Didier, and her children. Her responsibilities include what Clisby and Holdsworth describe as "reproductive labour (referring both to the nurturing of kin and maintenance of households)" which is "highly gendered [...] and [...] often perceived as an extension of women's biologically essentialised but socially constructed caring and nurturing roles" (11). Didier repeatedly comments on the uncleanliness of the house: "I know you have stuff to do, I'm not saying you don't, but could you maybe wash the toilet once in a while?" (Zumas, *Red Clocks* 29). By masking his covert order as a polite suggestion, he creates the illusion of choice while simultaneously stripping her of the opportunity to refuse. Another demand, once again masked as a request, to "at least make a suggestion" about what he could have for lunch, emphasises her expected role as a caretaker and implies her failure to fulfil expectations and to be a good spouse and mother (Zumas, *Red Clocks* 167). Her daughter's demand for dinner, which is targeted only towards her mother (Zumas, *Red Clocks* 26), reflects how her role as a caregiver is not optional but expected and taken for granted, even by her

children. As Philip J. Kain explains “as men come to engage in activities and interaction with other men outside the family that form [...] external spheres” and “[a]s children grow up and join these existing spheres, [...] they get caught up in and molded by these spheres” and “can separate from, turn upon, and come to dominate and oppress the women who gave them birth – they can, for example, come to support political laws, social policies [...] that oppress women” (129). By observing their father, who regularly reinforces gendered expectations through the criticism of his wife and a tone of superiority towards her, the children have already internalised the same patriarchal ideologies and further reproduce them within the family unit.

The wife’s domestic work, full-time parenting, and emotional workload are both under surveillance and simultaneously disregarded by her family, which reinforces a hierarchy in which paid work is assigned more value than unpaid care work. Didier’s criticism of her lack of housekeeping becomes a mechanism to assert control over her within the private sphere: “Since you clearly don’t want to do it yourself. Which [...] I *get*. I don’t feel like cleaning either, especially after being at work all day” (Zumas, *Red Clocks* 110; original emphasis). His comments exemplify that he does not recognise the demanding nature nor the importance of care work which, as Nancy R. Hooyman states, “is so fundamental to our ability to function” that “it is possible to take it for granted or ignore it” (8). Through ranking his financially compensated work as more legitimate than her unpaid labour, he not only justifies his refusal to contribute but also devalues his wife’s work. Upon her response that she would “much rather be at work all day,” Didier dismisses her reality of reproductive work that limits her options and tells her to “get a job [...] or go back to law school” (Zumas, *Red Clocks* 110). According to Hooyman, this “essential labour” remains undervalued and “is unpaid or low wage” because “it is viewed as unskilled,” which “perpetuates a social organization of care that marginalizes and often renders invisible and less worthy those who typically provide care – women [...]” (1). Care work and household responsibilities, despite being essential to the functioning of

society (Hooyman 8), are rarely recognised as legitimate forms of labour. The surveillance of the wife's domestic labour functions not only as a tool of control but also reinforces the social structures that render unpaid care work invisible and insignificant.

Normative gendered expectations are enforced through policing and controlling not only the wife's actions but also her tone, attitude, and emotional state. Didier tells her to relax while their daughter accuses her of child abuse when the wife asks her to leave the table due to misbehaviour, undermining the authority she should have over her children. Even her language is monitored and judged by her husband, admonishing her for telling their son to "[s]hut the fuck up" despite him previously telling his daughter to "[p]ipe the fuck down" (Zumas, *Red Clocks* 136, 62; original emphasis), creating a double standard based on gender. These occurrences indicate that her family believes that she is not fulfilling the roles of a good mother and wife, who should be responsible for the household and care work, including cooking and taking care of children. Through these examples, it becomes evident how deeply the judgment of others can infiltrate the private lives of women.

The interpersonal surveillance depicted in the above examples is biopolitical in nature because it arises from and reinforces the governmental frameworks that seek to regulate women's lives by exercising control over them. While the state enforces these laws, it is through interpersonal relations that the power of biopolitics is sustained in everyday life. The surveillance experienced by the characters demonstrates how the regulation of women's lives is not just the result of state-imposed mechanisms but is also achieved through networks of interpersonal surveillance (Zappe and Gross 14) that mirror the biopolitical objectives of the state. Ultimately, surveillance is not limited to state-imposed means; on the contrary, it operates most insidiously through the already existing structures of everyday life. Through portraying colleagues, family, and townspeople as ideological apparatuses, the novel demonstrates that mechanisms of control are not always externally imposed. Instead, their occurrence in the

characters' daily lives exemplifies the genre of paratopia, wherein a more insidious form of surveillance occurs within specific structures and institutions (Zappe and Gross 14), which shape the subjects' thoughts, behaviours, and self-conceptions both from outside and from within.

### **3.3. The Intimacy of Corporeal Surveillance**

Surveillance in *Red Clocks* occurs through a combination of bodily and psychological dimensions; it causes the protagonists to internalise state ideology as well as to perceive their bodies as sites of control and shapes their thoughts and behaviour, which becomes evident through their use of language. Instead of exerting its power in a more overt and public manner by employing tactics such as shame, disapproval, and social exclusion, this form of surveillance operates privately – and even more insidiously and invasively – through intimate experiences involving the body. Psychologically, it infiltrates the individual's sense of self until they have internalised state-sanctioned norms and the judgments and expectations imposed on them. Seemingly neutral or even benign structures and institutions such as the family, medical facilities, and adoption agencies – what Althusser refers to as ISAs – ensure the women's compliance with laws and regulations and internalisation of normative gendered expectations. These systems produce what Ayse Ceyhan refers to as “an insidious form of surveillance, which impacts individuals' lives not from the outside but from the domestic and private sphere” (44). The internalisation of surveillance does not merely affect the protagonists physically and psychologically, but they also reproduce state ideology through their ways of thinking and the language they use; therefore, language itself functions as a carrier of internalised ideology.

Althusser's theory of ideological interpellation acknowledges the psychological element of internalisation but fails to account for how surveillance is also internalised physically. According to Althusser, “[i]deology [...] ‘functions’ in such a way that it [...] ‘transforms’ the individuals into subjects” (118). He refers to this process as interpellation, by

which he means that an “individual is interpellated as a (free) subject [...] in order that he shall (freely) accept his subjection, i.e. in order that he shall make the gestures and actions of his subjection ‘all by himself’” (Althusser 123; emphasis omitted). However, he neglects to address the bodily component of internalisation, whose relevance is noted by Hille Koskela: “By targeting the body, surveillance agents have long hoped that they could ultimately reach the mind, with the ultimate aim of having individuals internalize control” (51). In *Red Clocks*, the bodily dimension of interpellation is particularly relevant as domestic and reproductive labour – both involving the body – become the medium through which the characters internalise state ideology and enact their own subjugation.

The daughter’s emotional conversation with her father, through which she internalises state ideology, exemplifies Althusser’s concept of interpellation; however, it not only reveals the insidious reach of the psychological dimension of internalised surveillance but also of the physical one. In preparation for a school debate on abortion, the daughter raises the question of “[w]hy can’t everyone just decide for themselves?” (Zumas, *Red Clocks* 122) and expresses a desire for autonomy over her opinions and her own body. However, through making no distinction between abortion and murder, her father mirrors the state’s prohibition of abortion in the novel: “When someone decides to murder a fellow human with a gun, we put them in jail, don’t we?” (Zumas, *Red Clocks* 122). The rhetorical question tag of “don’t we?” exposes the insidiousness of his rhetoric as it subtly coerces her into aligning her view with his and framing agreement as her only option. His subsequent comment of “[w]ell, I can’t imagine the world without you, pigeon, and neither can your mother” (Zumas, *Red Clocks* 123) is meant to incite feelings of guilt for challenging the law and functions, according to Basu and Tripathi, as an “argumentum ad passiones (an argument that appeal more to emotion than to reason)” (301). Through what they refer to as “inherently fallacious statements” (Basu and Tripathi 301), the daughter is not merely persuaded to adopt the state’s legal and moral framework as her own

and, in Althusserian terms, “interpellated” into a position where she accepts her subjection as if it were her own belief (Althusser 123). While Basu and Tripathi recognise the psychological manipulation, they overlook its physical implications, as she is also compelled to internalise the lack of autonomy she has over her reproductive choices and, ultimately, her body. Thus, the daughter’s surveillance operates on both psychological and bodily levels as she is led to adopt the ideological values of the state and is meant to accept that she is not free to make her own decisions about her body.

The daughter’s reaction to her pregnancy demonstrates the extent to which predominant norms have not only infiltrated her thoughts but also her relationship with her body. Within a legal system that prohibits abortions, her body becomes a source of fear, and, as she begins to suspect she may be pregnant, she anxiously monitors her body for signs of pregnancy. Her speculations over why her period may be late function as an attempt to reclaim control and authority over her body (Zumas, *Red Clocks* 50, 102). Through her thoughts and actions, her body becomes a site of surveillance, something to be monitored, and when her pregnancy test is positive, her worries intensify, and she considers the option of an abortion (Zumas, *Red Clocks* 102). The daughter’s internal monologue is characterised by pre-emptive justifications as if she is already in a courtroom anticipating judgment; for instance, her assertion that she “is not a murderer” (despite no one accusing her, reveals how thoroughly the existing legal framework and state ideology has shaped her self-perception and how she has already absorbed the values of a society that restricts women’s reproductive choices and autonomy (Zumas, *Red Clocks* 197). The daughter feels compelled to defend herself because she is confronted with the notion that abortion equates to murder (Zumas, *Red Clocks* 122). Surveillance manifests itself psychologically through fear and the need for moral justifications and physically through the monitoring of her body under restrictive reproductive laws.

The female body, particularly the biographer's, becomes a central site through which surveillance is internalised both bodily and psychologically. Basu and Tripathi state that she "falls prey to the epistemological violence of the socio-cultural patriarchal order" and "associated her worth with her compatibility to conceive" (302), but they have not sufficiently addressed the nature of this violence, nor in which situations it occurs and how it affects the biographer. At the clinic, the biographer passively submits "to all kinds of invasion without understanding a fraction of what's being done to it" while her doctor "is looking at her, but not in the eye" (Zumas, *Red Clocks* 7, 90). Her use of the word "invasion" (Zumas, *Red Clocks* 7) implies that she recognises the intrusive nature of the medical procedures she is subjected to at the clinic; nevertheless, by refraining from resisting or asking questions, she has accepted that her body is regarded as a site of control, both by herself and by others. Similarly, McManus states that the doctor only focuses on "the metrics he uses to assess the progress of her treatment, he cannot see her" (63); however, I argue that the doctor's behaviour constitutes not merely the failure to see her, but a refusal to do so. His lack of respect and time for his patient becomes evident when the biographer requests information about how her prescribed medication supports ovulation, only to be told by a nurse that he is no longer available and already attending to another patient (Zumas, *Red Clocks* 7). Furthermore, while McManus addresses the bodily internalisation of surveillance, she does not acknowledge the psychological dimension resulting from it. The objectification of the biographer's body leads her to view herself as invisible, powerless, and as an object rather than an autonomous subject. Moreover, she has internalised the societal values surrounding womanhood, motherhood, and fertility, which lead her to equate her professional failure at her job as a teacher with her inability to conceive: "Usually she has no issues with discipline; this outburst makes her feel like a failure. Well, she *is* a failure. She and her uterus fail, fail, fail" (Zumas, *Red Clocks* 143; original emphasis). Her body, specifically her uterus, is at the centre of her feelings of incompetence as

it continuously reminds her of her infertility. The psychological and the bodily dimensions of the internalisation of surveillance converge as each bodily sign of her failure to conceive reinforces her sense of worthlessness.

The contrast between the intimate act of writing to oneself and the judgmental statements within the biographer's list reveals the extent to which surveillance has infiltrated her private sphere, both psychologically and physically. One of her lists, titled "[a]ccusations from the world" (Zumas, *Red Clocks* 147), entails direct references to her body, including her age and infertility, which reflects how it has continuously been subject to societal scrutiny:

1. You're too old.
2. If you can't have a child the natural way, you shouldn't have one at all.  
[...]
8. You're doing something unnatural.
9. How is that child going to feel when she finds out her father is an anonymous masturbator?  
[...]
12. Are you only doing this because you're lonely?  
[...]
13. Preferring one's own company is pathological.  
[...]
15. Why didn't you try harder to find a mate?  
[...]
17. Do you think anyone actually believes that you're happy on your own?  
(Zumas, *Red Clocks* 10-11, 147)

The repeated use of the second-person pronoun signifies that these statements and questions originate from "the world" or, in other words, the people surrounding her, but their inclusion in her private lists shows the extent to which she has internalised them. The expansion from infertility and her desire for motherhood to comments about her body and her romantic life reveals how thoroughly her entire identity and life are affected by the judgments imposed on her by society. Physically, they target her body as an object under scrutiny and assess her age, fertility, and relationship status; psychologically, they make assumptions about her mental state, implying her loneliness and self-deception. Her lists are composed of short declarative sentences, which resemble universally accepted truths rather than subjective speculations and

transform her complex thoughts and feelings on the matter of her wish for motherhood into accusations that leave no room for resistance. The inclusion of rhetorical questions is particularly insidious as they deny her the space to argue against them or justify herself, and function as an attempt to diminish her self-assurance. Basu and Tripathi rightfully assert that the biographer's lists "bring forth the amount of socio-cultural stigma she was subjected to" and Andreescu has similarly identified that they "have been internalised by the Biographer" who "becomes the vehicle for exposing and criticising the manner in which, in paternalistic and oppressive societies, even apparently strong-minded and independent women internalise misogynistic discourse" (Basu and Tripathi 302; Andreescu 67); however, according to Basu and Tripathi, they also constitute a means "to write down issues that perturbed her" and a "conscious effort to unlearn" while Andreescu claims that she "uses them [...] to belittle her ambitions" (Basu and Tripathi 302; Andreescu 67). Instead of serving as tools of conscious resistance or self-disparagement, I argue that these accusations represent a culmination and reflection as well as internalisation of both the legislative landscape and the criticism directed at her for remaining single and attempting to pursue motherhood through IVF.

