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*THE HANDMAID'S TALE: THE
ADAPTATION AND ITS SOCIAL IMPACT*

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THE HANDMAID'S TALE: THE ADAPTATION AND ITS SOCIAL IMPACT

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***The Handmaid's Tale*: a adaptação e o seu impacto**

RESUMO: A série “The Handmaid’s Tale”, criada pela Hulu em 2016, é uma adaptação do romance com o mesmo nome, escrito por Margaret Atwood, publicado em 1985. A história apresenta como um regime religioso autocrata, Gilead, subiu ao poder nos Estados Unidos. O livro é considerado um dos trabalhos mais importantes da literatura feminista, refletindo a segunda onda do movimento feminista e da oposição que surgiu no rescaldo desta. A série expande a representação de personagens femininas e os temas feministas. A adaptação diferencia-se da sua fonte por refletir movimentos feministas como heterogêneos, por se focar na importância da solidariedade e cooperação entre as mulheres e por expandir a mensagem de urgência na luta pelos seus direitos.

A eleição do Presidente Trump em 2016 trouxe a aprovação de legislação que restringe o aborto e a nomeação de novos juizes conservadores para o Supremo Tribunal. Como consequência, 2017 foi marcado por um novo despertar da luta pelos direitos das mulheres. A série reflete este momento e cria correspondências entre Gilead e a sociedade atual, especialmente em relação às consequências da passividade e falta de mobilização pela igualdade no surgimento de políticas que põem em causa os direitos adquiridos.

Transformando personagens em heroínas capazes de inspirar outras mulheres a nível global, elevando o manto vermelho a um símbolo poderoso de protesto e motivando grupos em redes sociais onde os fãs da série formam comunidades, a primeira temporada de “The Handmaid’s Tale” criou ferramentas que têm inspirado protestos, produções culturais e continuado a discussão pública em torno dos seus temas.

Com uma mensagem moldada ao momento atual, a série expande as referências históricas do livro e, juntas, criam um quadro de referência para os diferentes períodos da história em que as mulheres viram os seus direitos em perigo. Com uma história adaptada e um novo media, a série é agora referenciada em todo um mundo para criticar mudanças políticas e sociais através da perspectiva dos direitos das mulheres.

Palavras-chave: adaptação; *The Handmaid’s Tale*; feminismo; distopia;

***The Handmaid's Tale*: a adaptação e o seu impacto
totalitarismo, streaming.**

The Handmaid's Tale: The Adaptation and its Social

ABSTRACT: The series “The Handmaid’s Tale”, created by Hulu in 2016, is an adaptation of the novel with the same name written by Margaret Atwood, published in 1985. The story follows how a religious autocratic regime, Gilead, would come to power in the United States. The book is one of the most famous pieces of feminist literature, reflecting on the second wave feminist movement and the opposition to women’s equality that arose in its aftermath. The series extends the representation of female characters and feminist themes. The adaptation however updates the reflection of feminist movements as heterogenous, focuses on the importance of solidarity and cooperation between women and expands on the message of urgency in fighting for women’s rights.

With the election of President Trump in 2016, there was a new push for restrictive abortion laws and the nomination of new conservative judges to the Supreme Court. As a result, 2017 was marked for a new awakening to women’s equality. The series reflects on this moment and creates an analogy between Gilead and the current society, emphasizing the consequences of passiveness and the lack of movements for social equality when face with new legislation that puts previous earn rights at risk.

Elevating the series characters as heroines prone to inspire, catapulting the red cloak as a powerful symbol of protest and creating communities on social media, the first season of the “Handmaid’s Tale” has created tools that inspire protests, cultural production and the continuation of the discussion around the series themes.

With topical themes, the series adds to the book historical influences and together they create a frame of reference to the different periods in history where women have seen their rights being in peril. With the adapted story and the new media, the series symbols are now used worldwide to criticize political and social changes through the lenses of women’s equality.

Keywords: adaptation; The Handmaid’s Tale; feminism; dystopia, totalitarian regimes, streaming.

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Introduction

Margaret Atwood's novel *The Handmaid's Tale* was published in 1985 and was received as a long-awaited feminist dystopia (Bloom, 78). Often compared to George Orwell's *1984* and Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World*¹, *The Handmaid's Tale* is Atwood's most well-known novel to date, transforming her from a famous writer in Canada to a world-famous Canadian writer. The novel was an instant success, being adapted into plays, a radio show, a series, and a film by Volker Schlöndorff, and winning the Governor General's Award for English language fiction, the Arthur C. Clarke, and being nominated for Booker Prize award. The book also started to be taught in classrooms all over Canada and became the subject of much academic interest. Despite or because of all its success, the book became the target of much criticism both from people that thought that Atwood was going too far with feminist writing and people that did not think she went far enough. Nonetheless, the book has been read over the years as essential to the feminist movements.

The novel, written in 1985, is set in the United States in the 1980s and portrays a very near future. It develops a society called Gilead where both men and women became infertile due to a rise in pollution. Taking advantage of the chaos created by the decrease in births, a radical group called "Sons of Jacob" rises to power with a message centered on family, religion and traditional values. The group's belief is that the decline in fertility was God's punishment for all of society's sins. Operating under the ruse of creating a better society, with less sin, less pollution, and God at its center, the group maintains a grip on power by controlling all aspects of life, creates a surveillance state, and uses religion as the justification for all actions, also controlling the narrative that blames solely women for the infertility plague. With the goal of cleaning the earth of sinners in order to appease God, they kill or send into labor camps everyone that does not agree with them, killing gays, doctors that perform abortions, priests, among others. Fertile women, who are considered sinners are an exception to this fate, as they are forced to have children for wealthy and powerful families.

The story is narrated by Offred, a fertile woman living under the authoritarian regime, after being kidnapped, separated from her husband and child, and taught to be a "Handmaid", the name given to all the women that are forced to have children. The story evolves when she is living with a family called Waterford. During this period, she meets Nick, a man who

¹ Other dystopian novels written by women preceded *The Handmaid's Tale*, such as *The Memoirs of a Survivor* by Doris Lessing, *The Passion of New Eve* by Angela Carter and *The Dispossessed*, *The Left Hand of Darkness* and *The Eye of the Heron* by Ursula K. Le Guin, however Atwood as specified the two dystopias by male writers as her inspiration.

becomes her lover, and encounters a rebellious movement, Mayday. Throughout her narration, she reminisces and extrapolates over the toll of being a prisoner.

The story raises questions on the rise of totalitarian regimes, the mistreatment of women in times of war, the roles of women in history, motherhood, abortion, the women's right over their own body, environmental questions, freedom of speech, feminism, community, sisterhood, immigration, and many more issues that could never be summarized in one sentence. As Margaret Atwood claims, "Novels are not slogans, If I wanted to say just one thing I would hire a billboard. If I wanted to say just one thing to one person, I would write a letter. Novels are something else." (Bloom, 77).

The series "The Handmaid's Tale" is an adaptation of Margaret Atwood's novel, created by Bruce Miller for the streaming service Hulu. Premiered on the 26th of April 2017 and following the book footsteps, the television series has been an enormous success, having been renewed for a fourth season in 2019. The first season won 11 out of the 30 Emmys nominations, 2 out of the 3 Golden Globes nominations, and 94% on Rotten Tomatoes. The work was critically acclaimed firstly for Elizabeth Moss' performance and secondly for how it managed to transform a 35-year-old narrative into a series with enormous contemporary relevance.

This thesis will explore the adaptation of the novel into the television series and its subsequent cultural impact. Season 1, partially written by Margaret Atwood herself, follows in part the novel plot from beginning to end and establishes the series both as a TV success and a cultural success. For this reason, this text will only consider this season in order to achieve a more focused analysis of both the adaptation and its success. By framing my investigation in the period between the release of the first season and the following months, I intend to grasp the cultural meaning of the story and explain its cultural and political impact and the effect on women's movements.

The first season follows Offred, the narrator of the book, now with a name - June.² In my thesis, we will call Offred to the character from the book and June to the series character. The series' plot has similarities to the book, it continues to follow the main character and the Waterford house, however, the process of adaptation gives a new dimension to the story with the use of image and sound. Adding to the previous criticism of the 1980s political and cultural

² The main character is called Offred due to her being Commander Fred's Handmaid. In the series she is called June as part of the changes to make the character more appropriate for television.

events that we find in the novel, the series creates a different historical reference, the preceding historical moment, and a new frame of reference for the current times.

The show premiered around the 100 days mark of President Donald Trump in the White House, also around the time his administration was preparing to repeal the Affordable Care Act and cut funding to Planned Parenthood, the two programs that had given access to reproductive information, abortions, and birth control to women across the United States. It also followed the 2016 presidential election which for the first-time had had a woman candidate representing one of the major parties. The adaptation quickly gained an online presence with people all around the world referring to it to criticize political and religious organizations as this thesis will sustain. The show was praised for making the red cloth used by the Handmaids a symbol of the fight for reproductive choices and a warning against the danger of political extremisms. Not exempt from criticism, the show has been criticized for being too violent and by not putting enough emphasis on the racial divide in the United States.

In the first chapter, we will look at the adaptation process itself with the support of theories of adaptation. We will later correlate them with the choices made in creating "The Handmaid's Tale" series. As the book is part of the literary canon the work of adapting it came with great pressure to follow the original without harming its cultural and literary standing. This is very telling of the history of adaptations. Literary works were for many years regarded as superior in relation to adaptations. The original source — the literary work — was considered by some as a superior art form, demanding from adaptations that they would faithfully tell the story. As a result, adaptations have historically been devalued, seen as mere copies, secondary, parasitic works. A literary adaptation can be a transposition into different media such as film, play, video games, or to another literary genre. Because of the many options in literary adaption, we will, therefore, analyze how adaptation has been viewed from an academic standpoint, focusing especially on the book to film/television series process.

For this analysis of *The Handmaid's Tale's* adaptation, it will be preferred to regard adaptation as a "palimpsest", the concept proposed by Linda Hutcheon in her book *A Theory of Adaptation* (2006). For this author, each new adaptation adds to the original work. Keith Cohen (cited in Aragay, 18) also considers that each new adaptation adds to the overall story meaning, what he calls a "global system of meaning". Leaning on these two perspectives we will consider that there is no hierarchical relationship between the original book and its adaptation because they are independent products and the contribution between them is mutual.

As the hierarchical relationship between book and film was dismantled, a new way to evaluate the quality of an adaptation emerged. Fidelity is now only part of what is looked at to evaluate quality. Technical standards such as how the story is told, how the narration, the music and the image all work in sync, how meaning is conveyed, and how the moving image balances the dialogue with the visual are just a few examples. Other two large groups of factors now play a role, firstly the cultural and political context of the works in the moment they are created, secondly how they fit in the intertextuality between the two media and all that characterizes the story. Therefore, an adaptation is now judged not only on how well it retells a story but how it shapes itself to the new medium, how it works to accompany the original and how it adapts to the moment in which it is created. This approach will later be used also to reflect on how much the cultural capital of *The Handmaid's Tale* was changed by the series.

"The Handmaid's Tale" series adaptation differentiates itself from other successful book-to-series adaptations because it was made for Hulu, a streaming service. Streaming is a relatively new medium and in the race for each service to become the dominant one there is a large demand for new productions that will establish it as a production company and create bigger libraries of content. The evaluation of the impact of streaming is essential for the understanding of the choices that were made when adapting the novel. One of the key factors we are looking into is that the majority of streaming subscribers are women. When we consider only Hulu: in 2016 women were 62% of their subscribers (Muchneeded: n.p.). This not only shapes which series are made but also what is included in each one, resulting in series made with a female audience in mind, making an effort to both include female characters but also to give a suitable representation of female experience.

For us to look at how the representations of women vary, in this first chapter we will briefly mention how women have been included or portrayed in television and film. These media in the United States are deeply rooted in conservative values. Penny Griffin explains that "[t]he modern culture industry (...) produces safe, standardized products geared to the larger demands of the capitalism economy [...]" (31). The consequence of this "safe" product is that minorities are often left out or have very restricted representation. Women are often less present or are shown under the "male gaze" (Mulvey, 19). Women tend to have more restricted roles, only allowed to be certain types of women that fit stereotypes, from being oversexualized to not having a story arch independent of the male characters. Even when present on the screen women often comply with the patriarchy instead of challenging it.

Women of racial minorities face double jeopardy from being confined to narrow roles given to women and complying with the stereotypes imposed on their race. To give context on how the authors of "The Handmaid's Tale" series made their decisions on female representation the chapter will finish by looking at contemporary examples of female characters that have brought great success to the works and how that success has changed female representation.

In the second part of the first chapter, we will look at how in the United States abortion, birth control, political and cultural movements affect women's place in society. Starting with the history of abortion, women have always practiced abortions or some form of birth control but in the 18th century abortion was made illegal in the United States after the "quickenings", and later was made illegal at all times of pregnancy. It was in the 20th century that most feminist movements fully integrated reproductive freedom into their agenda. Birth control became a necessity for women's liberation, especially in the job arena and the equal access to birth control and sexual education for poor and women of color became by the second part of the century a priority in women's rights.

The conversation around abortion and birth control was taboo and centered on a few of these arguments: family values, racial supremacy, religious rules, and women's control by men. The recent discussion of abortion is now mostly divided into two sides, pro-life and pro-choice, being now considered a fundamental women's right visible in politics, media, and culture. Abortion and reproductive health are now a major conversation for political parties: if the state should provide equal/unequal access, free/paid services, widely available/restricted abortion, extensive/restrictive sexual education, or even if the state should have the power to control women's bodies and finally if it is a federal or a state issue. Religion and women's control over their bodies continue to be a fundamental part of the conversation but there is now a more extensive discussion on the national stage.

In 2016, the issue of women's reproductive health was one of the major topics of discussion during the presidential election. Had Hillary Clinton won, the achievement would cement the women's fight for equality. Up until 2016 women's movements had been lacking momentum and the possibility of having a woman as president raised the discussion on the standing of women in society. The popularity of feminist movements is cyclic, as we will see in our analysis of the adaptation, the first decade of the millennium was a downswing, with a phenomenon that Penny Griffin (98-106) explains as an "image problem", when women would support feminist ideals but would deny the

feminist label. By the series' release, there was a revival starting that brought women's movements to the forefront and achieved great

victories for women's equality in a short period of time. To understand the adaptation and its success it is essential to analyze how feminist and women representation was dealt with on the series.

In the second chapter, we will look at the books' author. Margaret Atwood has an extensive body of literary work ranging from poems and novels to children's books and literary criticism. Atwood, with her 58-year career, a long list of published work, and winner of some of the most prestigious awards, has become a staple of Canadian Literature but also a feminist literature icon. Since her first novel, Atwood has given life to complex female characters, having women as lead characters and creating literature that portrays female experience. Moreover, she often writes about the environment and how humans have connected with it, destroyed it, or been at its mercy.

Despite Atwood herself choosing not to identify as a "feminist", *The Handmaid's Tale's* is enrooted both in women's history and the history of the feminist movements. Already a famous and prolific Canadian author, she used her perspective as an outsider looking at the United States from Canada to fictionalize Gilead. According to the author, the book was written as an exercise of what would happen if fundamental right-wing people were let to rule with no impediments. The book took inspiration from female history and the political causes that were mainstream in the 1980s. Due to this, the book holds a strong criticism of different feminist movements that were popular before its release.

By contextualizing *The Handmaid's Tale* phenomenon in Atwood's career, we will be making clear how the latter was changed by the release of the book in 1985 and the series in 2016, how much the series was influenced by having such a famous name attached to it, as well as how that has shaped the series into becoming a feminist icon as well.

Offred's story has been often adapted since 1985. The new adaptation to a series, however, distinguished itself from the other adaptations by being in tune with the cultural and political context of the time when it was created and with the media it was used. The series is 10 episodes long and starts and finishes at similar moments as the book. The series keeps most of the more essential points of the book and also introduces a large amount of variation which we will analyze in due course.

One of the reasons this story has been adapted so often is that the book naturally lends itself to be adapted for the visual media: the story is full of color, geometrical references,

and detailed descriptions of the characters' movements. We will see how the series takes advantage of the visual media and uses these processes to convey meaning.

Narration is used in both media, the series using voice-overs. While in the book the story is only told from the point of view and knowledge of the main character, on the screen the story shows much more, there are more knowledge sources and the other characters' existence does not completely center around June. The main character's portrait suffers many changes when put on screen, in the book, she is a nameless woman, trying to survive Gilead and using her romantic relationship with Nick, the family driver and an Eye, to keep herself safe and sane. In the book, she finds about the existence of the resistance group Mayday but decides eventually on not involving herself with it. Offred can be interpreted as a fragile character, mentally trying to escape her fate instead of fighting for change. As a contrast, in the series, we find a much bolder character. June, despite similarities with the original character, becomes more fearless, more manipulative, and more focused on finding her daughter and getting out of Gilead, instead of just surviving. By interpreting these and other changes we can access the multitude of factors that went into constructing the adaptation and how these changes impacted the final message.

Race is one of the issues that most differs from the book to the series. In the book non- white people were given the chance to leave; in the series, women from every skin color are forced to stay and get no differential treatment based on skin color. The book was criticized when it came out in 1985 for using black experience but not black characters. In the series, producers decided to include characters from different races. We will look into the issue of race and how it has changed in the adaptation.

By the end of chapter two, we will also look at how the series has adapted the story to make its messages relevant in the modern-day. The book very much reflects the time it was written in. In 1985 the United States was approaching the end of second-wave feminism that brought to the forefront of national agenda women's issues such as sexuality, workplace and legal inequalities, and political participation. It was also when Regan's conservatism came to be, which emphasized voices that defended family values and religion as moral guidance for the people. The book reflects all these issues, from some of the Gilead teaching echoing politicians of the time, to different characters reflecting different feminist schools of thought. For the series to do the same reflection of its time period, changes were made both to the characters and the themes approached. Motherhood, male representation, and mirroring feminist movements are present in both media, but the series emphasizes these issues over

June's thought. Moreover, the series creates a bigger representation of women encapsulating a plethora of references to women's movements as it steps away from the duality presented by the book between "radical feminism" and non-feminists. There will also be a change in the representation of the system of oppression. From a new look at the male figures and how they comply with the regime, to the women, that have in the series a bigger role in oppressing other women.

In the final chapter, we will look at the impact of the series "The Handmaid's Tale" both on women's movements and the larger cultural, political, and social arena. From the time of its release, "The Handmaid's Tale" series reached enormous audiences all over the world: "No television event has hit such a nerve." (Wollaston: n.p.). It cannot be discarded the significance of the series having premiered in 2017 following the 2016 United States presidential race. We shall pay attention to this fact as it was a moment when "ideological conflicts" were rooted in political and cultural life. And the reemergence of conservative values was met with a wave of contradictory social movements. This phenomenon shaped the series reception and how it was used by the fans.

In the United States, women's rights over their bodies are still up for discussion and sometimes are at risk. As a result, the Handmaids' story has been looked at less as farfetched speculative fiction, and more as a story that hits close to home for all women. Issues such as abortion and birth-control are evermore political and as one side takes power over the other there is the oscillation between women's progress and its halt. We will see how women's advancement in the United States is particularly susceptible to legal power due to the power instilled on the Supreme Court to set legality through court decisions.