The self-directed criticism within one of the biographer's lists represents a particularly insidious form of the internalisation of surveillance as it no longer functions exclusively through external enforcement but is internalised to the extent that she becomes complicit in her own subjugation. In accordance with Althusser's concept of interpellation, the biographer accepts her subject status and, rather than resisting, adjusts her self-perception and behaviour accordingly and disciplines herself from within. Her additional lists of "[w]ords I hate" as well as "[t]hings I have failed at" (Zumas, *Red Clocks* 202, 203) further reflect this internalisation of societal norms and her self-criticism:

Words I hate:

- 33. hubby  
[...]
- 35. diagnosis
- 36. pregs  
[...]

Things I have failed at:

- 1. Finishing book
- 2. Having baby
- 3. Keeping brother alive (Zumas, *Red Clocks* 202, 203)

While she has previously adopted the societal judgments imposed on her, she has not voiced them herself but expressed them in the second person. Through using the first-person pronoun, she assumes the role of both the accuser and the accused. Including words such as “hubby” and “pregs” in her list of words she hates invokes both societal and her own ideals of partnership and motherhood, whereas “diagnosis” is a reference to her struggles with infertility. In contrast, the list of things she has failed at entails the biographer’s expectations she has set upon herself; they are another enumeration of her shortcomings and failures, but unlike the previous external judgments, these entries reflect the biographer’s expectations she has set upon herself. Her inclusion of “finishing book” and “keeping brother alive” expands the scope of her self-recrimination beyond fertility and indicates that it permeates all areas of her life, including work and family.

The wife’s mental lists reflect the extent to which she has internalised the normative gendered expectations imposed on her as a wife and mother, both physically and psychologically. Federici posits that “the creation of the full-time housewife [...] and the sexual division of labor that emerged from it [...] fixed women to reproductive work” (*Caliban and the Witch* 75), which also applies to the wife whose daily activities revolve around reproductive labour. These lists mirror the internalisation of surveillance and represent a form of self-disciplining that aligns with the pressure inflicted on her by herself and her family to perform

her tasks efficiently and without complaint. One of them resembles a to-do list and consists of household tasks, ranging from cleaning the kitchen to doing laundry:

Spray table.

[...]

Rinse cups and bowls.

[...]

Pour water from quinoa soaking into pot of ficus tree.

Spray mist onto snake-like arms of Medusa's head plant.

Pull clothes out of dryer in basement.

Fold clothes.

[...]

Write *laundry detergent* on list in wallet. (Zumas, *Red Clocks* 137; original emphasis)

Each of the chores within her list involves a specific movement involving her body, such as folding or pulling. Her compulsion to perform domestic tasks serves as a mechanism of self-surveillance, through which she physically disciplines herself to uphold the socially constructed roles of the 'ideal' wife and mother. The wife's sense of self does not stem from her individuality or personal aspirations but from her performing the tasks expected of her, which aligns with Jeffner Allen's observation that "it denies to females the creation of a subjectivity" (315). While the psychological dimension is evident in her internalised gendered expectations and societal beliefs about womanhood, motherhood and a woman's sense of worth, the bodily dimension is reflected in how she treats her body as an object and a site of constant regulation and control.

In her lists of imperatives, the wife refrains from referring to herself, which makes her complicit in her own dehumanisation and objectification. Her duties extend to financial management, but only involve expenses related to her husband and children. While Didier and John are mentioned by name, the wife never refers to herself in these lists, which suggests that she views herself as indispensable to the functioning of her household but does not position herself as someone worthy of care:

Open bill for Didier's dentist co-pay.

[...]

Open overdue notice for John's trip to the ER [...]. (Zumas, *Red Clocks* 78)

Stylistically, these lists reinforce her erasure; they are concise and consist of a series of imperative clauses that resemble commands the wife gives herself, which reflect the mechanical nature as well as the monotony and repetitiveness of her daily domestic labour. The lack of a grammatical subject, especially the first person, within her lists ensures that she is linguistically absent, further revealing that she does not view herself as a subject within her own space but rather as a caretaker responsible for domestic tasks and care work. Ann Oakley notes that tasks with "short-term and repetitive goals" such as ironing and washing up "have assembly line aspects" as they are performed through "repetitive actions which tire specific muscles without engaging the attention of the mind or the concentrated energy of the whole body" (159, 46). She also directly compares housewives to "the assembly line worker in a factory" who is "tied machine-like to a mindless and endlessly repetitive task" (Oakley 46). The wife's lists illustrate this, as her domestic labour is reduced to a series of mechanical tasks. Oakley further claims that "[t]he inherent frustrations of assembly line work are also to be found in housework," which "gives substance to the contemporary feminist polemic which brands housework as 'alienating' work" (82). In performing these repetitive and alienating tasks, the wife conforms to prescribed gendered roles and expectations and dehumanises herself; however, while Basu and Tripathi's claim that they are "reducing women to reproductive machines" (297) accurately emphasises the automated nature of their work, it also risks implying a total absence of emotion. Instead of a machine, I argue that she is reduced to a body and defined entirely by her actions, with her thoughts and feelings 'merely' repressed as opposed to non-existent.

The wife internalises the ideologies of surveillance; however, she also perpetuates them, as the language she uses within her lists indicates that she views her children in terms of

obligations, chores, and duties. She is not only treated as an object responsible for housework – both by herself and her family – but she also reproduces this logic by extending it to her children. Unlike the domestic tasks in her previous list, which focus on the maintenance of space and objects, this list centres on the regulation of her children:

At the house: unbuckle, untangle, lift, carry, set down.  
Unpack, put away.  
Peel string cheese.  
[...]  
Place Bex and John in front of approved cartoon.  
(Zumas, *Red Clocks* 25)

Despite her referring to her children by their names, they are not represented as autonomous individuals with emotional needs but as ‘things’ to be controlled. The wife does not distinguish between the kitchenware in her previous list, string cheese, and her offspring, thereby blurring the line between people and inanimate objects. The impersonal verbs she uses to describe her actions are devoid of emotion and further reflect the dehumanisation of her children. Her reproductive function as a mother is biological, as she sustains their life through feeding, carrying, and physically caring for them. However, simultaneously, her care is reduced to mechanical processes through which she accustoms her children to being managed. Ideologically, she reproduces the same structures of control to which she is subjected; her monitoring of their movements and activities mirrors the way her husband supervises her domestic performance.

The biographer perpetuates the same mechanisms of oppression she experiences by adopting the state’s language of dehumanisation and internalising its logic that some people are less human than others. She refers to lawmakers as “the monsters in Congress who passed the Personhood Amendment” and “the walking lobotomies on the Supreme Court who reversed *Roe v. Wade*” (Zumas, *Red Clocks* 51), explicitly identifying the state apparatus as responsible for the enforcement of legislation that restricts women’s reproductive autonomy. Her use of dehumanising language constitutes an act of rhetorical resistance and points to the monstrosity

embedded in the state's legal system and the lawmakers' lack of empathy and inhumanity. By referring to them as "monsters" and "walking lobotomies" (Zumas, *Red Clocks* 51), she uses the state's weapon of dehumanisation against it. Just as the state dehumanises women by restricting their reproductive freedom and reducing them to their roles and functions, she achieves the same by denouncing lawmakers as incapable of critical thought and decision-making and stripping them of their legitimacy and rationality.

The biographer's and the wife's mutual dislike is rooted not merely in a sense of failure and envy, each resenting the other for what they appear to have and what they each feel they lack, but also in the tension between two conflicting models of womanhood. The biographer dislikes the wife because she represents the traditional domestic ideal of motherhood that the biographer fails to achieve. She has gotten pregnant without difficulties, which further highlights the biographer's sense of failure and jealousy, especially given her struggles to conceive and her desire for a child: "The first time Susan got pregnant, it wasn't planned. The second time [...] they'd only just started trying again" (Zumas, *Red Clocks* 67). She even admits to her envy and hatred, also through the form of a list, which serves as a visual representation of the biographer's feelings towards the wife:

Reasons I ~~am envious of~~ hate Susan:

1. Convenient/free source of sperm
2. Has two
3. Doesn't pay rent
- [...]
5. Has two
- [...]
7. Has two (Zumas, *Red Clocks* 242)

The use of the strikethrough – from "I am envious" to the more hostile "I hate" (Zumas, *Red Clocks* 242) – reflects the biographer's complicated feelings towards the wife. Initially, she merely admits her jealousy and presents her feelings as the more socially acceptable envy; however, she then replaces it with the emotion that she truly experiences. Moreover, through the recurrence of "has two" (Zumas, *Red Clocks* 242), referring to the wife's children, the

biographer emphasises the central source of her resentment, namely that the wife has been blessed with two children while the biographer is unable to conceive. The wife, in turn, harbours feelings of dislike towards the biographer because the latter is able to retain her autonomy and lead an independent life without the obligations that come with marriage and motherhood. She expresses that she “would like to be a good person, a person who’ll be happy if Ro gets pregnant or adopts a baby,” (Zumas, *Red Clocks* 192), but her true feelings reveal otherwise: “How can the wife hope that Ro doesn’t get pregnant?” (Zumas, *Red Clocks* 138). Their rivalry extends beyond personal resentment and is indicative of the effects of patriarchal ideology, which denies women the possibility of defining themselves outside prescriptive categories of womanhood, including motherhood.

Despite their resentment, the wife and the biographer resemble each other as each internalises the ideological expectations surrounding womanhood and performs their role in response to societal pressures, whether mediated through a male figure, institutional structures or themselves. Their lists reflect how deeply both have internalised the judgments and norms imposed on them. While the biographer’s lists are characterised by societal discourses around age, partnerships, and motherhood, the wife’s lists are predominantly driven by her domestic obligations and housework. Although the women’s social contexts differ – the biographer is single while the wife is embedded in a traditional family structure – both are subjected to the internalisation of societal values and surveillance and their lists reveal that this internalisation has taken place to such an extent that it has become part of their thoughts and inner monologues. The wife also resembles the biographer in her internalisation of failure, claiming that she “fails, as a parent, on so many fronts” (Zumas, *Red Clocks* 277); therefore, she similarly equates her identity and self-worth with her ability to fulfil her roles as a wife and mother adequately. However, the presence or absence of a male figure shapes how precisely this internalisation operates. The wife’s conformity is reinforced by her husband, who, while not overtly

oppressive, is a constant presence whose expectations shape her behaviour. Her perception of inadequacy in her roles as a wife and mother and her internalisation of societal values stems from her family, most notably, her husband. In contrast, the biographer is predominantly free from traditional domestic structures and male authority, yet her internalisation of ideological norms surrounding womanhood is no less prevalent; in fact, it may be even more deeply rooted because it operates without direct enforcement through a male figure. Her self-regulation is mediated through institutions such as fertility clinics and adoption agencies, but it is most insidiously perpetuated through her internal voice. Together, these examples demonstrate how ideological control functions across different life paths and is not confined to a single form of womanhood.

Writing functions as an intimate experience for the biographer and the wife as they expose any feelings and thoughts that they might not admit out loud but cannot repress in their writing; additionally, it is also a means to partially reclaim their bodies. Marlene A. Schiwy states that “writing can empower the writer” as “the very process of rendering [...] experience into language prompts the [...] writer to take herself, her experience, and her written voice seriously” (235). For the biographer, this empowerment occurs when she gives herself the space to self-correct and articulate her true emotions (Zumas, *Red Clocks* 242). Schiwy also draws attention to other benefits of writing: “It can encourage [...] exploration of one's private and public selves, thereby expanding one's sense of identity; allow for cathartic expression without fear of censorship or recrimination; provide a safe testing ground for [...] half-formed thoughts and insights” (235). This is evident not only in the biographer's self-correction but also in the wife's lists, in which she can reveal her ambivalence towards motherhood and her unhappiness within her family (Zumas, *Red Clocks* 242, 137, 25). Hélène Cixous addresses the importance of writing for women: “Woman must write her self: must write about women and bring women to writing, from which they have been driven away as violently as from their

bodies – for the same reasons, by the same law, with the same fatal goal” (334) of, as I argue, restricting their autonomy and reducing them to their roles. Cixous also connects the censorship of speech to the censorship of the body and encourages women to “[w]rite your self” through which “woman will return to the body which has been [...] confiscated from her;” in other words, the act of writing equals reclaiming one's body (338, 337). In accordance with Schiwy, writing “is a powerful and effective means of deconstructing [...] assigned roles as women in a patriarchal society” and “can provide a safe channel of thinking and creating one's life beyond the boundaries and terms that society deems appropriate to female selfhood and behavior” (234, 235). Through the act of writing, the biographer and the wife, to some degree, regain agency over their bodies, their thoughts and as well as their identities, which have been constrained and regulated by patriarchal systems.