The success of the series does not only lay on the messages it portrays, but also on the symbols it introduced to a wider audience. Protesters against women's oppression started to use those symbols. *ABC's "Nightlight"* calls the cloak "a breakout start" and says that "It is [the cloak] catapulting the show themes of oppression against women into a cultural phenomenon". The cloak started to be used as a protest tool in Texas and quickly spread globally. By having the cloak represent the fight for rights that have been lost, the show has related to the sense of urgency in women not to let women's rights be forgotten. It gave women in protest both a way to spread their message and an inspiration to organize.

Concurrently with the red cloak, 2016 was the year when the #metoo movement and Black Lives Matter became part of a revival of movements that intend to bring

amongst other things, to the inequalities still present today in American society. As the #metoo movement only started after the first season of "The Handmaid's Tale", it did not impact the series directly, although the series has influenced the #metoo movement in many ways since then. Issues such as slut-shaming, women silencing, and work discrimination are all themes discussed in the series.

At the end of the chapter, we will look at how the series through social media and cultural creation that it has inspired, has impacted social change. From discussion groups of the series and the politics around it to commentary on Saturday Night Live skits, the series has inspired discussion around women's oppression that goes much further than the 10-episode adaptation. The series is now part of cult shows with a large following and has used its success as a guiding compass to guide its fans to wherever women's rights are being infringed on.

By the end we, will have looked at how the series has shaped public opinion, how its success was affected by the paradigm it was released in, how its messages shaped its reception, and finally how the adaption and the book work after the series achieved its success.

1. Chapter One: theory of adaptation.

1. 1. Adaptation

The series "The Handmaids' Tale" premiered on the 26 of April 2017 on the streaming platform Hulu. As an adaptation, the series to come was highly anticipated for all the fans of the book but at the same time generated many questions about how capable the streaming service would be able to transport the literary classic into the screen. In an article by *The Guardian* in April 2016, the question was raised how the series run by Bruce Miller would do justice to the female issues that the book addressed (Maloney: n.p.). The series, however, went on to become a critical acclaim success, being praised exactly for how it represented women. Nonetheless, that apprehension gives us an insight into the risk of adapting a well-known novel. The process of adaptation itself is often reduced to the mere passage from the written mode to the visual mode, however, it encompasses all the remakes between genres and media. Because in this case we are looking at the passage from a novel to a series we will focus on the process of adaptation specifically between literature to the big and small screen.

From the beginning films have turned to books for inspiration and, despite being a process that has existed since the creation of cinema, adaptation has created much turmoil between literary and film critics. According to Mirei Aragay, this is because adaptation was considered by critics as a mere copy, never having the same importance as other works of art, as it lacks "originality and "uniqueness"" (12). Virginia Woolf went as far as to compare the film to a "parasite" and the book to its "victim"(Ibid:12); however, she still considers the potential of the showing media to overcome this fate. The discussion about fidelity further injured the process, some arguing that because films could not present a story in the same way books did, film adaptation could not measure up to books. By creating this hierarchy between film and books, film critics have turned to fidelity as the main criteria to judge the quality of an adaptation and in turn created an almost impossible set of standards for one to be considered good. Between the 1950s and 60s many theorized that the book was a better art form as films are less complex, only able to hold a metaphor in a "restrictive sense" (Ibid:

13) and without the ability to have the same symbolic meaning. George Bluestone (Cited by Aragay:13) goes even further and declares films and novels "antithetical" art forms, hence adaptation being impossible. All in all, it was defended that if a film

"shows" and a book "tells" they can never be transformed into each other as they are fundamentally unable to present

the same story to the audience/readers. Moreover, the book, as the original work could shape and impact the film, but the opposite could not happen, so the apparent untouchable written word was then labeled as superior, as it did not let itself be changed.

As films later became established works of art and not just commercial products for the entertainment of the masses, films started to raise their cultural status. Around the same time, television started to be part of American households and as a result, a new “lower art” device was introduced into peoples' lives, giving at the same time, more space for the cinema to move from a product for the masses to an elite audience. Keith Cohen (Cited by Aragay: 18) was one of the first to argue that innovation in film and books that occurred in the 20th century was connected, claiming that the visual and the written medium belong to the same “global system of meaning”. Hence, Cohen tries to topple the idea of book superiority by claiming that between film and books there is an exchange of meaning that is mutual. In this perspective, adaptation stopped being viewed as a one-way process and instead started to be studied for the mutual cultural impact in both genres. Further along we will analyze how this process applies to *The Handmaid's Tale*. In brief, a literary work moved from being an original with a “timeless essence which the adaptation/copy must faithfully reproduce[d]”(Ibid:22) to a text that can be endlessly redefined and reinterpreted depending on the time and the media of the adaptation.

As the relationship between a book and a film changes it becomes imperative that a new way to evaluate the quality of an adaptation emerges. Christopher Orr claimed that the fidelity discourse “Impoverishes the film intertextuality”, by focusing on how we can copy the book we will be losing how much the adaptation can contribute in itself to art and culture (Cited by Aragay: 19). Today fidelity is one of many guidelines use to analyze an adaptation. When looking at an adaptation we will emphasize less the formalistic concerns and more the context of production (Aragay: 25) and the intertextual factors that shaped the final product. Two major groups of factors are hence analyzed when looking at an adaptation, all having to do with the context—the economic, cultural, and political—, and all that surrounds the intertextuality of the text, the analysis of both works in the different media and how they culturally contribute to each other. Robert Stam explains this last point: “Film adaptations (...) are caught up in the ongoing whirl of intertextual reference and transformation, of text generating other texts in an endless process of recycling, transformation, with no clear point of origin” (Aragay: 25). By studying the intertextuality of the texts, we can deduce the impact of the adaptation in the spider web of cultural references. Moreover, by studying the

this way, the study of adaptation helps to change the relationship between the book and the film from a hierarchical one, made of binaries and only impacting in one direction to a relationship where both works benefit from each other's success. Intertextuality then, helps to discredit the claim of the book superiority.

When it comes to adaptation from a book to a television series or film, the fact that far more people see the series or the film than read the book, or the fact that a lot of people will only read the book after seeing its adaptation adds to the dimension of the adaptation as a rewriting of the book. However, this implies that an adaptation needs to both stand on its own and be linked with a previous work (Hutcheon, 2006: 85).

Of the total of 141 films nominated for the Oscar for best picture between 2001 and 2018, 90 were adaptations (64%) (Marlow: n.p.). On Netflix the list of book adaptations is extensive, series like "The House of Haunting Hill" or "House of Cards" and films like "Bird Box" are just a few examples of how the biggest successes of 2018 Netflix originals were adaptations. Linda Hutcheon (Hutcheon: 4) argues that part of the pleasure of an adaptation comes from repetition with variation, this reasoning being suited both to the maker and the viewer. From a financial standpoint, adaptations are desired as they ensure a certain guaranteed success. So much so that historically Hollywood has turned to adapting classic novels in times of crisis, as they know they will be successful (Hutcheon: 5). Moreover, novels bring with them an existing fan-base that is guaranteed to see the film/series, and, as multiple adaptations are made from the same book, as in the case of *The Handmaid's Tale*, the audience gets bigger each time the story is remade. For example, a person might not have read Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaids' Tale* but might have seen the film and that leads them to see the series.

Today big film companies even buy the rights to books they know will make a big profit, so that later they can roll with different types of adaptation from one single story. Netflix had in 2019 aggressively acquired book rights (Wood: n.p.) from relatively new literary works to classics such as Gabriel García Márquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude* (Spangler: n.p.). This rush to aggressively acquire book rights by large streaming companies opens the door for different literary works to reach the world stage. However, adaptation is a process that adds to, critiques, and changes the original story, and having this power given to colossal production companies such as Netflix or Hulu risks the loss of the writer's voice, the original message, or the roots where it came from. As an example, the film "The Human Stain", an adaptation of Philip

Roth's book with the same name, overlooks some of the book analysis into

race and instead casts Anthony Hopkins, a white actor, to play a biracial character, and removes most of the social criticism of American cultural values and contemporary society and politics that was present in the book.

Books increase the popularity of films/series, but the opposite is a possibility as well. The book *The Handmaid's Tale* has sold 8 million copies since its release in 1985(Charles: n.p.). Since the American presidential election in 2016, it has sold 3 million copies (Merritt: n.p), in fact, the book was the most read book on Amazon in 2017 (Amazon.com: n.p.). The series may not be the only reason for the book spike in sales, since dystopian books have sold better in general, and *1984* sold seven times more books in 2017 than in 2016. However, *The Handmaid's Tale*, which sold 22 times more in 2017 than in 2016, was featured one month before the series started in a Super Bowl Sunday commercial, and just a few days later the book planted itself in the Amazon bestseller list where it stayed all through the series release (Trombetta: n.p.). *Alias Grace*, another Margaret Atwood's book got a 100% spike in Google searches when in October 2017 Netflix started to stream the series adaptation worldwide. So, despite dystopic books in general having had a rise in sales, the name Margaret Atwood became a household name in part with the help of the series made from her books.

1.2.Streaming

The film industry started to be a “low-brow, popular form of entertainment” (Aragay: 2). Appealing to the working classes and relying on realistic narratives and classic dramas, films took a few years to be viewed as a proper art-form. In the 1950s television became a phenomenon, appearing in households all across The United States and, up to a point, taking away the title of “entertainment of the masses”. Film and television have now very different places in society. While film, with its many categories, is often seen as elitist, television, being flooded with all types of reality television, filler shows, and huge amounts of commercials, is often questioned as an art form (Dixon: 42).