In contrast, the mender is not affected by and even deviates from the internalisation of surveillance as she does not monitor or discipline herself; however, the body remains at the centre of her experience. Her attention is directed to other women to whom she offers medical treatment, support, and care. She prepares and applies tinctures and herbal remedies to their wounds with her hands, using her body as part of the treatment process; for instance, she “stirs the egg with vinegar and shepherd’s purse for the client who is coming later, an over-bleeder,” “pressed fresh-bruised leaves of houseleek to the damaged skin,” and provides the biographer with a tea blend that she has likely prepared on her own as she can name the ingredients (Zumas, *Red Clocks* 14, 130, 47). These acts of healing require manual work, knowledge of the human body, trust, and intimacy. The women who seek her care are predominantly affected by physical ailments such as injuries, menstrual disorders or unwanted pregnancies (Zumas, *Red Clocks* 43, 130, 102, 154). However, her medical activities ultimately lead to punishment as she is put on trial, arrested, and confined to a jail cell (Zumas, *Red Clocks* 257, 296); therefore, the body of the mender is at the centre of her experiences and is still subjected to state control.

The internalised surveillance portrayed in *Red Clocks* is profoundly biopolitical as it illustrates how control over women's bodies and lives operates not only through laws and interpersonal dynamics but also through the women's psychological and physical internalisation of state-sanctioned ideals of womanhood and motherhood. The novel illustrates how governmental ideologies are a part of everyday life, leading women to monitor, regulate, and discipline themselves and their bodies in accordance with these ideals. The characters' intimate and personal experiences, which closely involve the body such as medical procedures, incarceration, and the act of writing lists, are at the centre of the surveillance mechanisms that the protagonists are confronted with.

### **3.4. Reconfiguration of the Dystopian Genre?**

The political inspirations behind *Red Clocks* emphasise its status as a paratopia. The laws in this novel are not entirely speculative fiction but draw upon the contemporary political agendas of politicians such as Mike Pence and Paul Ryan, whose initiatives aimed at restricting women's reproductive rights and autonomy provide a foundational framework for the legislation depicted in *Red Clocks* (Zumas, qtd. in Sugiuchi). Zumas explains that in the years 2005 and 2007, Pence "co-sponsored federal legislation that would recognise human zygotes as legal persons, thereby outlawing not only abortion but certain fertility treatments and all non-barrier forms of contraception" (Zumas, qtd. in Sugiuchi). Similarly, Ryan "co-sponsored the 2013 Sanctity of Human Life Act, which would grant full legal rights to a fertilized human egg" (Zumas, qtd. in Sugiuchi). Initially, the author conceptualised her novel as being "more specifically set in the future" (Zumas, qtd. in Crum); however, she ultimately decided to set it closer to contemporary reality: "Something about dystopia feels so solidly separate from us, and I wanted to invite the reader to experience the world of *Red Clocks* as '[t]his is actually happening, maybe next week'" (Zumas, qtd. in Crum). By drawing from real-world political

efforts to restrict reproductive autonomy, the novel blurs the boundary between speculative dystopian fiction and reality, reinforcing its classification as a paratopia.

The framework of surveillance and the circumstances depicted in *Red Clocks* mirror contemporary biopolitical dynamics where women's lives and bodies are similarly subjected to state control. One notable example is the self-surveillance enabled by period-tracking apps. Following the overturn of *Roe v. Wade* in 2022, Flora Garamvolgyi has reported that many users decided to delete these apps out of fear that their reproductive data could be accessed and used against them since "[i]n a state where abortion is a crime, prosecutors could request information by these apps when building a case against someone." A more direct manifestation of this concern occurred in Nebraska where Facebook provided the police with private messages exchanged between a mother and her daughter and used them to prosecute them over an illegal abortion (Bhuiyan). The criminalisation of pregnancy outcomes such as miscarriage further illustrates how biopolitics regulates matters surrounding reproduction. In one case, after suffering a miscarriage, a young woman from Oklahoma was found guilty of first-degree manslaughter (Cohen), which resembles the situation in *Red Clocks* where women's abortions are considered a punishable offence, regardless of context. Therefore, just as women's reproductive decisions and agency are monitored and restricted in the novel, real-world mechanisms of reproductive surveillance and data control also function as instruments of biopolitics.

Not only can *Red Clocks* be understood as a paratopia, but it also allows for a re-evaluation of the dystopian genre itself. Other novels that have been traditionally characterised as dystopias may, in retrospect, be thought of as paratopias, especially considering how closely they resemble present realities, which has also been acknowledged by other authors alongside Zumas. For instance, Atwood wrote an article in *The New York Times* in which she reflects on the significance of her novel in the era of Trump's presidency. There, she said about her novel

*The Handmaid's Tale* that she “would not put any events into the book that had not already happened [...], nor any technology not already available” (Atwood, “Margaret Atwood on What ‘The Handmaid’s Tale’”). In a conversation with Penguin Books, she gave insights into the origins of and her inspiration for this novel, including a large number of newspaper clippings: “There was no Internet then, you couldn’t just go online and put in a topic, so this is just stuff I came across when reading newspapers and magazines. [...]. I didn’t make it up. This is the proof – everything in these boxes” (Atwood, “Margaret Atwood on the Real-Life Events”). Similarly, Butler, the author of *Parable of the Sower*, has expressed that she “didn’t make up the problems, [...] all I did was look around at the problems we’re neglecting now and give them about 30 years to grow into full-fledged disasters” (qtd. in Heller). These authors’ comments reinforce the idea that so-called ‘dystopian’ fiction is not always futuristic and speculative but rather can also reflect already existing political and societal conditions, which justifies their respective novels’ classifications as paratopias.

The connections between the world portrayed in *Red Clocks* and the contemporary biopolitical landscape underscore the novel’s classification as a paratopia, a genre that, unlike dystopia, does not depict distant and speculative futures. The restrictions imposed on women’s reproductive rights and agency, as observed in both the novel and real-world examples, serve as a reminder that the regulation of women’s lives and bodies is not a distant concern but a present reality shaped by current political circumstances, which mirrors legal developments such as the overturn of *Roe v. Wade*. Moreover, surveillance is not only imposed from above but is also deeply embedded in ordinary, everyday situations and social structures. Lastly, the body is a central site of both the characters’ intimate experiences and surveillance in the novel. Thus, *Red Clocks* reinforces its classification as a paratopia and encourages a re-evaluation of the defining features of the dystopian genre as a whole.

#### 4. *Future Home of the Living God: A Reproductive Dystopia*

Zumas's and Erdrich's reflections problematise the genre boundaries of dystopian literature by viewing the conditions in their respective novels as already part of lived experiences, especially those of women. Like Zumas, who stated that "[t]his is actually happening, maybe next week" (Zumas, qtd. in Crum), Erdrich herself also remarks that she views the situation in her novel as realistic, although she does not use the term paratopia: "That's why I don't know if I can call it a dystopia. It's set as though this could happen tomorrow" (Erdrich, qtd. in K. Miller). Erdrich's comment on her novel's realism suggests that there are similarities between fictional mechanisms of state control in *Future Home of the Living God* and current reproductive policies and restrictions. This reading is corroborated by Martínez-Falquina who notes that "[t]he dystopian ownership of the pregnant woman's body on the part of the state in this novel is inspired by real and specific attacks on women's rights" such as the Global Gag Rule, which was signed in 2001 and reintroduced by Trump in 2017 ("Louise Erdrich's *Future Home of the Living God*" 165). Instead of having written a speculative dystopia, Erdrich draws from concrete, real-world examples to reveal the extent to which the reproductive politics of the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries already exhibit dystopian characteristics (Erdrich, qtd. in Atwood & Erdrich). In a conversation with Atwood, Erdrich mentions that she had started writing her novel after Bush was elected president and "began by reinstating the global gag rule, which cuts international funding for contraceptives if abortion is mentioned" (Erdrich, qtd. in Atwood & Erdrich). She only redirected her attention towards *Future Home of the Living God* after the election of Trump: "With Obama in Washington, we seemed to have a chance to move forward [...]. But we have a tendency to regress after we move forward. I picked up *Future Home of the Living God* again, after the 2016 election, because I needed Cedar" (Erdrich, qtd. in Atwood & Erdrich). Erdrich presents a world in which evolution is reversing and, through speculating that she may be "writing the biological

equivalent of our present political mess” (Erdrich, qtd. in Atwood & Erdrich), draws a paratopian comparison to the political climate at the time of her novel’s publication.

Erdrich frames dystopia as an ongoing reality for Indigenous peoples, extending her novel’s realism beyond contemporary reproductive policies into the history of settler colonial violence. She argues that the conditions already shaping the life of Indigenous peoples can be understood as dystopian: “Indigenous people in the Americas are descended of relatives who survived the dystopia of genocide. To us, dystopia is recent history. (For many, it is the present.)” (Erdrich, qtd. in Coleman). According to Arnim Scheidel et al., “[a]lthough Indigenous Peoples have contested land encroachment and oppression from the advent of colonialism to the present [...], many continue to be severely affected by development projects causing environmental conflicts worldwide” (1). They further state that “[i]n environmental conflicts, Indigenous People face severe impacts, such as livelihood loss and land dispossession [...], environmental pollution [...], threats to their knowledge systems [...], racial- and gender-based violence [...], as well as intimidations and assassinations” (Scheidel et al. 1). Justin Farrell et al. have found “that the heightened climate vulnerability of Indigenous peoples can be attributed to prior national policies and actions” and claim that while “decisions to dispossess land from Indigenous peoples were not made with an understanding of future rises in global average temperature, they were nonetheless intended to remove Indigenous peoples as barriers to the interests of settler [...] populations” (7). By situating the Indigenous experience within these settler colonial realities, Erdrich further signals that her novel does not portray a speculative future; instead, it is a continuation of what Indigenous peoples have had to endure as a result of the historical and ongoing structures of colonialism.

The reversal of evolution in *Future Home of the Living God* creates conditions for the implementation of a gendered surveillance regime and serves as a justification for severe state intervention in reproduction. Andreescu situates the governmental surveillance of women in

the novel within “a large-scale [...] ecological catastrophe” that “has triggered the steady recession of women’s reproductive rights in a desperate attempt at policing the last remnants of potential human life” (68). While the reasons for this evolutionary reversal remain unclear – “the world as we know it is coming to an end and nobody knows what the hell is going on” (Erdrich 26) – its effects on women are immediate and far-reaching. It is through this current “state of emergency” (Erdrich 8) and its ambiguity that the state justifies its extreme measures of reproductive control. Pregnant women suspected of carrying unaffected babies, such as the Ojibwe protagonist Cedar, are arrested and forced to repeatedly give birth to ensure humanity’s survival: “This newly expanded decision [...] empowers the government to determine who is pregnant throughout the country” and to force “pregnant women [...] to give birth under controlled circumstances” (Erdrich 72). Erdrich envisions a state in which women’s reproductive capacities are the target of governmental control since their pregnancies are subjected to surveillance and severely controlled, which exemplifies Svitlana Kot’s claim of “gender-based seclusion,” according to which “the male population is free from any controlled practices oriented towards fertility and childbirth” (10). The state’s response to the evolutionary crisis in *Future Home of the Living God* exemplifies how uncertainty and fear can become a pretext for the regulation of women’s bodies.

The state’s regime in Erdrich’s novel relies on an emotionally manipulative form of surveillance as well as, partially, on violence and overt coercion. While Cedar is abducted and brought to the birthing facility by an unknown couple – “I’m dragged straight into a van” (Erdrich 248) – *Future Home of the Living God* nevertheless marks a shift in how state power in dystopian novels monitors women and exerts control over their bodies: from strictly authoritarian control to a feminine and more intimate form of surveillance, embodied by Erdrich’s figure of Mother. Mother reconfigures control as care by exhibiting a sense of maternalism towards those she seeks to control and speaking directly to the women she

monitors, establishing a false sense of closeness with them that makes her control more insidious. Her seemingly benign rhetoric of empathy constitutes an example of the manipulation of language and obscures the true nature of her intentions, making her surveillance less noticeable and her subjects more likely to comply. By replacing a more authoritarian and coercive form of control with the maternal and ‘caring’ figure of Mother, Erdrich subverts the dystopian tradition and shows that surveillance can also operate emotionally and psychologically rather than merely through overt force.