Both television and film have been through multiple stages of existence, but streaming has come to change how series and films are made, how they are seen and where they fit into cultural significance. Netflix started in 1979 as a DVD rental company and started streaming online videos in 2007; Hulu started as well in 2007 with immediate streaming services and Amazon started their streaming services in 2006. Netflix was the first to offer a subscribing base model, the others followed later, and

they became the top three streaming services. The

reason why they are essential when talking about adaptation is that similarly to films, when a new medium is introduced, it exists a large demand for content and it is with adaptations that this demand is usually met. The necessity for large catalogs of content increases with the subscription business model, as people will usually only sign up for one or two out of the many services that exist today. Netflix and Hulu, for example, on their outset "aggressively acquired streaming content"(Dixon, 7) but as license deals are very expensive both services have turned to making original content in order to gain customer allegiance (Ibid). Netflix alone had a 7 billion dollars budget for new content in 2017, Amazon 4.5 billion, and Hulu 2 billion. This strategy of creating heaps of new content is being successful as these services are becoming more powerful. With large budgets streaming services are also succeeding in creating some quality content for their users: Netflix won 15 Emmys in 2018 and Hulu with just "The Handmaid's Tale" season 1 won 8 Emmys and 2 Golden Globes. This new way of distributing content is also essential as it changes the way series are consumed and in turn how they are produced. With a large emphasis on detail to allow for multiple watching and a bigger emphasis on ambitious plots to different a series from the large amount of content a user can choose from.

Adaptation from telling to showing deeply affects the target audience of each work. Even when a famous book is adapted to a series it is done with the purpose of grabbing the original fanbase and increasing it. Even when a book has sold well, is part of the canon, or is part of the literary cult with a large fanbase, series will almost always reach higher audiences worldwide, due to requiring less commitment, often being more widely available, and being easier to reach. Besides the long and steady decline of literature consumers, in terms of profit translating subtitles is a much quicker and sometimes a more available process than book translation. Moreover, while books entail commitment, series, on the contrary, can be watched passively which changes techniques used to grab the audience. To study the audience of a work is pertinent, because audiences depend on the time and the medium, and for each type of audience the object gets a new meaning (Selby and Cowdery: 9). However, an idealized audience exists for each work. For *The Handmaid's Tale* adaptation the target audience was generally, as I mentioned before, the book fans. But also, because the content was intended for streaming, there is a larger but simultaneously more specific target audience. Streaming is changing the way television is made from cable television where there was an intended group for each show, to streaming services that know exactly who is watching their shows. Streaming platforms have the ability to gather information on gender, age, users' reception, and much

more. Consequently, this data permits them to tailor-make shows for specific groups, being able to foresee their probable success.

One of the first factors to look into is age. Streaming services are a relatively new technology with a younger user, Hulu average subscriber age is thirty-one, twenty-five years younger than cable television viewers (Muchneeded.com: n.p.), this trend of young viewers spreading across to other platforms such as YouTube and Netflix (Fletcher: n.p.) (Iqbal:n.p.). Younger people are in fact moving away from traditional ways of television watching, moving from group watching on large television screen to more personal viewership on personal desktops (Logan: n.p.). They flock to streaming because they are demanding more freedom to decide what to watch and when to watch it, don't want to waste time with advertisements, and binge-watching has become a common practice. So, streaming services are making their new shows with young adults in mind. Hulu's series "Castle Rock", "The Handmaid's Tale" and Netflix series "Stranger Things" are examples of three series which were made with the younger subscriber in mind, they are binge-watch worthy, they portray complex stories and not just light entertainment to enjoy with the family and, moreover, many new streaming services are taking advantage of the fact that their programs don't necessarily mean family time to explore complex plots with plenty of horror, violence, or sexual themes. The fact that shows can be very audience-specific allows for more liberty, putting away many traditional formats.

Another audience characteristic very pertinent to streaming services is related to gender. In 2017 Hulu subscribers were 62% women (Dreier: n.p.), before 2017 Netflix (Iqbal: n.p.) users were also 57% women, and even though the number has lowered to 51%, the importance of the female viewer has left a mark on those platforms' original programs. Netflix, with programs such as "Orange is the New Black", "Unbelievable" and "Sense 8", has created inclusive television with significant representation not only of women but also of different sexual orientations, transgenders, and multiracial groups. Hulu followed in the same footsteps with "The Handmaid's Tale" and "Harlots". The reason why such series are so important for streaming services is that having more people represented will attract a bigger audience. Moreover, attracting younger audiences is of most importance as not only are young adults their biggest subscribers but also attracting young people will mean they can be paying clients for many years to come.

1.3. Representation on screen

"The Handmaid's Tale" is thus, in part, the result of the streaming era. The show appeals to Hulu's majority women subscriber base, has the potential, if well done, to help establish Hulu's productions, is on the list of the highest budget shows made by streaming platforms, and entices binge-watching and repeat watching. The adaptation was streamed in the United States first and later was sold to other streaming platforms or television channels around the world reaching an audience much bigger and much more diverse than the original market. Furthermore, although the show touches upon issues that are extremely divisive, the fact that it is able to reach a large enough audience gives it the liberty of not having to please everyone. Finally, it has much more freedom than a show made for cable which would have stricter guidelines to be able to reach a larger number of people. In fact, the series "The Handmaid's Tale" was such a success for the streaming company that Hulu credits the majority of its user growth from 2017 to 2018 on the series (Muchneeded.com: n.p.).

The question of female representation, i.e., women's presence on the big and small screen has to be also taken into consideration if we want to understand better the show's success. For this analysis, we will use two concepts, the concept of mass media and class media as they appear in *Racism, Sexism and The Media* by Wilson, Gutiérrez and Chao. In this book the authors put forward the idea that television and film have been racist and sexist because they were made as mass media in a capitalist society:

As advertisers demanded mass audiences for their products, media corporations responded by adopting news and entertainment strategies that would attract the largest numbers of people. At that time, the people targeted by the mass media in the United States were White, many of them European immigrants looking to the media to learn about the people of their new nation. Men and women of color, such as Blacks, Latinos, Native Americans, and Asian Pacific Americans, were treated by the media as fringe audiences, not large enough in number to influence the content directed to the mass audience. (Wilson, Gutiérrez and Chao: 50)

The earlier framers of the Constitution foresaw journalism as having a policing role in both the government and the community and, therefore, it was given complete freedom under the protection of the First Amendment (Ibid, 48 – 50). But across the

centuries media outlets started to run with almost no supervision from the government and, instead of relying

on public funds as in other countries, in the United States media was left to be run like a business relying on paying costumers but mostly on advertisements to make a profit (Ibid). As a result, the media, instead of becoming a class media meaning media created for small groups, became a mass media, trying to get as much audience as possible in order to be attractive for advertisers.

Penny Griffin explains how intertwined popular culture and consumer culture are: "The modern culture industry (...) produces safe, standardized products geared to the larger demands of the capitalism economy..." (Griffin, 31). As a consequence, many issues such as religion, race, sexuality and ethnicity became taboo. Minorities were pushed out of media representation as the goal was to please the consumer market and maintain the status quo so that the advertisers were kept happy. Media was made by the majority of society to the majority of society, and by "majority" it is meant those who had the purchasing power, meaning white males (Wilson, Gutiérrez and Chao: 50). To sell to the biggest number of people, including minorities, advertisements created a collective consciousness where they could feel included whilst not being represented (Ibid: 50-53).

In the absence of personal contact, alternative portrayals, and broadened news coverage, such one-sided stereotypes and news coverage could easily become reality in the minds of the White mass audience. Whites were seen in a wide range of roles in movies, ranging from villains to heroes. In contrast, until the late 1960s there were no government or industry-wide efforts to provide alternative media portrayals and coverage to counteract the mass media stereotypes of people of color in a society where they had less than equal standing with Whites. (Ibid:53)

With time, as the country got more diverse, minorities got more power, and technologies evolved, a bigger range of available media was created. There was then a move from mass media to class media, where people are targeted according to their race, age, sex, residence, religion and/or political orientation (Wilson, Gutiérrez and Chao). Notwithstanding, popular culture inherited much of the mass media singularities: "popular culture is necessarily conservative, since it works in the interests of those in power, helping to maintain the status quo by pacifying the masses and justifying capitalism." (Griffin, 2015: 31).

As concerns the representation of minorities, such as African Americans or women, in the entertainment history specifically, films have established the pattern of "portraying American Blacks as intellectually and morally inferior to whites (...)"

Chao: 63), and television evolved into a major industry where black men and women started to be featured but almost always as secondary characters, guest appearances, or portraying criminals, or characters with less complexity and based on old stereotypes. A few exceptions existed in comedies such as "The Cosby Show "or "Living Color".

As relates to women, "In tv and film, women are traditionally not the protagonist (the subject of narrative), but the object of the protagonist's desire (the subject of fantasy) (Griffin, 10). Women are not only less present than men on screen but when they do appear, they are often oversexualized (Ibid, 56), subservient to men, confined to the domestic arena, or playing secondary roles to motivate the main characters, when it comes to action films or when we look at reality television, women often follow the dumb girl trope by glorifying stupidity (Ibid: 137). Frequently women representations are also divided into virgin or whore categories and are allowed no flexibility outside those categorizations.

The scenario is worst when considering women of color or women from religious minorities, who have been mostly left out or misrepresented for almost the entirety of film and television history. Depending on their ethnic group, specific roles have been reserved for them: for black women the role of uneducated mothers, for Latinas hipper-sexual roles, for Middle Eastern roles of oppressed women, and for white Asian women, the one of geisha girls or exotic prostitutes (Wilson, Gutiérrez and Chao, 83 - 88). As an example of the lack of women in film history, the first woman of color nominated for an Oscar were Hattie MacDaniel in 1940 for Best Supporting Actress and Dorothy Dandridge in 1954 for best actress, but only in 2002, 74 years after the first Oscar ceremony, did Halle Berry win again the award. The first Asian woman to be nominated for best actress was Anglo-Indian Merle Oberon in 1935, she didn't win the award, and since then no other Asian woman was nominated.