Mother’s markers of benign femininity disguise her role as an enforcer of state control, allowing her to appear benevolent, non-threatening, and caring. When she makes her first appearance – “a woman’s face blooms onto the screen” (Erdrich 68) – she looks human and is depicted as female. Cedar describes her as follows: “Her face is round [...]. Her smile is tiny with thin stripes of red lip. [...] She is wearing an apricot-colored blouse [...]” (Erdrich 68). Her red lipstick is a conventional symbol of femininity while the apricot colour of her blouse can be associated with gentleness and warmth, which presents a contrast to the darker, less colourful tones typically associated with authoritarian figures. Through the dissonance between her appearance along with her seemingly benign traits of care and empathy and her function, Mother represents an ‘ideal’ mother figure, weaponised by the state to exert control over its female citizens.

Despite Mother’s crucial role as both the technological and ideological tool through which the state enforces surveillance over pregnant women, scholars have not addressed the ways this is achieved. Technologically, she has no physical body but instead appears on screens through which she addresses and monitors the women, such as when they “sit on wobbly chairs crammed together in the viewing room” where “Mother is the only channel” (Erdrich 254). Ideologically, Mother embodies the state’s doctrine that women’s reproductive capacity and pregnancies are matters of state control, exemplified through Mother’s statement that they will

be “contributing to the future of humanity” (Erdrich 255). While Anna Kemball and Kot similarly describe her as “the regime’s mouthpiece,” “a public mouthpiece of the new doctrine,” and “a symbolic figure representing continuous oppressive surveillance as well as a new official ideology,” they have not explored her methods of surveillance and how Mother enforces control over pregnant women (Kemball 164; Kot 9).

In Erdrich’s novel, Mother’s and the state’s reproductive control is not applied universally to all women, but along racial and colonial lines; instead of introducing unprecedented modes of surveillance, it mirrors pre-existing structures of Euro-American settler colonialism through the targeting of the novel’s Ojibwe protagonist, Cedar Hawk Songmaker, for her ability to bear healthy children. This is in accordance with Kemball, who describes a woman’s race as “a contributing factor in how the regime assigns value to the pregnancies it monitors” (163). Cedar’s experiences illustrate that not every woman is equally impacted by reproductive control over her body. For instance, when a doctor questions her about whether she has “any special ethnicity,” as, according to Cedar, she does not “stand out as Native unless people already know,” and about the father of her child, she states that she is Ojibwe and that he is white (Zumas, *Red Clocks* 51). In addition, although her birth mother only reveals this to her later, Cedar is also half white, which contributes to her appearance and is the reason why the doctor allows her to leave the clinic (Erdrich 233, 51). Through targeting Cedar, the state reproduces racial, gendered, and colonial hierarchies of the past, aligning with Kemball’s claim that “Erdrich presents a dystopian society that seems to be a fictionalised future but is in fact a biocolonial rendering of the historical and ongoing injustices experienced by Native American women” (166). Sherene H. Razack elaborates on Native women’s “dystopia” under Euro-American settler colonialism and addresses both “the settler colonial frame where Indigenous women’s bodies are available for consumption and annihilation,” which “is sustained through state practices and through law,” and the “deeply embedded and

systematized devaluing of Indigenous life in settler societies” along with “the specific sexual brutalization of Indigenous women that runs through them” (298, 293). *Future Home of the Living God* shows how Indigenous women like Cedar already live in a reproductive dystopia and depicts how advances in settler colonial surveillance technologies, represented by Mother and the broader medical surveillance of Cedar’s pregnancy, perpetuate this dystopia. Cedar’s adoption and separation from her own child and Mother’s characteristics of maternalism and infantilisation mirror the settler colonial logic and paternalistic practices as well as family separation and deculturation.

#### **4.1. Continuity of Colonialism**

While *Future Home of the Living God* is set in a speculative future, its narrative of surveillance is firmly rooted in the continuity of colonialism and oppression based on both race and gender. Mother’s white complexion is recognised and explicitly mentioned by Cedar: “Her face is [...] white like pizza dough” (Erdrich 68). Crucially, Mother, a white ‘woman,’ holds a position of authority, while Cedar is subjected to surveillance and control. Yet, it has been argued that the future depicted in this novel suggests a world in which racial hierarchies are no longer of relevance. Ann-Karina Schneider contends that *Future Home of the Living God* “acknowledges past race-related exploitation but does not perpetuate it” and even suggests that she sees “the possibility of a postracial future” (356). She also poses the question that “[w]hat remains to be decided is whether” the “ambivalence toward genderless, postracial cyborgian futures” that female authors of contemporary dystopias such as Erdrich possess “is a throwback to inescapable patriarchal gendered and racial dualisms” (Schneider 358, 344); however, there is little room for doubt, as these dualisms based on gender and race are clearly perpetuated in *Future Home of the Living God*. Women are the targets of reproductive surveillance and racial hierarchies are reinforced as whiteness is upheld as the normative standard while non-white bodies disappear from public spaces (Erdrich 44). Cedar observes this erasure while watching

television: “The women are fewer, [...] white with white teeth [...]. The men are all white with white teeth [...]. There are no brown people, anywhere, not in movies not on sitcoms not on shopping channels or on the dozens of evangelical channels up and down the remote” (Erdrich 44). This stark absence of racial diversity signals a form of erasure of non-white bodies, especially women, which has also been recognised by Martínez-Falquina and Julia Siepak who emphasise the “unjust treatment of women, especially women of color” and claim that it “mirrors white supremacist ideology” (Martínez-Falquina, “Feminist Dystopia and Reality” 276; Siepak 44). This aligns with Crenshaw’s assertion that “the violence that many women experience is often shaped by other dimensions of their identities, such as race” (273), underscoring how the intersecting forces of racism and sexism define the reality of Erdrich’s narrative and Cedar’s experiences of surveillance. Therefore, Schneider’s claims overlook a central aspect of Erdrich’s book, namely that the persistence rather than the transcendence of colonial power structures is at its forefront.

Mother is the central figure through which the reproductive surveillance of Indigenous women such as Cedar is enacted and her regime and methods can be understood as a perpetuation of Euro-American settler colonialism. Kyle Whyte defines settler colonialism as “processes in which at least one society seeks to move permanently onto [...] places lived in by one or more other societies who already derive economic vitality, cultural flourishing, and political self-determination from the relationships they have established” (134-135). Crucially, he further states that its purpose is to enable settlers “to erase Indigenous economies, cultures, and political organizations for the sake of establishing their own” (Whyte 135). Cedar is affected by settler colonial practices in many ways, but two interrelated aspects are particularly relevant for discussing the gendered dimension of settler colonial violence: the removal of Indigenous children from their birth families and the reproductive surveillance of Indigenous women. Her racial identity is shaped by the convergence of her Ojibwe heritage and the white,

progressive household in which she was raised. Cedar, the “adopted child of Minneapolis liberals,” Sera and Glen, grows up in a family described as “forgiving people, Buddhists, green in their very souls” and “happily married vegans” who are committed to social issues such as gun control (Erdrich 3, 4, 85). However, by adopting an Ojibwe baby and removing it from its native culture, Cedar’s adoptive parents are complicit in and perpetuate settler-colonial practices (Erdrich 4). Cedar’s early displacement at the domestic level is mirrored at the institutional level when she is separated from her son, an act Kemball identifies as “biocolonial abuse[s] within reproductive healthcare” (Erdrich 264; Kemball 166). While she is detained at the birthing facility, she is not only removed and alienated from her Ojibwe family but also deprived of her bodily autonomy and free will. While Kemball rightfully proposes that “a reading of *Mother* [...] should be understood within the oppressive continuum of colonial and paternalistic practices” (167), she does not address the ways that *Mother* reproduces them. Building on Kemball’s insight, I contend that, along with the practice of separating Native children from their birth families, the figure of *Mother* perpetuates the reproductive dystopia that Cedar lives in. *Mother*’s maternalism functions as a continuation of settler-colonial paternalism, as she frames her authority over pregnant women as benevolent and protective; however, in reality, through her rhetoric of ‘care,’ she enforces strict control over them and limits their autonomy. This settler-colonial dynamic is reinforced through *Mother*’s infantilisation and her treatment of pregnant women as children. By casting them as childlike, *Mother* legitimises her surveillance and control over them and reproduces a settler-colonial logic in which Indigenous people were historically characterised as incapable of caring for themselves and in need of guidance.

## 4.2. Forced Child Removal

Cedar's adoption as a young child and her violent separation from her newborn son reflect the long-standing paternalistic practice of the forced removal of Native American children from their families. According to the National Native American Boarding School Healing Coalition, "[b]etween 1869 and the 1960s, hundreds of thousands of Native American children were removed from their homes and families and placed in boarding schools operated by the federal government and the churches." Christina Firpo and Margaret Jacobs emphasise that these removals functioned as "a primary strategy for managing their remaining Indigenous populations and working for their eventual elimination as distinctive peoples with their own communally held property and quasi-sovereign status" (560). They further explain that "officials engaged in intense efforts to persuade parents to part with their children" and "often resorted to trickery, threats, bribes, or the use of military or police forces," including "the withholding of rations" (Firpo and Jacobs 548, 549). Meschelle Linjean and Hilary N. Weaver state that the practice of sending Indigenous children to boarding schools was replaced by their adoption by non-Indigenous families, with Jacobs describing it as "a new reiteration of Indian child removal" (Linjean and Weaver 3; Jacobs, "Remembering the 'Forgotten Child'" 139). The Indian Adoption Project, as Thomas L. Crofoot and Marian S. Harris address, originated in 1958 and its purpose was to "make Indian children desirable for adoption by White middle class families" (1669). Deborah Thibault and Michael S. Spencer similarly explain that it was meant "to stimulate the adoption of American Indian children" and add that it was "believed that taking them away from their families and culture would make their lives better" (811), which underscores its paternalistic nature. In *Future Home of the Living God*, this practice of forced child removal is perpetuated throughout Cedar's life. As an infant, she was adopted into a white family: "[M]y white name is Cedar Hawk Songmaker and [...] I am the adopted child of Minneapolis liberals [...]. Except I never understood how I was adopted [...]" (Erdrich 3-

4). As a mother, she is separated from her newborn: “The sting of the needle stole my consciousness. As I slipped away, someone pried apart your fist and I felt you lifted from my arms” (Erdrich 264). By beginning her novel with Cedar recalling the details surrounding her adoption and ending with the violent separation from her son, Erdrich structures her narrative around an intergenerational repetition of forced child removal that is not merely confined to the past but also occurs in the present. Cedar’s reminiscence of spending time with her adoptive parents when she was a child – “I remember how I was there the last time it snowed” (Erdrich 266) – and her final reflection – “And I have wondered, ever since your birth. Where will you be, my darling, the last time it snows on earth?” (Erdrich 267) – underscores this cycle of the severance of Native American children from their birth families and imagines her newborn in the same situation she has experienced as a child..

Through attending boarding schools, Native American children were not only forced to adopt European-American values, but this practice also entailed severing them from their Native customs. According to Mary Stout, “traditional Native American education varied from tribe to tribe,” encompassed a wide variety of subjects that were “woven together with the acquisition of practical skills, such as farming, gathering, hunting [...]” and provided children “with both the knowledge and the skill to survive and thrive in their society and environment” (xi, xii). In accordance with Jacobs, Native Americans who were against boarding schools were accused of being “opposed to education and “progress”,” however, many of them “did not oppose Western-style education” but “simply wanted schooling that did not involve the removal of their children” (*White Mother to a Dark Race* 150). Tsianina K. Lomawaima and Teresa L. McCarty assert that “schools have purposefully and systematically worked to eradicate Native languages, religions, beliefs, and practices,” Whyte similarly claims that they “destroy the basis for maintaining languages and cultural practices” (Lomawaima and McCarty 282; Whyte 133). David Grann, the author of *Killers of the Flower Moon* (2017), in which he

addresses the Osage murders, illustrates this by stating that the attendees of such boarding schools were forced to cut off their hair, change their names and clothes, speak English, and read the bible (90, 49, 51). Brenda J. Child explains that “Indian names were a highly visible symbol of tribal identity,” which is why it was “[o]ne of the first Native traditions to come under assault at boarding schools” (28, 29). As a result of having been sent to boarding schools, Stout states that students “were often ill-equipped to deal with the reality of life on the reservation and often were uncomfortable with their traditional lifestyle” and either “the returned students rejected their families and former lifestyles” or “their families found them so changed that they rejected the boarding school students” (xiii). Similar to how boarding schools held values deemed ‘correct’ by colonial authorities and imposed them on Native American children, birthing facilities in *Future Home of the Living God* instil state-prescribed ‘correct’ doctrines that women are expected to believe through the figure of Mother: “You are here because you did something wrong [...], but this is a place of forgiveness. [...] You can be absolved of anything you did [...], by contributing to the future of humanity. [...] Women are powerful. You are empowered to the max. Women are heroes” (Erdrich 254-255). Thus, boarding schools and birthing facilities share the same aim of imposing state values on their attendees and occupants.

Boarding schools systematically severed children from their Indigenous communities, heritage, and traditions, which is reminiscent of Cedar’s experiences of being separated from her Ojibwe tribe. As a child, she did not experience realistic Ojibwe ceremonies that tribe members practise in real life; instead, her adoptive parents created their own made-up ceremony, which consisted of “eclectic readings of Indigenous culture” and encompassed “sacred tobacco,” “white candles with sage,” “ginger beer,” and “peace-march songs” (Erdrich 53). As a grown woman pregnant with her son, Cedar comes to the realisation that she and, as a result, her unborn son, possess no knowledge about the medical history of her birth family,

which leads her to contact her Ojibwe relatives: “You deserve two sets of grandparents. Not to mention genetic info, which may affect who you are even beyond whatever is now occurring. There may be hereditary illnesses. Or unexpected talents [...]. Still, I think you need to enter the web of connections that I never really had” (Erdrich 6). Furthermore, before her pregnancy, she feels distant from the religious faith of her birth family, although she attempts to remedy this: “I embraced Catholicism in my crisis-creating year [...]. [...] I have integrated both my ethnicity and my intellectual leanings into my faith first by analyzing the canonization of the Lily of the Mohawks [...] and then by editing [...] and distributing a magazine of Catholic inquiry” (Erdrich 6). Cedar also admits that she has no knowledge of the Ojibwe language and refers to herself as “deculturated” (Erdrich 139). Her lack of cultural knowledge and her efforts to reconnect with her birth family illustrate how the removal of Indigenous children from their communities continues to affect her throughout her adult life.

The lives of Cedar and her biological family reflect the historical and intergenerational trauma caused by settler colonial practices, including the separation of Indigenous children from their families. Maria Yellow Horse Brave Heart defines historical trauma as “cumulative trauma over both the life span and across generations” and explains that the “trauma response includes depression and self-destructive behaviour; substance abuse [...]” (“Oyate Pyatela” 111). As Jacobs posits, these practices of forced child removal, both through boarding schools and adoptions, “undermined the customary socialization of Indian children,” as “several generations grew up without learning how to raise children within their own cultural contexts” (“Remembering the ‘Forgotten Child’” 139). According to Brave Heart, both the attendees of such boarding schools and their offspring were affected by it, suggesting an “intergenerational transmission” that “has resulted in impairment in culturally normative parenting styles and high risk factors for developing alcohol and/or other drug abuse associated with ineffective and injurious parenting” (Brave Heart “Oyate Pyatela” 111, 113). She emphasises the “lack of

effective Native parenting models and the lack of nurturing as well as abuse in boarding schools,” which “have resulted in uninvolved, non-nurturing [...] parents” (Brave Heart “The Historical Trauma Response” 9-10). In *Future Home of the Living God*, Cedar’s adoption is a continuation of separating Native children from their families. Her birth mother, Sweetie, admits that she took drugs after Cedar’s birth and concedes that she is not “the best mom” for her step-sister Little Mary, while Cedar speculates that “[t]hings got so bad that she drank and drugged until I was removed from her” (Erdrich 20, 43). Cedar observes that “there’s something wrong with him,” hinting at Eddy’s depression, and similarly realises that Little Mary is also “suffering from some heritable mental instability – Eddy’s the source, most likely” (Erdrich 27, 38). While Cedar herself “had no struggle” during college, she recalls accounts of addictions and suicides among her Native American peers (Erdrich 5), which is indicative of the substance abuse and self-destructive behaviour identified by Brave Heart (“Oyate Pyatela” 111). Although the novel does not explicitly mention any instances of forced child removal in her parents’ generation, Sweetie’s admission of parental inadequacy, her reliance on drugs, Eddy’s depression, and Little Mary’s mental affliction (Erdrich 20, 43, 27, 38) mirror some of the trauma responses Brave Heart attributes to the practice of separating Native American children from their families.

Cedar’s adoption by white parents reflects the settler colonial logic in which Indigenous children are removed from their communities and raised within non-Indigenous households. According to Jacobs, “Indian parents and families” were cast “as shadowy, off-stage figures who had neglected their children,” while “positioning *all* Indian children as in potential need of removal to a new home with new parents” (“Remembering the ‘Forgotten Child’” 144; original emphasis). Similarly, Hana E. Brown addresses the portrayal of “white settler families as ideal parents” and “the saviors of Indian children” (370). While Sera and Glen do not openly share these beliefs, Cedar’s adoptive parents remain complicit in the dynamics of settler

colonialism and uphold the same values as Mother, namely a conviction that a white household represents the ‘best’ environment for raising a child. Most notably, this occurs through their ability to evade the “Indian Child Welfare Act, which makes it almost impossible to adopt a Native child into a non-Native family” (Erdrich 4). Cedar herself states that she “never understood how I was adopted – [...] the legality there is definitely to be questioned” (Erdrich 4). The Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA), referenced in the novel, corresponds to a real-world legal statute of the same name. According to the National Indian Child Welfare Association (NICWA), the ICWA was passed in 1978 and “responded to the crisis of the forced removal of Native children from their families and communities at alarming rates of 25%–35%, with 85% being placed outside their families, even when relatives or tribal members were available to care for them.” Terry L. Cross elaborates on this by stating that “ICWA established minimum standards for states to follow in issues of custody and adoptions,” while Yvonne Elder Chase and Jessica Saniguq Ullrich note that “state agencies “ were required to “provide active efforts to prevent the break-up of an Indian family [...] and if a child has to be removed, then the state needed to keep children with extended family, a tribally approved foster home, an Indian foster home, or a tribally approved institution” (Cross 24; Chase and Ullrich 185). Cedar’s separation from her birth family indicates that her adoptive parents’ white privilege successfully circumvented legal protection meant to safeguard Indigenous families.

Cedar’s upbringing within the Songmaker household is characterised by her adoptive parents’ stereotypical and generic romanticisation of her Indigeneity. According to Pauline Turner Strong, “Indian children were relatively easy to place [in adoptive families] because of European-Americans’ idealization of the country’s original inhabitants” (“To Forget Their Tongue” 482). Cedar reflects that “my ethnicity was celebrated in [...] my adoptive Songmaker family” and she was seen as “rare, maybe part wild” and as an “Indian Princess” (Erdrich 4). While framed as a term of endearment, “Indian Princess” (Erdrich 4) perpetuates stereotypical

imagery and colonial tropes associated with the Indigenous woman, which is corroborated by John M. Coward: “Indian women were assessed not by their own values or customs but by the romanticized idea of Princess Pocahontas” (74). Tarrell Awe Agahe Portman and Roger D. Herring add that “[t]he most significant European American understanding of Native American Indian women came from the legend of Pocahontas” (190), which explains why her adoptive parents viewed her as an “Indian Princess” (Erdrich 4), dehumanising and reducing her to a role – that of a princess – long before she was so by Mother. These reductive representations are reinforced through everyday essentialising gestures; for instance, Cedar recalls that “Sera kept my hair in braids” and that “my observations on birds, bugs, worms, clouds, cats and dogs, were quoted” as she “supposedly had a hotline to nature” (Erdrich 4, 5). Siepak similarly identifies her adoptive parents’ “expectation [...] to fulfil the stereotypical perception of Indigenous people as living close to nature” and highlights that she is “alienated from her original, Indigenous culture” (63). However, she does not address that by only celebrating generic aspects of Indigeneity that align with settler fantasies of the “Indian princess,” the Songmakers erase any distinctions between Indigenous tribes – “Ojibwe, Chippewa, Anishinaabe, but whatever, I was rare” (Erdrich 4) – and deny her the opportunity to develop an authentic connection to her Ojibwe heritage.

The Songmakers perform a superficial and stereotypical affirmation of Cedar’s Indigenous identity through Native cultural appropriation. Cedar recollects one of Sera’s rituals that she performed during her childhood: “During one of Sera’s many self-invented ceremonies, [...] we placed sacred tobacco all around our house and then smudged white candles with sage and stuck them in the ground and lighted them” (Erdrich 53). Kot as well as Emily Childers and Hannah Menendez rightfully describe their ritual as a “unique fusion of indigenous and Euro-American cultural elements,” “made-up Native ceremonies and rites,” and an “attempt to celebrate Cedar’s Indigeneity, but always through an exoticized and whitewashed lens” (Kot

7; Childers and Menendez 219); however, they have not identified it as an instance of harmful Native cultural appropriation. Gabrielle Legault and Denica Bleau define cultural appropriation as “the inappropriate theft and inclusion of Indigenous knowledge, practices, and culture” (74). More specifically, Adriene Keene et al. describe Native appropriation as follows: “when people who are not American Indian (AI) [...] use aspects of AI identities, cultures, and/or pseudo-cultures (i.e. what they perceive to be AI culture but is often stereotypical) for their own purposes” (648). The Songmakers’ usage of tobacco in their ceremony, is an example of Native appropriation, as Joanne D’Silva et al. have identified: “Traditional tobacco, used for spiritual, ceremonial and cultural purposes, plays a central role in the life of many, but not all Native people,” but “[t]he tobacco industry has misappropriated culture and traditional tobacco by misrepresenting American Indian traditions, values, and beliefs to market and sell their products for profit” (57). Aside from Native appropriation, what Kot, Childers, and Menendez, like Siepak, overlook in their analyses is that Sera and Glen do not make a distinction between Native American tribes. Moreover, Kot’s assertion that this ritual “transforms the family’s modern, comfortable dwelling in a respectable neighborhood of Minneapolis and their family life into a contact zone” (7) implies that their home becomes a space of interculturality. Yet, for Cedar, their ceremony is not only an instance of cultural appropriation; instead, her identity as a member of the Ojibwe remains unrecognised, as she is only categorised as being “Native American.”

Cedar’s adoption and the separation from her newborn son not only perpetuate the separation of Native American children from their families but also delegitimise Indigenous forms of child-rearing. In *Future Home of the Living God*, Cedar is drugged after having given birth and her son taken away from her, which Childers and Menendez define as a continuation of “the separation of Indigenous peoples from their identity and community” (Erdrich 264; Childers and Menendez 224). Robbed of the opportunity to raise her child according to Ojibwe

values, her child will likely grow up without any connection to his heritage, which reproduces the same effects that resulted from boarding schools and adoptions into non-Indigenous families. Jacobs explains that “[i]t was common and desirable for extended family members [...] to participate in the upbringing of children,” while “non-Indians maligned this cherished aspect of Indian life as out of step with modern American family standards” (“Remembering the ‘Forgotten Child’” 147). She further states that “[t]hroughout the late 1940s and 1950s, adoption had become a significant means to bolster the postwar nuclear family ideal” (Jacobs, “Remembering the ‘Forgotten Child’” 141), thereby undermining the importance of communal child-rearing. The removal of Native children was legitimised by framing communal Indigenous child-rearing as unsuitable and inferior to normative family structures. In accordance with Jessica L. Liddell et al., such practices “violate the right of women to parent their own children and to do so in safe and healthy environments” (371). Non-Western modes of mothering were excluded and judged, particularly by white women, who, as Jacobs observes, held “conceptions of indigenous women’s sexuality, marriage, and work lives” and deemed them “deficient mothers” (*White Mother to a Dark Race* 119). According to Jacobs, the cradleboard, which Cedar would have received, as Eddy tells her that her grandmother is “working on your cradle board” (Erdrich 117), exemplifies the critique of Indigenous women’s treatment of their children: It was viewed as a “wholly foreign method[s] of carrying infants,” while “Native cultures often infused the cradleboard with sacred meaning” (Jacobs, *White Mother to a Dark Race* 121). The forced removal of children and the devaluation of Indigenous child-rearing illustrate how colonial structures imposed control over Native American families and erased their cultural knowledge.

In *Future Home of the Living God*, Erdrich demonstrates that it is not just evolution that is reversing, but also the supposed ‘progress’ of settler-colonial civilisation, as the state’s regime of surveillance over pregnant women is a regression to the brutal methods of family

separation historically imposed on Native American families. The birthing facilities in the novel revert to the same logic that was at the centre of the removal of Native children from their families, not only enforcing control over women and their reproductive capacity but also stripping them of their authority over their own bodies and their children. Cedar's life, her own adoption into a white household and the violent separation from her newborn, illustrate this reversion, as the disruption of kinship relations among Native American communities persists.