According to Penny Griffin, in her book *Popular Culture, Political Economy and the Death of Feminism* the reason to exclude women and minorities from lead roles is that studios consider films led by white males more profitable, despite the fact that the numbers don't support their considerations. "Wonder Woman" was the third highest-ranking movie of the DC comics franchising, and "Beauty and the Beast" the second highest-grossing film of 2017. In 2018 "Black Panther" was the highest-grossing film of the year. As more inclusive films continue to outdo box office expectations, the question lingers on why women are given less quantity and quality leading roles: "(...) the modern-day Hollywood studio has learned to rationalize male leads in supposedly

Victorian critics saw the female written novel as inferior (Thornham, 12), for being too sentimental, too domestic, and based on observation. Women's writing was seen as a "product of their femininity" and not eligible as canonical/high-culture material. A great part of television is, in the same way, considered a feminine media, with programs reflecting society, with an emphasis on daily life, family and the maternal, and an abundance of trivial information or even lightweight shows such as reality television and sitcoms. Programs that deviate from this trend are considered "serious programs" and are viewed as masculine. Serious, differential, and critical programs tend to be viewed as masculine, and trivial ones tend to be viewed as female.

There is a general tendency to leave women out of what is seen as "serious" programs that shape public opinion or critical thought. Female underrepresentation works both by excluding women and by the subalternation of topics related to the female experience. There are many types of narratives made with female audiences in mind, the examples ranging from melodramas, soap operas to "chick flick" and romantic comedies. The plots are often filled with romantic themes, giving emphasis not on moral, intellectual, social or political values but instead engaging mostly on the personal and sentimental. Shows and books that are mostly about the female experience tend to be grouped as subpar works, and being "female works" becomes a major factor in the conversation on their quality.

Furthermore, a work being made for women does not equate to having an accurate representation of women's experience. These works can rely heavily on stereotypical representations of women. Although reducing characters to stereotypes is a process often used in film and television, especially in comedy, women tend to be reduced to stereotypes across all genres, not only when they are secondary characters but even when they are the main characters. While white men may be rendered to stereotypes for a certain purpose in the narrative, women often have stereotypes as their only representation. A few examples are the nagging wife, usually to create an obstacle to the male hero in the story, the hot-headed sexpot, and the successful professional woman but emotionally unfulfilled.

Women often find themselves being portrayed under the male gaze (Mulvey, 19), being looked at instead of looking, being over-sexualization, or being the victims of violence, and lacking complexity. Despite having their body present, they are often absent from the plot or only exist to validate the male story, become voiceless, and deprived of autonomy. Moreover, in "women's films", which intend to make a woman

the center of the story, the male gaze creates a contradiction. When female characters are put into narratives that are

traditionally for male characters, they often lose traits of kindness, humaneness, and motherliness. "In appropriating the 'male gaze', the female 'hero' has stepped into the 'masculine' position, and for this she will be punished both narratively and by the loss of the 'feminine' characteristics." (Thornham, 69).³

Finally, movies and television series predominantly made with a female audience in mind tend to comply with the patriarchal message and consequentially maintain the ideology of the status quo by having women being the center of the stories but still having them shown according to that patriarchal paradigm. These shows and films work in the end by having the woman come to terms with the patriarchal society instead of challenging it. Also, because these films and shows use pre-made tropes, they result in having similar problems when it comes to women representation. The male savior, the domestic sphere, the lack of professional fulfillment, the underplay of moral and political interests and the lack of female agency are just some of the issues of these female characters. By constantly misrepresenting female characters they contribute to the normalization of patriarchal ideals.

The lack of female representation is also associated with the lack of females working behind the camera. For example, in 2019, there was not a single woman nominated for best director and in the last five years out of the twenty-five nominations, only one was a woman. The power of conservatism in Hollywood and television history continues to be very strong, despite minorities being increasingly visible, changes come slowly. The power structure, the business model, and the targets to gather more advertisements stay the same, so the product also stays the same. Streaming, however, is tackling this problem head-on, and, despite still having a long way to go, the change in the business model has allowed some flexibility.

The demand for new production in streaming platforms and a new business model has given the opportunity to create a new generation of content where the conservatism of past productions was partially left behind. Firstly, the audience changes, through time minorities in the United States have become economically more powerful and are now a much bigger part of the audience. Secondly, globalization has made it harder to maintain the overwhelmingly

³ This practice happens often in police shows, when women are the wives of the male police main characters, they tend to be motherly and sensitive, but when women become the investigators they lose those traits and become "cold, driving, ambitious, manipulating, just like the men whose positions (they have) usurped." (Thornham, 69). Examples of this practice are plenty, just to name a few, Dr. Temperance "Bones" in "Bones", which represents the geek sidekick with no social ability and femininity, or Jessica Pearson, a lawyer in the series "Suits", who sacrifices her personal life for her professional life. Examples of shows that have recently broken the practice are: "Unbelievable", with women investigators as career driven but with different degree of family orientation, and

"Criminal Minds" that portrays a gay woman investigator navigating through a male heterosexual dominated field.

white male presence. According to Penny Griffin, this has been viewed by global audiences as the Americanization of entertainment (Griffin, 45). Hollywood has time and again blamed audiences for their own unwillingness to put women front and center. The movie industry continues to cater to men, special male teenagers, and continues to assume men are not interested in stories led by women.⁴

As a response to this lack of interest to represent women as full autonomous characters within plots outside the male benefit, streaming platforms have taken upon themselves to current this absence. "Bird Box", a film starring Sandra Bullock has become the most stream film of all time by being watched on Netflix by 45 million people just in the first week. The film plot not only revolves around a woman but tackles issues of motherhood, adoption and female independence. "Unbelievable" has mostly female characters and analyses issues such as rape culture, women not being believed, victim-blaming, sexism in law enforcement, and social ramification of rape. Moreover, streaming services are actively making films and series with important, complex female characters immersed in works that are neither female nor male, and instead, just have more representation as a norm and not as the exception. Series such as "The Crown" and "The Hunting of Hill House", two series with great female representation have scored 8.7 and 8.8 on IMBD ratings. And series with non- white leads such as "Sense 8", "Killing Eve" and "When They See Us" have IMDB scores of 8.4, 8.3 and 9. All in all, it seems that creating women and minorities with the same importance and agency as white men has been a good bet for streaming services.⁵

In the second chapter we will see how "The Handmaid's Tale" works on all these advances in streaming and representation to create a series that is female-driven, with different female representations, and showing female experience in new and innovative ways. We will also look at race to see how the show transforms a book about a white nation into a series where race becomes an essential topic of discussion due to the decision made in the

⁴ Women are still represented in confining roles despite being 52% of the movie goers in 2016 (Montpelier). To make matters worse, as Hollywood started to catch up on the fact that films led by females could be box office successes, the previously mentioned "female films" were made, that take advantage of the lack of female representation, making second grade films where women are leads. They enjoy large profits as women will go to theaters to watch them (Griffin, 123). Examples of these films are plentiful, such as "The Twilight Saga" and the "Magic Mike" films, despite having a big success in box office, they do not have women represented in any revolutionary way.

⁵ In fact, many shows now consciously deviate from the Hollywood standard as a way to grab audiences. For example, "Westworld", a television series which begins showing female characters as decoration and uses the

adaptation process. As we have seen, women's stories are often devalued and have been overlooked by Hollywood, but we will look at how Hulu took advantage of this blank space to create one of the most successful shows of 2017.

1.4. Precedent: abortion, birth control and feminist movements.

In order for us to understand "The Handmaid's Tale" series in full, the decisions made when adapting and its subsequent impact it is imperative that we first mention the historical, political and cultural background. Firstly, the crux of the book is women's self-determination over their bodies and reproductive choices, and in the adaptation, this continues to be of most importance. Secondly, the book's historical reference, using the discourse of women's oppression popularized in the United States during the Victorian era, using as inspiration historical events of women's oppression, and reflecting on the rise of Evangelists as political and media influencers. Moreover, it seeks inspiration from popular feminist voices for its characters. Finally, the success of the series, as we will see, is enrooted in the current trends of feminism.

To understand the adaptation's reference to the past and the reflection on the present, looking at the history behind birth control is imperative, following its brief history of the movements for birth control in the United States, and focusing more on the 20th and 21st century. Throughout history, birth control has functioned in society in some way or another since the origin of time to regulate sexual practices, control population, and women's sexuality. With industrialization, smaller families were more popularized as a result of health care improvement, lower death rate for pregnant women, lower infant mortality, and increase in the cost of living. (Gordon, 11). To lower the number of childbirths the ideology regarding sex and motherhood had to change, and it did. Victorian prudery, sexual repression, avoidance of non-reproductive sex inside the marriage, and birth-control were a few of the methods used in order to control population growth (Gordon: 23).

Abortion is not a modern invention, women always found ways to get rid of unwanted pregnancies even against social norms, laws, and health risks. "To get rid of an unwanted pregnancy, a woman would move progressively from the least to the most dangerous procedures, stopping at whichever works" (Shorter: 178). As Edward Shorter observes, women have infringed on themselves unspeakable violence in order to end an unwanted

pregnancy⁶ (180). With advances in medicine, the procedure of ending a pregnancy has become safer, bringing nonetheless a new set of moral problems which in many cases have contributed to hindering the advances made possible by technology.

Freedom of reproductive rights has always been hand in hand with women's liberation. Women were left at the mercy of numerous childbirths throughout their life that could eventually lead to their death: "In most series of statistics, married women in their fertile years had higher mortality rates than single women and (...) their husbands" (Shorter, 240). Abortion was a way to avoid this predicament, without it the women's only possibility of family planning was abstinence and for many that was not a choice. Moreover, sex outside of the marriage institution was not accepted, so women saw abortion as a way to escape social retaliation if they were to be discovered. Abortion and sometimes infanticide were often a result of female desperation, either because of health, economic or social reasons. Abortion, until the 1870s, was not just mere contraception, but an answer to women trying to survive.

"Before the nineteenth century there were no laws against abortion done in the first months of pregnancy. Until then the Protestant churches had gone along the Catholic tradition that before the 'quickening' (...) abortion was permissible." (Gordon, 1990: 52). England only made abortion illegal in 1803, and as a consequence, it also became illegal in the United States, as it followed the English common law. The law stated that abortion was illegal after the "quickening", at which point the baby was considered to have "life" (Shorter, 52). By making it illegal, women were left with no reproductive choices, being at the mercy of the man and oftentimes in a worst economic situation than before

By the 1850s/60s, abortion was still a common practice in America.⁷ Women did not see abortion as a sin and tended to not consider abortion in the beginning of the pregnancy as illegal or immoral. *The New York Times* calculated that in New York alone there were two hundred full-time abortionists, clinics were spread out across cities and there were even

⁶ Some ways to end pregnancies ranged from using herbs, binding, to women purposively throwing themselves down stairs. The most effective methods were usually abdominal massages and different types of drugs (Shorter, 180). Some methods came from experience performed by professional abortionists, others came from folklore legends. The methods chosen varied by the access to the knowledge and the money to pay for that knowledge. Together with remedies to help childbirth and to relief menstruation pains, the medicine behind abortions was usually kept among women, which drugs to take and where to get them was part of "women's culture" outside the "established medicine" which was male dominated (Shorter, 180). Many abortions ended in the death of the women due to infections and other types of complications. However, it is impossible to know how many were successful as successful abortions went always undetected and women only recurred to doctors when their attempts went wrong (Shorter, 191-197).

⁷By 1860, despite the prohibition of abortions, they continued to operate in broad daylight as judges refused to enforce the laws (Gordon: 57).

advertised in newspapers.⁸ Due to a large number of abortions and the decline of fertility in the 1870s an antiabortion propaganda started with the goal of changing that mentality around the procedure⁹. In 1871 *The New York Times* called abortion “The evil of the Age.” (Gordon, 2002: 25). The goal of the antiabortion campaign was to persuade women to stop the practice by scaring them, shaming them or appealing to their religious values.

Campaigns for and against abortion gained more attention in times when women's rights advanced. Conservatives blamed the low fertility rates and high abortion practices to the number of women attending school for longer. The claim was that higher education “drain[ed] women's reproductive energies and reduce[d] their fertility” (Freedman, 214). In fact, as women started to be part of the wage labor force and became a more educated group, abortion has become a more preeminent issue. The antiabortionist campaigns did not succeed in diminishing the number of abortions but did affect how it was seen in society. Birth control, something performed by women either as a precaution or as an act of survival or desperation becomes through the years a social issue with many factors involved. From family size to doctors' responsibility, economic motivation, or even moral questions all became part of the large conversation that is the right of women to choose their reproductive life.

The fight for reproductive rights grew in the feminist movements after the 1870s. Groups started to demand abortion through the voluntary motherhood cause. Three major groups were drawn to it, suffragists, moral reformers, and members of small free-love groups (Gordon, 1990: 95). In these three groups, there were all types of feminists, radical, liberal, conservative, with different ideas of what the Women's Movement should be. By the end of the century, some consensus was reached, the commitment to voluntary motherhood started to include a larger commitment to women's rights (Ibid: 109). Feminists addressed issues as the double standard of sexuality for males and females, and talked to women about the advantage of having fewer children and achieve happier and healthier marriages, although in some more conservative sectors of the Women's Movement the idea that women could fight for sexual pleasure and for better marriages where they were equal was still unthinkable during this period (Gordon, 1990: 109).¹⁰ Victorian values stayed in the foundation of more

⁸ Linda Gordon gives the example: “Another standard euphemism for abortion was 'relief' or 'removing obstacles' 'A great and Sure Remedy for Married Ladies ... Price \$5...'” (Gordon, 54).

⁹ Some doctors joined this campaign as a response to increasingly prudish public moralism. By 1860, despite the prohibition of abortions, abortion clinics continued to operate in broad daylight as judges refused to enforce the laws (Gordon: 57).

¹⁰ It was widely agreed that it was up to the husband to make the decision on when to have children, and many feminists at the time supported this position as they followed the Victorian ideal of family. Because the Victorians believed in chastity until marriage, they defended that not having birth control guaranteed that men would be

conservative parts of society and would for many years hinder women's liberation. The ideals defended by the Victorians would inspire the defense of family values

By the turn of the 19th century abortion was outlawed in all stages of pregnancy and the "quickening" exception was lost. The only exception was if the mother's life was in danger, and only a doctor could make that decision. This led to unequal access to legal and safe abortion depending on class. The path to becoming widely acceptable in feminist movements took a curious turn.

Eugenics was a movement that had a big influence on the way the State dealt with reproduction. Eugenics was motivated among other reasons by the white population decline, white Anglo-Saxons believed that women were putting the race in danger by not reproducing. The argument for "race suicide" started in the 1870's when doctors realized that the foreign-born, i.e. immigrants had more children. Moreover, as previously mentioned, college-educated women married less, married later, and had fewer children. The fear was that the poor would "crowd out the rich" (Gordon, 1990: 138). The argument of "race-suicide" worked to condemn women that worked outside the home who were accused of being selfish and abandoning the home, which was their place. Gordon refers to Theodore Roosevelt's views: "In March 1905 the president of the United States attacked birth control. Theodore Roosevelt condemned the tendency toward smaller families as decadent, a sign of moral disease. Like others who worried about race suicide, he specifically attacked women, branding those who avoided having children as "criminal against the race... the object of contemptuous abhorrence by healthy people." (2002: 87). The president's comments, propelled suffragettes, until then mostly quiet about the birth control movement, to speak out for the first-time. At the same time, many conservative feminists started to demand birth control programs and sexual education as a way to propel women. The birth control movement became an important issue of the Women's Movement and not just a small part of it. This led, for the first-time, to the feminist movement rejection of the "Cult of Motherhood". Women's rights groups up to then had fought for volunteer motherhood and the suffrage arguing these two factors would improve motherhood, but now they started to question it all together and fight for women's contribution outside the domestic sphere: "(...) the lasting result of the race-suicide

committed to marrying women, as women would not risk getting pregnant outside the marriage, since marriage in the nineteenth century was essential for the women economic survival (Gordon, 1990: 110). Those feminists thought that if birth control was legal, sex outside marriage would increase even further, leading to men's greater freedom to have sex outside marriage. Also, it was a way to ensure women didn't stray from marriage either. And, finally, motherhood was fulfilling to many women and without it it was feared they would lose self-esteem. All in all, feminists from Victorian time believed that motherhood was a way to keep women and men in accordance with their ideals of family.

controversy was that feminist and professional women previously silent on the subject now committed themselves publicly and lastingly to birth control." (Gordon, 1990: 142)

After 1910, as sexual attitudes shifted, there was a general feeling that the time for birth control had arrived (Gordon, 1990: 189). The idea of volunteer motherhood was left behind, and sex and reproduction stopped being synonyms. By the 1920s, the war was over and the "sexual revolution" associated with the flappers and jazz was in full effect (Gordon, 1990: 190). Feminists believed that birth control could eliminate many human miseries and fundamentally alter social and political power relations, as well as create greater sexual and class equality (Gordon, 1990: 207). For women, birth control had become more than ever a necessity to live in the new society as "New women".

With the Great Depression, the birth control movement did not strive as much as in the years before, many families now needed more than ever to reduce in size but because the Movement didn't associate with the working class, the access to reliable birth control continued to be exclusive of the upper and middle class, and the movement struggled. In the 1930s, the Supreme Court overturned aspects of the law and made it illegal for doctors to recommend birth control methods to women. When the New Deal was implemented, the future of birth control relied heavily on being promoted by social workers and accepted into other State programs. Also, by then birth control had become a lucrative industry, however, there were still many state laws that prohibited advertisement and the spread of information. By denying people better information, the industry managed to deceive many people into buying defective products (Gordon, 1990: 321). During the 1920s/30s birth control clinics started to appear, providing better education and access.¹¹ One of the problems of preventive birth control was that there was no social distinction between them and abortion, which continued to be a sinful act, surrounded by social stigma. Only through time did contraceptives become legal and regulated, starting to become more acceptable.¹²

In 1938 the organization that would later become Planned Parenthood, Federation of America (PPFA) was created. The legacy of this organization was that it made birth control an issue of the family instead of a women's issue. In the 1940s Planned Parenthood incorporated

¹¹ Teaching about contraceptive methods of coitus interruptus and condoms, recently made popular by the armed forces, the douche, which was widely ineffective, and the diaphragm.

¹² Women with money could secure doctors that specialized in birth control and would provide the information necessary, however, poor women, even with access to doctors, were often left at the mercy of doctors who thought of birth control as a stepping stone to moral depravation: "(...) rich had access to more effective contraceptives,

sponges, pessaries, suppositories, and douches, whereas poor women were forced to rely on abortion as a primary form of birth control." (Gordon, 1990: 70).

“reproduction control into state programs as a form of social planning” (Gordon, 1990: 345). The association allowed women greater independence by providing birth control for women that before had no access to it. Although not without its problems, the PPFA, offered birth- control and sex counseling, but regarded sex only within the marriage.

When the Second World War began, the Feminist Movement realized that black communities still had the lowest concentration of birth control clinics, other public health programs, and social work, without even mentioning that black women were disproportionately sterilized. Although black women accepted birth control with as much enthusiasm as white women, the problem relied on the fact that the different movements for birth control had alienated both poor women and women of color (Gordon, 1990: 354). By the 1950s, birth control moved farther away from the women's movement and into population control. Planned Parenthood and the laws on birth control became increasingly dominated by doctors and lawyers instead of the people who needed them and experienced the problems associated with them. Government institutions became distanced from women's reality, the public agenda was out of women's hands and reform was needed.