#### **4.3. Mother's Maternalism**

Mother's maternalism is a continuation of colonial paternalism within a settler-colonial logic, as her insidious methods of coercion masked as care mirror the strategies of colonial regimes that claimed to protect while simultaneously dominating Indigenous people. Gerald Dworkin defines colonial paternalism as "the interference of a state or an individual with another person, against their will, and defended or motivated by a claim that the person interfered with will be better off or protected from harm," highlighting how acts framed as benevolent can conceal coercion. Elizabeth Strakosch demonstrates how this operates in practice by stating that "Indigenous policy systems have enacted and continue to enact large-scale violence in the name of care, for example, via ongoing child removal and administrative restrictions of freedoms" (20). Eva Boodman addresses the importance of recognising that coercive measures are masked as caring by claiming that "if we do *not* understand these examples through the lens of care, we miss an important dimension of their justification by the state" (332; original emphasis), which is why this analysis of Mother as a continuation of settler colonial practices entails a focus on her 'caring' maternalism. Strakosch's and Boodman's insights apply directly to *Future Home of the Living God*, where Mother embodies the contradictions inherent in colonial paternalism – her caring tone and her maternalism mask her underlying surveillance and control over Cedar.

Settlers in the United States framed colonial paternalism as benevolent interventions, yet it was a deliberate strategy to facilitate the exploitation of Indigenous people. Andrew Boxer states that “[b]etween 1887 and 1933, US government policy aimed to assimilate Indians into mainstream American society,” which “the white elite that dominated US society” perceived “as a civilising mission.” According to Francis Paul Prucha, Thomas Jefferson saw “no contradiction or equivocation in working for the Indians’ advancement” while “gradually reducing the land they held” and, in 1803, even asserted that through introducing them to a ‘more civilised way of life’, they “*are acting for their greatest good*” (42; original emphasis). Prucha also notes that Andrew Jackson, signed the Indian Removal Bill in 1830, which meant relocating Eastern Indians to the west of the Mississippi, “leaving the area between [...] free for white exploitation” (51). Coercion was not mentioned, however; instead, the hope was to convince the tribes that their relocation would benefit them (Prucha 54, 55). The Dawes Act of 1887, which is also addressed in the novel when “Eddy explains that like almost every other reservation, ours was lost through incremental treaties and then sold off in large part when the Dawes Act [...] removed land from communal ownership” (Erdrich 213), further perpetuated this paternalistic logic. Boxer explains that it “promised US citizenship to Native Americans who took advantage of the allotment policy and ‘adopted the habits of civilized life’,” while it was another “opportunity for [...] white Americans to acquire Indian Land.” Lori Cox Han and Tomislav Han add that it “allowed the federal government to break up tribal lands with the goal of assimilation” (604). Boxer also highlights that, between 1948 and 1961, there was “a policy of relocating Indians [...] to the cities” for better job opportunities than on their reservations, but in doing so, their native land and resources were made available to “white purchasers.” As a result, many Native Americans faced prejudices, struggled with “[s]ecuring housing” along with “understanding the everyday features of urban life” and, therefore, faced “unemployment, slum living and alcoholism” (Boxer). Prucha rightfully questions “the

sincerity of the government [...] policy of protecting Indian rights to the land” and why there were no “more effective measures to prevent encroachment” (39, 40). He attributes this to the fact that “[t]he [...] government was sincerely interested in preventing settlement on Indian lands” to the extent of “keep[ing] a semblance of peace and [...] goodwill so that land would continue to be ceded by the tribes” (Prucha 40). Thus, settlers have historically achieved the oppression of the Native Americans by disguising their actions as benevolence.

Boarding schools for children of Native Americans also constitute an example of colonial paternalism in the United States. Boxer remarks that “the civilising process” included “the education of Native American children – many in boarding schools away from the influence of their parents.” This was justified in the language of the improvement of education, both by the settlers and, to some extent, the Native Americans, as Stout identifies: “European Americans [...] sought to replace nothing with something,” initially, after the defeat of Indigenous tribes, “some elders were [...] receptive to the idea of Anglo American education” as it might “better equip their children for survival in this new, drastically changed world” (xi, xii). Stout also posits that “the colonists undertook the education of the native inhabitants via religion” and wanted to achieve “the assimilation of the Native American students into the larger European American society in the United States by the means of a forced replacement of language and culture through immersion” (xii, xiii). As identified by Jacobs, government agents attempted to achieve the attendance of Native American children through “persuasion, not force,” even convincing “Indians themselves” to “recruit other Indian children” (*White Mother to a Dark Race* 151, 153). Lomawaima and McCarty state that both “self-education” and “the collective and individual rights of self-expression and of socializing one’s children in the community language” are “necessary to sovereignty” (295); however, I argue that Euro-American settler colonial powers in the United States undermined Indigenous sovereignty such as the right of families and communities to raise their children in accordance with their own

values and traditions. Thus, boarding schools were another means through which colonisers oppressed Indigenous peoples by claiming that they had the Native Americans' best interests in mind. In Erdrich's novel, this is mirrored in the novel's depiction of Mother's supposedly caring maternalism and her emphasis on alleged voluntariness when she gives Cedar the opportunity to decide by herself whether she would like to become a "Womb Volunteer" and tells her that "[w]e need you to volunteer" (90). In reality, Cedar is involuntarily detained, initially in the hospital, later in a birthing facility and stripped of her autonomy and freedom of choice (Erdrich 123, 248, 249, 250, 254).

Mother enacts a gendered version of settler colonial paternalism, as her maternal persona and rhetoric of 'care' mask her surveillance, violence, and control over Cedar. Although she appears understanding and sympathetic, she enforces Cedar's compliance with state-sanctioned reproductive control through her performance of affection, which aligns with Strakosch's assertion that settler colonial powers in the United States "claim to 'care'" (20) to justify their coercion. Mother first appears on the protagonist's computer and speaks to her: "Hello [...]. I am Mother. How are you today? [...] How are you feeling? [...] I care. I'd like to know" (Erdrich 68). These phrases recur throughout the novel and are meant to create a false sense of intimacy between Cedar and Mother; however, this remains unachieved, as Cedar turns off her computer when Mother appears (Erdrich 71) and reveals how she feels about her at the end of the novel by imagining to end her life: "My finger squeezes an imaginary trigger as she begins another endless prayer" (Erdrich 255). At the hospital, Mother's usage of a rhetoric of affection and care intensifies: "Always know that I care about each and every one of you [...]. You can talk to me anytime. You can bring me your worries, your concerns. I am all about communication, my dears. I care about each and every one of you one hundred percent forever" (Erdrich 255). Like Jefferson's rationalisation of settler colonialism and his 'civilising mission' of Native Americans in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, which includes his claim to act "for

their greatest good” (Prucha 42), Mother enforces Cedar’s confinement, surveillance, and reproductive coercion through affective discourse.

While Mother appears to embody the characteristics of ‘normative’ motherhood, her traits nevertheless differ from those typically associated with ‘normative’ mothers. As Eva-Maria Schmidt et al. have identified, normative constructions of motherhood include, but are not limited to, attentiveness, possessing “comprehensive knowledge of the child’s needs and desires, [...] best met when she is [...] highly attentive,” and “a high degree of control over [...] her child” (62, 64). Mother resembles ‘normative’ mothers, as she also exhibits attentiveness and control towards Cedar, but their motivations vary in various ways. Firstly, whereas a ‘normative’ mother typically directs her attentiveness towards her child’s wellbeing, Mother’s attention is only ostensibly on Cedar’s welfare; instead, she directs her attention to Cedar’s reproductive capacity and pregnancy and treats her not as an autonomous subject but as an object of control. Secondly, a ‘normative’ mother’s authority over her child is ideally grounded in affection and care, but Mother merely adopts this guise; in reality, her monitoring of Cedar is grounded in state interests (Erdrich 255). Thirdly, a ‘normative’ mother’s authority is partially shaped by societal and cultural expectations, but she remains embedded within a familial and intimate context. On the contrary, Mother is not a mother in a familial sense but operates as a technological and ideological apparatus employed by the state to exercise control over women like Cedar. The state’s efforts to control pregnant women through Mother’s surveillance and her seemingly ‘benevolent’ methods become evident at the end of the novel when Mother preaches to the women at the birthing centre and reflects the government’s aim to secure the future of humanity by forcing them to bear children: “You can [...] completely win back God’s love, by contributing to the future of humanity. Your happy sentence is only nine months. [...] These nine months will pass like a few weeks” (Erdrich 255). These women’s surveillance is enforced by detaining them in birthing facilities, forcing them to watch Mother’s

sermons during “mandatory Watching Hour,” and by not permitting them “to look away” (Erdrich 248, 249, 254, 255). Thus, Mother transforms maternal care and affection into ideological tools of the state, where women’s pregnancies are framed not as voluntary but as their duty towards the state.

Mother frames her methods as being in the best interest of women like Cedar, which aligns with the paternalist colonial narrative in which Native Americans were expected to accept their oppression for their own supposed benefit. Cedar reports that the government is “rounding us up,” yet authorities insist that such measures are “for our own safety and we are required to go voluntarily” (Erdrich 72). Similar to Jackson’s Indian Removal Bill, which was framed as a measure meant to protect Indigenous communities from white settler encroachment but facilitated their displacement and the loss of ownership over their reservation lands (Prucha 70, 40), Cedar’s ‘voluntary’ confinement masks the state’s effort to control her reproductive capacity under the guise of protection. Mother urges women to offer their bodies as Womb Volunteers (Erdrich 90), which is reminiscent of how Native Americans were encouraged to leave their reservations and relocate to cities in exchange for the promise of opportunity under the Indian Relocation Act of 1956 (Boxer): “I wonder if you have the courage to save the country we love. We need you to be a Patriot. We need you to volunteer. If you are a woman, if you are pregnant, go to any of our Future Home Reception Centers” (Erdrich 90). Mother masks her coercion by using a rhetoric of voluntariness, portraying women as heroes capable of saving their country when they would continue to be treated as objects of state control. Her militarised and nationalistic language – “save the country you love,” “Patriot” – portrays motherhood as a form of civic duty. Mother’s strategy of offering benefits such as “the best rooms” (Erdrich 72) to volunteers mirrors the promises made to Native Americans under the Indian Relocation Act (Boxer).

Cedar ultimately conforms to the role of Womb Volunteer imposed upon her, not through choice but through coerced compliance. Her earlier acts of resistance consisted of not leaving her house to avoid being seen and “constructing a secret food cache in the basement” (Erdrich 81, 103). At the hospital, she refuses to swallow her “happy pill” that instils “the most intensely comfortable feeling of peace and order” within her (Erdrich 128, 127): “I only pretend to swallow the vitamin [...]. I spit it out into the toilet and flush it away” (Erdrich 128). Additionally, she and another woman, whom Cedar refers to as Spider Nun and who is also detained at the hospital, kill a nurse: “I throw myself over her, sideways, to hold her down. Spider Nun keeps twisting with both fists, more, tighter, until Orilee’s eyes and tongue pop out and her face goes purple” (Erdrich 161). Subsequently, the two pregnant women escape from the hospital, with the help of Cedar’s adoptive mother: “And so we creep along the wall until we get to the door that Sera’s kept open with nothing more than a salad fork. We melt inside and start running down the stairwell. [...] We vault into the passenger’s side door as the truck pulls out of the service lot” (Erdrich 166). In contrast, as Cedar is detained at the birthing facility, she no longer opposes what she is subjected to. Throughout her confinement at the birthing centre, Cedar does not attempt to escape or resist; instead, she endures the activities and procedures imposed on her, such as practising for labour, having her picture taken, attending mandatory Watching Hour, and undergoing several ultrasound scans (Erdrich 250, 251, 254, 256, 261). After her first pregnancy, Cedar states that “I wait in my cell for my next pregnancy,” which signals that she acquiesces to bearing another child and has internalised that her reproductive capacity defines her existence (Erdrich 266). The emotional and ideological methods employed by Mother, along with her resemblance to a ‘loving’ and ‘nurturing’ figure, leave little room for defiance.

Mother enforces Western ideals of motherhood and womanhood while suppressing Indigenous ones. Portman and Herring explain that “many Native American Indian societies

[...] were matrilocal and matrifocal” and, as Kim Anderson notes, even though “men and women had their spheres of work, they were not restricted from engaging in each other’s work [...], if it made better use of their particular abilities” (Portman and Herring 188; Anderson, *A Recognition of Being* 34). Anderson also posits that “Indigenous ideologies of motherhood are distinct from patriarchal western models of motherhood” and advocates for distancing oneself from “Western ideology that condemns the mother to the role of family servant without any decision-making power” (Anderson, “Giving Life” 775; Anderson, *A Recognition of Being* 147). In contrast, Tatjana Takševa posits that “Indigenous motherwork is culturally valued, understood as a collective responsibility, and seen as equivalent to any other work structurally important to the community” (184). This approach is reflected in *Future Home of the Living God*, as Cedar’s stepfather reassures her that they “are not giving up our pregnant tribal members” and that “[o]ur women are sacred to us” (Erdrich 227). Anderson corroborates the “sacred identity” of women and the importance of mothers in Indigenous societies by acknowledging their “roles in traditional spiritual practices, ceremonies, and beliefs;” furthermore, “[t]hrough their ability to bring new life into the world, women play an intermediary role between life on earth and in the spirit world” (*A Recognition of Being* 33, 48, 49). However, she continues, “Indigenous systems that allocated power to women were incompatible with the kind of colonial power dynamics that would be necessary to maintain colonial power” (Anderson, *A Recognition of Being* 34). Mother’s regime of reproductive surveillance reproduces that incompatibility, as she redefines pregnancy as a purely reproductive function that is meant to save humankind by “contributing to the future of humanity” (Erdrich 255) and neglects the spiritual components Indigenous peoples attribute to it. Mother’s rhetoric of care reinstates colonial paternalism by erasing Indigenous maternal authority, denying Cedar’s humanity, and reducing Cedar to a state-controlled organ, the ‘womb.’