In 1959 the American Law Institute drafted a document that would expand legal abortion to certain circumstances while still maintaining its illegality in most cases. When in 1961 there was a spread of a type of measles that caused birth defects, the fact that the women affected could not perform abortions, made the urgency of a reform a matter of public concern (McBride, 12). Four years later, the Supreme Court ruled on *Griswold v. Connecticut* which made it illegal for states to criminalize birth control in married people, but not abortions.

The feminist movement in the 1960s, later labeled Second-Wave feminism, made many advances and showed a notorious change in goals of what was women's equality. The movement to decriminalize abortions mobilized itself in organizing conferences and committees to try to change the laws. In this era, one of the focus of the feminist movements was on women's right to their bodies and the right to be heard, and the right to be in charge of their own health and not be at the mercy of the male medical establishment, since their experience was being taken out of the legal and hegemonic discourse (McBride, 2008: 13).

In the 1960s and 70s, women started to create women support associations, and made large manifestations but most importantly feminist movements focused on changing laws, by putting its efforts into court cases: “By 1971, a majority of Americans

by early 1973, a stunning 57 percent of Americans, (...) agreed that the abortion decision should be left to the woman and her doctor.” (McBride, 14). During this time feminist movements were able to change the abortion conversation from population control and family planning to an issue essential to women's equality. With this change, women regained a collective mentality and saw anti-abortion laws as oppressive and restrictive of their rights by not allowing control over their own bodies.

By 1973, states started to implement laws that allowed abortion in specific situations, but the opposition to the legalization of abortion also grew. In the same year, two cases made history, *Roe v. Wade* and *Doe v. Bolton*, two Supreme Court cases on which it was decided that the State could not interfere in the woman's decision to have an abortion before the third trimester: “Within a year of the ruling the mortality rate for abortion fell from eighteen to three deaths per hundred thousand women, making the procedure far less risky than childbirth” (Freedman, 237).

The legalization of abortion in the United States was a historical moment for women's rights and it marked a new stage both for the movements for and against the legalization of abortion. After the legalization, those who opposed abortion started immediately the efforts to limit it or revoke it. Because it was made legal through a Supreme Court decision, there were two ways to revoke it: through a new decision, although this would be very difficult due to the power of precedents in the courts, or through a Constitutional amendment, which would be also very unlikely as it required two-thirds of the votes of the House of Representatives. The debate over abortion motivated both sides to take action, the issue became largely discussed in the media, in the courts, and in the political arena. Two major movements emerged, the pro-choice, defending the legal and easy accessibility of abortion and information, and the pro-life, defending the immorality of abortion, the need to outlaw it or to restrict it in most cases. The two groups usually fought on opposite sides on issues such as sexual education, birth control and state funding for women's health, among many others. Pro-life is often associated with the right-wing, Republicans and religious ideals, while the pro-choice has been associated with the Democratic party, sometimes more left-leaning and in favor of women's equality, although the line is not well defined, as often we find pro-choice on both sides of the aisle and the same goes for pro-life.

The Court decision in *Roe v. Wade* with a 7-2 vote was made possible as the issue of abortion was not yet divided between party lines to the extent that it is today. Since then as abortion became a major platform on political parties it is assumed that the court judges will

vote according to their party platform. This results in a heightened importance in choosing Supreme Court seats as having a majority increases the chances to either revoke or maintain the original ruling.

Since 1973, the pro-life movement directed its attention to promoting laws that would restrict abortion, but more recently with the changes in the Supreme Court seats these laws have become more popular. The first law, put in practice in many states, was the requirement of parental authorization for minors. The laws that followed depended on the state, but they all tried to create hurdles and delays in order to reduce access to abortion. The laws created some of the following limitations: husband consent, informed consent from the women, counseling about pregnancy, fetal development and alternatives to abortion, grace periods of at least 24 hours, unfunded abortions, so that women had to pay for them themselves, the possibility for doctors and hospitals to refuse to perform the procedure, and the promotion of information delivered by clinics and schools to teach women about abstinence and birth control but not abortion.

The Hyde Amendment was one of the most well-known victories of the pro-life movement. It prohibits the use of federal funding to pay for abortions except when the woman's life is in danger. It was passed in 1976 and in 1993 President Bill Clinton presented a version of the Hyde Amendment which gave funding to abortions in cases of rape and incest. The pro-choice movement has tried to revoke this Amendment as it claims to be "unconstitutional discrimination against the poor" (McBride, 49). In the 2016 presidential race, its repeal became for the first-time part of the Democrats' platform in the run for the presidency, however, with the victory of Republican President Donald Trump it has become unlikely that it will be repealed in the near future. The Amendment has been criticized since the beginning for taking away an essential process from the women that need it the most, it is not only against women, but it helps to maintain inequality amongst women in need and hinders women's efforts for movement out of poverty.

Restrictions and advancements in the availability of abortion have come in waves, in recent years, there seem to be two of these waves happening simultaneously. Red states moving forward with restrictive abortion laws and blue states improving its accessibility. In April 2007 the Supreme Court upheld a federal law that would ban second-trimester pregnancy (Plannedparenthoodaction.org, n.d): "For the first time in more than 30 years, the Court turned its back on the bedrock principle that abortion restrictions cannot endanger women's health. Instead, the Court ruled

that the 'State's interest in promoting respect for

human life at all stages of pregnancy' could outweigh a woman's interest in protecting her own health." (American Civil Liberties Union, 2009)

This decision empowered states to create more restricted abortion bills, as it has given a new precedent for the court. By 2019, with two new Supreme Court nominees by President Trump, at least 30 states introduced partial abortions bans. Almost half of them introduced "Heartbeat bills" restricting abortion after the first six weeks of pregnancy (BBC News, 2019). In some states, new laws might not outright make abortion illegal but they are restrictive to the point that legal abortion is not accessible to a large number of the population. An example of this is Missouri, the state where the only legal clinic is at risk of closing (ibid). On the other hand, in January 2019 New York passed a bill that safeguards abortion rights in some cases after 24 weeks (ibid). And in June 2020, the Supreme Court voted against a bill that if passed would leave the state of Louisiana with a single abortion provider (Liptak, 2020: n.p.). In chapter three we will see how these laws and the series interlace in 2017 activism.

Historic attempts to limit women's access to birth control follow the same strategy as abortion, restricting its access by making it too expensive for poor women, limiting education and information, and shaping public opinion through media and politics, so that it becomes a question of morality and religion and not of health and women's choice. As medicine advances, preventive birth control has been made safer, but the social acceptance and conversation surrounding it continue to be restrictive due to questions of politics and morality.¹³

¹³ In the 1840's, a patent for a diaphragm under the name "The Wife's Protector" was introduced in the United States. In the 1880s it was the condoms, now made out of rubber, offering affordable protection. Women's rights activists were cautious about these methods as they were fearful of the effects they would have on man's increased encounters with prostitutes and also on women, who would be forced into having sex within marriage as the fear of pregnancy was out of the question. In contrast, these new technologies also allowed greater freedom to women by creating a division between sex and childbirth, allowing women to rediscover their sexuality (Freedman, 232). With time the use of contraceptives became widespread, but it continued to be a taboo well into the 20th century. In 1873, in the United States it was passed the Comstock Act prohibiting the circulation of obscene material through the postal service, including information about contraceptives. Moreover, doctors continued to not provide information to women that ask for it. By the 20th century feminists were calling for easy access and information about contraceptives both for middle class women and working class women. In 1916, Margaret Sanger opened the first United States clinic that distributed information on contraception, and through the 1920s and 30s birth control became increasingly more socially accepted as working class women campaigned to legalize birth control and make education on it widespread. By the 1960s the Movement started to see the results, the Supreme Court ruled that married couples had the right to use birth control, the pill was approved by the Food and Drug Organization (FDA), and was received with great enthusiasm by women, specially by young unmarried women who started to embrace premarital sex (Freedman, 235). By 1970, through various Court decisions and eventually laws, contraception was made legal in all States. In 1976 the FDA approved what is commonly known as "morning-after pill".

In 2000 the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission ruled that companies that provided insurance for prescription of drugs to their employees but excluded birth control were violating the Civil Rights Act of 1964. Ten years later President Obama passed the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act (ACA), which forced companies to include contraceptives in their medical insurance plan, with the exception of religious institutions, such as churches, which could choose not to pay for their employees' birth control. However, one year later, the exception was removed.

During 2016, the issue of funding of birth control set apart the candidates for the presidential race. In the following weeks after the election, with the uncertainty of what a presidency under Trump would be, women flocked to Planned Parenthood to ask for a long-term birth control option (Mozes: n.p.). Because President Trump ran on the platform to repeal the 2010 Affordable Care Act, there was the risk of women losing access to birth control, making that access an economic privilege and not a right. In October 2017, the Trump administration allowed employers to apply for broad moral and religious exceptions and not pay for employees' birth control (Alkon: n.p.).

Feminist movements have since the first attempt to conquer the right to vote, changed drastically, adapting to changes in society. These movements have always had opposition, even in the late 19th century anti-suffragist groups opposing women's vote spurred up almost simultaneously as the Women Suffrage Movement (Lange: n.p.). From this period until today different movements supporting women's equality have encountered continuous opposition. The opposition comes both from within the movements themselves where disagreement is always abundant, to overall opposition to all the different attempts to improve women's path to equality. However, in the last decade, the opposition against feminist movements has changed. There are still large and active groups against women's advancement (Sharff: n.p.). In the last decades, even people that support causes of women's equality seem to deny feminism and want to distance themselves from the label. Penny Griffin in her book *Popular Culture, Political Economy and The Death of Feminism* explores feminism "Image Problem". By the end of her research, when looking into media in relation to feminism, she points out that "Popular culture artefacts, across television, film, news media, magazines, social media and music source, have at various times contributed to representing feminism as outmoded, irrelevant or uncool." (180). In this same book Griffin also talks about how some of her students, despite agreeing with all that feminism has achieved so far, distance themselves from the label and

from the efforts for women's equality today (xvi). But it seems that Griffin's students are not alone. A BBC article by Christina Scharff points out that despite women's marches have had millions of participants and the original #Metoo tweet had half a million responses in the first 24 hours, and the hashtag has been used in more than 80 countries, the feminist movement continues to be widely unpopular. Scharff acknowledges this phenomenon:

A 2018 YouGov poll found that 34% of women in the UK said 'yes' when asked whether they were a feminist, up from 27% in 2013. It's a similar picture in Europe, with fewer than half of men and women polled in five countries agreeing they were a feminist. This ranged from 8% of respondents in Germany, to 40% in Sweden. However, people do not appear to reject the term feminism because they are against gender equality or believe it has been achieved. The same study found that eight out of 10 people said men and women should be treated equally in every way, with many agreeing sexism is still an issue. (n.p.)