Mother's depiction of Cedar as helpless and in need of care, along with her oppression and surveillance, is reminiscent of white women's portrayal and treatment of Indigenous women and mothers as inferior and unfit. Her white skin tone, addressed by Cedar (Erdrich 68), situates Mother within the category of a white 'woman' and merits a comparison between Mother and white women in the colonial past. According to Jacobs, "[w]hite women [...] took upon themselves the role of spokespersons for indigenous peoples," which bears a resemblance to Mother controlling women both from afar and at the birthing facilities (Jacobs, *White Mother to a Dark Race* 112; Erdrich 68, 255). She further observes that white women often regarded Indigenous women as "deficient mothers," commenting critically on their child-rearing practices and expressing worry about their children (Jacobs, *White Mother to a Dark Race* 119). Their 'concern' was a means to mask their interference and impose Western maternal norms on Indigenous communities; like Mother, their coercive actions were characterised by a false sense of benevolence and care, indicating that white women were also implicated in colonial paternalism. Jacobs also notes that Indigenous women were viewed as "oppressed," "chattel," and "burden bearers," as they performed work that was typically seen as "men's work," while white women were "elevated in status," due to their "adherence to a sexual division of labour [...] in which "true women" oversaw domestic duties" (*White Mother to a Dark Race* 113, 114). Mother's reduction of Cedar to merely a 'womb' can be seen as an attempt to discipline Indigenous women into normative ideals of womanhood, which often include motherhood (Gillespie 43) as opposed to "engag[ing] in the kind of physical labor" that white women "coded as masculine" (Jacobs, *White Mother to a Dark Race* 115). Like white women in the colonial past, Mother enacts a gendered form of colonial paternalism in which coercion is justified through care, ultimately erasing Indigenous maternal authority and reinscribing patriarchal Western norms of womanhood.

#### 4.4. Mother's Infantilisation

Cedar's loss of agency and childlike treatment through Mother mirrors a settler colonial logic in which Indigenous people were represented as childlike to justify their subjugation and dispossession. As stated by Freeden Blume Oeur and Donna Varga, "infantilization [...] has been an enduring tactic used by Anglo-Europeans to subjugate [...] Indigenous local populations" and "marginalized others" who "are exploited as being childlike in the service of empire" (3). To demonstrate this, Prucha states that Thomas McKenney, "superintendent of Indian trade from 1816 to 1822," declared that "I would [...] take them *firmly* but *kindly* by the hand, and tell them they must go; and I would do this, on the same principle that I would take my own children by the hand [...]" whereas Jefferson claimed that "the General Government can exercise a parental control over their interests" (44, 55-56, 56, original emphasis). Grann adds that while "a delegation of Osage chiefs met with Jefferson at the White House," he "addressed the chiefs as "*my children*" (40-41; emphasis added). According to Project 1492, Indigenous "land is held 'in trust' by the U.S. government in a strange, patriarchal relationship that requires tribes to get permission from the Department of the Interior [...] to utilize their own property in any meaningful way." In fact, "individual Natives who want jurisdiction over their land" are required to "declare themselves 'incompetent' to manage their own affairs" (Project 1492). Moreover, as stated by Grann, "many Osage [...] were deemed "incompetent" and [...] forced to have a local white guardian overseeing and authorizing all of their spending," with one guardian even expressing that "an Osage adult was "like a *child* [...] and when he sees a new toy he wants to buy it"" (63, 85; emphasis added). Although not comparing Cedar to one of her children nor referring to her as a 'child,' Mother adopts a similar infantilising stance towards Cedar by addressing her with a rhetoric of care.

Indigenous dependency on the government was a deliberate strategy of colonialism that resembles Cedar's involuntary reliance on Mother. Firpo and Jacobs posit that, because of

“treaties with Indigenous people that confined them to ever-shrinking plots of land and opened up more land to settlement [...], Indigenous people suffered from dire poverty and became dependent on government assistance” (534). As Alvin Padilla-Babilonia notes, “dependency became an independent justification for plenary power over Native tribes” and “remained even after tribe members became U.S. citizens” (969). The dependency of Indigenous peoples was enforced through government programs, which, for instance, controlled food distribution to Indigenous communities, as Rachel M. Gurney et al. have identified (683). They further explain that by displacing Native American peoples from their land, they were also “hindering their ability to participate in traditional harvest practices and access traditional foods,” forcing them to “rely on federal food programs to provide their sustenance” instead (Gurney et al. 683). Similarly, Nick Estes states that “by separating Indigenous producers from the land and attempting to make them dependent on treaty annuities or cash economies, the colonizers waged total war on Indigenous life” (87). As Karethy Edwards and Beverly Patchell mention, “food aid provided to the tribes was usually insufficient and of low quality” and “did not include traditional foods;” as a result, their health deteriorated and their ties “to land, ceremony, family, and spirituality” were severed (32, 33). In *Future Home of the Living God*, when Cedar is detained at the hospital and at the birthing centre, Mother not only ensures Cedar’s oppression but also her dependency on medical facilities, as the nurses provide her with meals: “The nurse who is working with former Dweeb nurse, now Jessie, brings us a couple of peanut butter sandwiches for lunch, with a side of army-green boiled peas;” “Lunch is fried sweet potatoes and chicken soup” (Erdrich 135, 251). The staff also organise and perform Cedar’s health checkups: “Orielee comes in and wakes me for another ultrasound but first she takes my blood. I get my blood drawn every day [...];” “There are usually two doctors and a nurse in the room when I get a checkup. I go in every single day now” (Erdrich 150, 261). Thus, Mother’s

– and the state’s – regime of control over pregnant women like Cedar ensures their reliance on the institutions that suppress her.

Mother’s treatment of Cedar reproduces the colonial practice of infantilisation, which historically cast Indigenous people as children and deemed them incapable of managing their land and finances. Just as Native American tribes like the Osage were infantilised and placed under white guardianship, Mother, a white ‘woman,’ treats Cedar as a child and denies her the autonomy to make decisions over her body. In doing so, she resembles white women in the colonial past, who, according to Jacobs, had a “tendency [...] to represent indigenous peoples as a “child race”” and to liken them to “children who had not yet matured into adults” (*White Mother to a Dark Race* 112). Mother continuously reminds her that she cares, asks about her day, and reassures her that she can share anything with her: “Would you like to tell me about your day?;” “You can talk to me anytime. You can bring me your worries, your concerns. [...] I care about each and every one of you one hundred percent forever” (Erdrich 71, 255). At the end of the novel, Cedar is confined to a birthing centre that once was a prison: “A sign above the entrance says Stillwater Birthing Center, but it is only a painted piece of canvas that covers Minnesota Correctional Facility Stillwater” (Erdrich 249). This aligns with what Cedar is told by Phil: “All of the prisoners in the country have disappeared. Most people say they have been euthanized. Or freed [...]. The prisons are for women” (Erdrich 85). Similar to the prisoners, the pregnant women are provided with jumpsuits, although theirs are “neon-pink or peacock-blue” (Erdrich 249). At the birthing centre, which still fulfils its function of a prison, Cedar is deprived of her freedom and not allowed to move around freely, as she is confined to a “cinder-block cell” (Erdrich 249) and can only leave when someone unlocks her cell: “Today two male guards collect me from my cell” (Erdrich 250). One of the few leisure activities that Cedar is permitted to do is going for short ‘walks,’ which takes place in the prison yard: “There is the prison yard, an exercise area where we are allowed to walk in circles or aimlessly shift around”

(Erdrich 258). During her 'walk,' Cedar even describes herself and the other detained women as "frightened children" (Erdrich 258). Additionally, Cedar's daily routine involves light exercises: "Every morning at ten a.m. we're seated in a room to practice for labor" (Erdrich 250). Cedar's behaviour and lack of resistance during her detainment at the birthing centre resemble the obedience typically expected of a child, illustrating how these methods of infantilisation deny her full personhood and reproductive agency.

Indigenous children at boarding schools were isolated and separated from their Native American families and cultures, just like Cedar's contact with both her birth and her adoptive families ceases as soon as she is detained at the birthing centre. There are very few mentions of any of her birth family members, except for Eddy. At night, Cedar is reminded of a lullaby that might be the one Eddy promised to write for her baby, as he "had a dream about a little baby" that asked "'[w]here's my song'?" (Erdrich 226): "My good spirit visits me nearly every night, settling at the foot of the bed. And this time, there is a song that I also hear, and it is not the women's song. It is a baby's song, maybe Eddy's song, for it is high, repetitive, and comforting, like a lullaby" (Erdrich 258). Cedar also expresses that "[w]hen I miss them to an unbearable degree, I sing the song for you, baby. Or I untuck a page of Eddy's manuscript from my pack" (Erdrich 259). Only at the end of the novel, two months after Cedar's son was taken from her, does she reminisce about her adoptive parents, Sera and Glen, in a letter to her child: "My parents would tell me things about the world, the way it was before, the way they knew and loved it although, they always said this, We didn't know it was heaven" (Erdrich 265). She recalls a moment they spent together during "the last time it snowed" (Erdrich 266) and relays it to her son: "I was eight years old. I can feel it now. The cold seizing my body, its clarity. The snow poured out of the sky. Come! Sera cried. Glen shouted, Snow! We ran outside and stood on the dull green lawn, transfixed. The snow swirled around us, falling and falling faster" (Erdrich 266-267). Cedar's experiences reinforce that the ties to her family only persist through

memories and objects, not in physical appearances, which is reminiscent of the way Indigenous family bonds were deliberately weakened by sending Native American children to boarding schools.

While Cedar is not in contact with her birth as well as her adoptive family while she is detained at the birthing centre, her experience differs during her stay at the hospital. In these earlier chapters, Cedar maintains contact with her family through notes and letters, including one with a hidden message, as well as conversations. She receives a note from her birth mother Sweetie who issues a warning to Cedar: “*Phil turned you in. Be careful and watch for me*” (Erdrich 137; original emphasis). Shortly after, Eddy sends her a letter, containing a hidden meaning, which Cedar deciphers by reading only every other word based on the bible verses that were included: “So whatever is going to happen, this week I will be in my true family. And wherever I’m going, I believe, it’s Indian Paradise” (Erdrich 141). Moreover, Sera gains access to the hospital by pretending to be a nurse: “The door opens. I look up. When I see who holds the lunch tray my brain skips. Sera sets the tray on my bedside table and cautions me with a look, but she can’t help it, either. Can’t help being suddenly overcome” (Erdrich 153). She whispers to Cedar that “[t]his is going to make it easier” (Erdrich 154) and, later, successfully helps Cedar and Spider Nun escape: “Mom grabs us and helps us into a well behind the seat, full of clothes and tools. We feel the truck moving” (Erdrich 166). In contrast, the chapters situated within the birthing centre are dominated almost entirely by Cedar’s routines of light exercises, health checkups, and mandatory Watching Hours (Erdrich 251, 254, 261, 255); she receives no letters and is unable to contact or be contacted by her family. Cedar even acknowledges that “there is no rescue from this place” and that she is aware “that even with all of their combined ingenuity my family is not going to get me out of here” (Erdrich 259). This shift from contact with and support from her birth and adoptive family at the hospital to

complete isolation at the birthing centre reveals the state's success in severing Cedar's ties to her adoptive as well as her birth family.

#### **4.5. Is there Room for Resistance?**

While *Future Home of the Living God* portrays the pervasive reach of surveillance and settler-colonial control (Andreescu 68; Martínez-Falquina, "Feminist Dystopia and Reality" 276; Siepak 44; Kemball 166), its epistolary structure also creates space for resistance and hope for the future (Childers and Menendez 218; Kemball 162). The novel is told through a series of letters from Cedar to her unborn son, which serves as a way for her to assert her Ojibwe voice and, in accordance with Childers and Menendez (219) can be seen as an attempt "to maintain her independence as the government imprisons pregnant women" (219). Cedar explains her decision to write these letters to her unborn son as follows: "This notebook has become my life, or perhaps better to say that this notebook has become the way I remain connected with my life, and with you" (Erdrich 171). In addition, she addresses that "[t]here have always been letters and diaries written in times of tumult and discovered later" and that she "could be writing one of those" (Erdrich 3). Her insistence on documenting what is happening from her perspective can be seen as a truthful account of what is happening to her and functions as a small act of resistance towards Mother's regime. Cedar uses the second-person pronoun to address her son directly and describes his developmental stages in her womb; for example, "[y]our bone marrow's making blood cells and taste buds are forming on your tongue. Your brain and nerve endings are mature enough to feel touches" (Erdrich 81). This is corroborated by Kemball who notes that "Cedar figuratively constructs her child as a reader" and that "this is primarily achieved by narrativising stages of fetal development with second person pronouns" (162). Thus, for Cedar, the act of writing becomes both a refusal to be silenced and a means of documentation, but also an emotional outlet through which she voices hope for her son's future and survival: "My dear son. I know you're going to read this

someday” (Erdrich 265). Through writing to her son, Cedar, who is otherwise subjected to surveillance and control over her body as well as her reproductive rights and agency, reclaims her narrative authority.

Although the continuation of Euro-American settler colonialism through the figure of Mother is at the forefront, *Future Home of the Living God* nevertheless also offers a narrative of Indigenous resistance. Eddy becomes the leader of this resistance movement and reminds Cedar of the resilience of Indigenous communities: “Indians have been adapting since before 1492 so I guess we’ll keep adapting” (Erdrich 28). Upon Cedar’s objection that “the world is going to pieces” and that their situation “is different” (Erdrich 28), Eddy counters as follows: “It is always going to pieces [...]. It is always different. We’ll adapt” (Erdrich 28). Similarly, Childers and Menendez observe that “Eddy [...] reminds Cedar that Indigenous Americans have already survived multiple apocalypses all related to the violent and debilitating practices of settler colonialism” and that they “see it as merely another challenge to adapt to” (223). Furthermore, Eddy shares his plan with Cedar: “We’re [...] taking back the land within the original boundaries of our original treaty” (214). This represents a reversal of settler colonialism and the history of movements such as the American Indian Movement, as Indigenous people reclaim their territory and non-Natives retreat voluntarily: “We were all set to conduct a compassionate removal of non-tribal people living on our land at present, but I am relieved to tell you that we haven’t needed to put removal into action. They’ve all removed themselves” (Erdrich 214). The reclamation of their land is accompanied by a return to a lifestyle of self-sufficiency as opposed to succumbing to the reversal of evolution and its consequences: “He [Eddy] wants to make the reservation one huge, intensively worked, highly productive farm” (Erdrich 226). Moreover, Cedar hears a mysterious howling sound that Eddy refers to as their “new unbreakable code” (Erdrich 228), which suggests a form of encrypted communication among their tribe. Ultimately, Cedar’s acquisition of her tribal identification

card, the reclamation of her Ojibwe name, and her subsequent assertion “[t]hat’s me. Mary Potts” (Erdrich 238) mark not just a regaining of her identity and name but also a deeper acknowledgement of her belonging.

## 5. Conclusion

This thesis has examined how Zumas's *Red Clocks* and Erdrich's *Future Home of the Living God* reconfigure dystopian fiction in the 21<sup>st</sup> century by situating surveillance and reproductive control in present times rather than in the future. Both novels challenge the genre's defining characteristics and disrupt the assumption that dystopian conditions are merely a distant possibility. Reading these novels as 'conventional' dystopias set in a distant future would be to overlook how dystopian control is already embedded in contemporary political, social, and legal frameworks as well as in women's everyday lives. Zumas and Erdrich have shown that the instances of reproductive surveillance in their novels resemble the lived political realities of many women in the United States – particularly during the first and second Trump administrations – and worldwide.

The arguments within this thesis have been proven by close textual analyses of the respective novels and supported by their contextualisation within various secondary scholarly works and concepts in the fields of literary criticism, dystopian literature, feminist approaches to dystopian fiction, surveillance studies, and Native American and Indigenous studies. Through analysing seemingly small changes in legislation and its rhetorics with far-reaching consequences as well as the occurrence of a more insidious form of surveillance in already existing everyday structures, and the centrality of the body in the mechanisms of control in *Red Clocks*, it has been shown that this novel warrants a classification as a paratopia as opposed to a distant dystopia. In *Future Home of the Living God*, Indigenous women like Cedar already live in a reproductive dystopia, which has become evident through the analysis of Mother and her characteristics of maternalism and infantilisation as well as the medical surveillance Cedar is subjected to, along with her adoption and the separation from her own child, all of which mirror a settler colonial logic. The classification of *Red Clocks* as a paratopia encourages readers to reflect on the situation of reproductive rights within their own countries and to realise

that some women – especially those living in countries as well as states and territories of the United States with restrictive laws surrounding reproductive rights – are already confronted with ‘dystopian’ conditions, as presented in the novel. Through portraying reproductive dystopia as a reality for Indigenous women, *Future Home of the Living God* introduces an intersectional perspective that urges readers to become aware of the continuity of Euro-American settler colonialism and its lasting impact on Indigenous women in the present. Together, these arguments are significant because they have shown that dystopian means of surveillance are no longer speculative; instead, they are embedded within already existing or potentially soon-to-exist restrictive political and legal frameworks in the United States.

The significance of this thesis extends beyond close readings of *Red Clocks* and *Future Home of the Living God*, as its arguments also entail political and literary implications. Politically, it becomes evident how the reproductive surveillance depicted in these novels mirrors contemporary practices of reproductive control such as the prohibition of abortion. From a literary perspective, traditional understandings of the dystopian genre are challenged, as these literary works are proof of how 21<sup>st</sup>-century feminist ‘dystopian’ literature is no longer set in a distant future. Furthermore, Zumas’s and Erdrich’s novels contribute to an expansion of the dystopian literary canon by foregrounding the voices of women and, crucially, Indigenous women, both of which have been marginalised within literature, including dystopian fiction (Franková 211).

To adhere to the acceptable length of a master’s thesis, this study has been limited in scope. It has focused mainly on surveillance, while resistance has only been briefly addressed; thus, a more detailed exploration of how the characters in the respective novels practice resistance and regain their autonomy would provide an important addition to this thesis. Moreover, it has been limited to two works of ‘dystopian’ literature. While this allows for a more detailed analysis, a larger selection of feminist ‘dystopian’ literary works from the 21<sup>st</sup>

century might reveal additional patterns and characteristics of reproductive surveillance and resistance. The inclusion of works by other Indigenous authors of the Americas beyond Erdrich, such as Cherie Dimaline's *The Marrow Thieves* (2017), may offer further examples of how colonial pasts continue to shape reproductive politics. Since the novels chosen for this analysis are both situated within the context of the United States, they cannot capture whether and how feminist 'dystopian' fiction from other countries depicts reproductive surveillance. Thus, the expansion of 'dystopian' works from the United States to other continents is recommended to achieve a less United States-centric perspective on reproductive politics and surveillance. Potential novels to analyse could include *Moxyland* (2008) by Lauren Beukes, *Who Fears Death* (2010) by Nnedi Okorafor, and *The Core of the Sun* (2013) by Johanna Sinisalo.

*Red Clocks* and *Future Home of the Living God* demonstrate that the events they depict have already or could soon become a reality. Differentiating between fictional dystopian narratives and political reality has become increasingly challenging, particularly in relation to women's reproductive rights. Critically engaging with 21<sup>st</sup>-century feminist 'dystopian' works of literature offers opportunities to recognise and oppose the increasing lack of women's reproductive rights and its consequences, especially – but not only – in the context of the United States and in the aftermath of *Dobbs v. Jackson* and subsequent abortion bans. Both Zumas and Erdrich recognise the realism of what they portray in their novels; in their own words, "[t]his is actually happening, maybe next week" and "[i]t's set as though this could happen tomorrow" (Zumas, qtd. in Crum; Erdrich, qtd. in K. Miller).

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## **7. AI Use Acknowledgment**

### **1. Research, working with secondary sources:**

I acknowledge the use of ChatGPT (<https://chatgpt.com>) to rephrase complex sentences from secondary scholarship in easier-to-understand language, receive starting points for research on certain topics, both by providing keywords and scholarly articles, and to suggest ways to meaningfully incorporate certain direct quotes into my existing paragraphs.

I used the output to better understand complex fragments in secondary literature, to help me realise where I may need more input from secondary scholarship, and to improve how I incorporated some direct quotes (from my own research, with no help from any AI tools) from secondary scholarship into my existing paragraphs.

Disclaimer: While the provided keywords helped me figure out where more research was required and (through u:search) allowed me to find relevant secondary sources as well as realise which of my claims may need additional backing through secondary scholarship, the suggested sources by ChatGPT were rarely helpful and – after skim reading – I disregarded most of them.

### **2. During writing:**

I acknowledge the use of ChatGPT to brainstorm and write down my ideas and to organise my thoughts. I also used it to help me identify the gist of certain paragraphs, receive feedback on some topic sentences, and suggest where I could split lengthy paragraphs. It proved useful for receiving suggestions for improvement for transitions between paragraphs and for suggesting where certain sections may be too descriptive and to help me figure out how I could make them more analytical. Lastly, I used it to aid me in formulating footnotes.

I used the output to improve my topic sentences and the transitions between my paragraphs, to remove any redundancies, and to make certain sections of my thesis less descriptive. I used it to split some paragraphs that included more than one idea. What helped me the most was that it provided a space to write down my thoughts and ideas, to make sense of/organise my thoughts. Ultimately, this helped me overcome writer's block and the feeling of being stuck and not making any progress.

### **3. Language:**

I acknowledge the use of ChatGPT to improve certain sentences. I acknowledge the use of Grammarly (<https://app.grammarly.com>) and the correction tools integrated within Microsoft Word to identify any typos or errors, suggest synonyms, and refine the language in some sentences. I used the output from both tools to improve and refine the language in certain sentences of my thesis, especially when I was not content with the way they sounded or wanted to use a synonym.

### **4. After finishing my thesis:**

I acknowledge the use of ChatGPT to receive feedback on my abstract, introduction, and conclusion, and to suggest improvements for the translation of my abstract into German. I used the output to improve my abstract, introduction, and conclusion as well as the phrasing of the German version of my abstract.

## 8. Appendix

### Abstract (English)

This master's thesis analyses *Red Clocks* by Leni Zumas (2018) and *Future Home of the Living God* by Louise Erdrich (2017). These novels reconfigure dystopian literature in the 21<sup>st</sup> century by situating reproductive surveillance and state control in the present rather than in speculative futures. Drawing on theoretical frameworks from Louis Althusser and Michel Foucault as well as concepts of settler colonialism, including Euro-American settler colonial practices, and colonial paternalism, this master's thesis examines the ways in which the novels' female protagonists are subjected to surveillance and how their bodies become sites of control. More specifically, these analyses aim to determine the ways in which *Red Clocks* warrants a classification as a 'paratopia,' a term proposed by Zumas herself, as opposed to a distant dystopia and how the Ojibwe protagonist in *Future Home of the Living God* already lives in a reproductive dystopia shaped by colonial paternalism and settler colonial practices. In *Red Clocks*, seemingly small changes in legislation and its rhetorics have far-reaching consequences for the characters, a more insidious form of surveillance occurs in already existing everyday structures, and intimate experiences involving the body are central to the mechanisms of control to which the protagonists are subjected. In *Future Home of the Living God*, advances in settler colonial surveillance technologies, represented by the figure of Mother and the broader medical surveillance of the protagonist's pregnancy, perpetuate this reproductive dystopia.

## Abstract (Deutsch)

Diese Masterarbeit behandelt *Red Clocks* von Leni Zumas (2018) und *Future Home of the Living God* von Louise Erdrich (2017). Beide Romane verändern das Verständnis von dystopischer Literatur im 21. Jahrhundert, indem sie reproduktive Überwachung und staatliche Kontrolle in der Gegenwart statt in spekulativen Zukunftsszenarien verorten. Aufbauend auf Theorien von Louis Althusser und Michel Foucault sowie auf Konzepten des Siedlerkolonialismus, einschließlich euro-amerikanischer Praktiken des Siedlerkolonialismus, und des kolonialen Paternalismus wird gezeigt, wie die Protagonistinnen beider Werke der Überwachung und ihre Körper der Kontrolle ausgesetzt sind. Ziel der Arbeit ist es, zu zeigen, warum *Red Clocks* als ‘Paratopie,’ ein Begriff, der von Zumas selbst vorgeschlagen wurde, im Gegensatz zu einer weit entfernten Dystopie klassifiziert werden sollte und wie die Ojibwe-Protagonistin in *Future Home of the Living God* bereits in einer reproduktiven Dystopie, die von kolonialem Paternalismus und den Praktiken des Siedlerkolonialismus geprägt ist, lebt. In *Red Clocks* haben vermeintlich kleine Gesetzesänderungen und deren Rhetorik weitreichende Konsequenzen für die Charaktere, eine heimtückischere Art der Überwachung ist in alltäglichen Strukturen verankert und intime, körperliche Erfahrungen stehen im Zentrum der Kontrollmechanismen, denen die Protagonistinnen ausgesetzt sind. In *Future Home of the Living God*, perpetuieren Fortschritte in den Überwachungstechnologien des Siedlerkolonialismus, welche durch die Figur der Mother und die medizinische Überwachung der Schwangerschaft der Protagonistin repräsentiert werden, diese reproduktive Dystopie.