Nevertheless, the idea of the death of feminism is not new. In the 1990s, *Time Magazine* came out with a cover questioning: "Is Feminism Dead?" (Aronson, 903). And before that, in the 1980s "the media began to label women in their teens and twenties as the "postfeminist" generation". (Aronson, 904). In 2015, Penny Griffin wrote: "Twenty years ago it seemed that what was often called 'feminism' had become code for a particular stereotype of man-hate radicalism that, although not representative of the feminist movement, saturated media and popular culture sites." (180). Today, observes Griffin, feminisms have had a sort of revival, through social media ideas of equality are being disseminated. She adds that both feminism and anti-feminism have today become a commodity. Domestic violence or over-sexualization of women, for example, are used gratuitously in movies and music to sell to a particular audience, and a growing number of feminist slogans and messages are becoming part of the sales pitch.

"There seems to be a cycle of feminism's stigmatization and, at the moment, we are in the upswing." (Griffin: 183). Today, this "upswing" in feminism's popularity still goes hand in hand with anti-feminism. The book written in 2014 by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie *We Should All Be Feminists* is a bestseller, having had a score of 4.45 on

Goodreads. In 2017, Dior released a white t-shirt costing \$710 with the slogan "We should all be feminist" showcasing that the

rise of feminist awareness and cultural popularity go hand in hand with commodification. Notwithstanding, it is undeniable that feminism representations in media have become more frequent and varied in this decade. In the 2014 VMA, Beyoncé performed with “an epic declaration of the F-Word, a giant “FEMINIST” sign blazing from behind her silhouette”, *The Times* wrote in an article “How to Reclaim the F-Word? Just Call Beyoncé” (Bennett: n.p.). With this performance, Beyoncé made feminism a topic of conversation for at least 24 hours (Ibid) and she joined the many celebrities that today proudly identify as feminists (Murray: n.p.). From books, to music, to film, the new re-education of the meaning of the word “Feminism” means that the conversation on the importance of fighting for women's issues is having a surge.

In politics, although there is a rise in alt-right in the United States and the rest of the world, there is also a record number of women in power. In 2016 we saw the first woman running for president as the nominee of a major party. And although women are still far from being equal, there are more women in Congress (24%) and in the Senate (25%) than there ever was (Desilver: n.p.). Although the presence of women in these two bodies is now divided by party, in 2019 there were 17 women from the Democrats in the Senate and 88 in Congress while from the Republicans there were 9 and 13, respectively (History of Women in the U.S. Congress). By 2016-2017 women were also the major recipients of degrees in the United States. Female participation in the workforce is, however, decreasing: “Women's labor force participation rate peaked in 1999 at 60.0%. It is projected to be 55.4% in 2024 and 51.9% in 2060. Some estimate that women are more likely than men to lose their jobs due to automation.”(Catalyst: n.p.). Women are also less represented in the higher positions in S&P 500 companies: “The overwhelming majority of boards are still dominated by men. In 2018, men held 76% of S&P 500 board seats, while women held 24%.” (Ibid). The position of women in politics and in the workplace is still not equal, yet women are at the same time getting more education, having more representation, and more economic power.

In the third chapter, we will see how “The Handmaid's Tale” series will fit into the journey towards reproductive freedom, women equality in the workplace and women representation in culture. But first, in the second chapter, we will look at Margaret Atwood, and “The Handmaid's Tale” adaptation in order to ascertain how a 35-year-old story considered a feminist classic was revived into a global phenomenon.

2. Chapter Two: comparative analysis of the novel and the series

2.1. Margaret Atwood: life and work

Margaret Atwood has written more than forty books, ranging from novels, poems, children's books, graphic novels, to literary criticism. With a long list of published books Atwood has become a household name all over the world. Margaret Eleanor Atwood was born on the 18th of November 1939, in Ottawa, Canada, daughter of Carl Edmund Atwood and Margaret Dorothy. Her father was an entomologist and for that reason she spent much of her childhood on his scientific exploration through the Canadian countryside. This part of her life later became a big influence on her literature with both main characters in her books *Surfacing* and *Cat's Eye* being nature explorers. As a young child Atwood read classic books much above her reading level, propelled by the idleness of the countryside and the discipline of her mother, reading being at times her primary hobby.

In 1951 the entire family moved to the city and Atwood and her siblings¹⁴ started attending formal school. From 5 years of age to the age of 16, Atwood didn't write anything, but by her teenage years she knew she wanted to be a writer, an unlikely choice considering there wasn't a big literary culture in Canada and she was a woman, as she claims: "We had no Canadian poetry in high school and not much of anything else Canadian" [...] "I contemplated journalism school; but women, I was told, were not allowed to write anything but obituaries and the ladies' page". (Staines 13). Atwood grew up during the Second World War and by the time it was over, Canada was still ascertaining its identity. Writers didn't place their stories there, and the few that did, didn't reach enough commercial success to be widely known.

By 1957 Atwood enrolled in Victoria College, at the University of Toronto, where she obtained her bachelor's degree, and then went to Radcliffe College in the United States for her master's. In 1961 she began a doctor's degree at Harvard but never completed it. Her thesis had the title "Nature and Power in the English Metaphysical Romance of the 19th and 20th century" (Macpherson).¹⁵

¹⁴ She was the middle child, having an older brother named Harold and a younger sister named Ruth.

¹⁵ Atwood married James Polk in 1967 and divorced him in 1973. Later she began living with the writer Graeme Gibson with whom she had a daughter in 1976 called Eleanor Jess Gibson.

As a writer, Margaret Atwood began at an early age to give long strides. In 1957, while at Victoria College, she published a few stories and poems in college literary journals. This period of her life is considered crucial as it exposed her to Canadian literature: "When I did discover Canadian writing it was a tremendously exciting thing because it meant that people in the country were writing, and not only that, they were publishing books" — said Atwood in an interview, continuing by stating: "And if they could be publishing books, then so could I" (Staines, 14). By 1961, when she finished her bachelor's, Atwood had already earned a Pratt Medal for her poems and a Fellowship to enroll in her master's. In the following years, writing and publishing poems became her main focus, despite having had odd jobs and eventually having been a lecturer at the University of British Columbia. Two poetry collections were released, one in 1967 and another in 1968 called *The Circle Game* and *The Animals in that Country*, respectively (Full Bibliography - Margaret Atwood). The writer won the Governor General Award, Canada's highest prize for poetry, for *The Circle Game*. In her following works of poetry, Atwood started to invoke Canadian history and by the time she releases her first two novels, *The Edible Women* (1970) and *Surfacing* (1973), Atwood starts to incorporate Canada and Feminism as main themes of her writing.

With the book *Survival: A Thematic Guide to Canadian Literature* Atwood "forged an identity as a Canadian writer" creating what for many was the first literature that went beyond just being written in Canada but being fundamentally about the country. The book went on selling more than 100.000 copies and established Atwood as a Canadian writer (Staines, 19). Critics of the writer, such as David Staines, tend to divide her career into stages, the first being everything up to this point, all the work that helped to establish her as a writer; from the 1970's until 1985, the second stage is marked by her continuous work in reviews and criticism and the writing of more three novels; by 1985, she published *The Handmaid's Tale*, her most famous novel outside of Canada, which put an end to the second stage of her career and made Atwood an international bestseller and transformed her from a Canadian author into a Canadian international author.¹⁶

¹⁶ During the second stage Atwood also published three collections of short stories where she moves away from criticizing Canada within Canada, taking a stand on Canada's position in the world, with themes that go from Canada not as a colony but as a colonizer and the country's position in relation to women's rights. As Staines remarks, "The world becomes the center, while her focus is distinctly Canadian" (22). Moreover, her work reviewing books makes her an interpreter of Canada to the world. It is also during this second stage of her career that the author gets her

After 1985 her fiction is marked by her focus on contemporary Toronto and Canada. The books *Cat's Eye* (1989) and *The Robber Bride* (1993) focus on the city of Toronto while the book *Alias Grace* (1996) focuses on Canadian history. In 2003, she returned to science fiction with the book *Oryx and Crake*, the first of the MaddAddam trilogy. It is through the final decade of the 20th century and the beginning of the 21st that Atwood continued to receive honorary degrees, this time from Oxford University (1998), Cambridge University (2001), Harvard University (2004), and The New Sorbonne University (2005). During this period Atwood becomes a Fellow at the Royal Society of Canada where she further develops her criticism, editing literary books such as *The Oxford Book of Canadian Short Stories in English* and writing *Strange Things: The Malevolent North in Canadian Literature*.

Atwood's career has taken a unique turn, she became a literary celebrity, a combination of words not usually expected but necessary when talking about the writer. There are many reasons for this celebrity status, first "Atwood sells, and sells well" (Macpherson, 13), with an estimated net worth of 20 million dollars (Celebworth.net), the Atwood name has become more of a commodity. Her money comes from literary prizes, book sales, but also from adaptations of her works to movies and series, to investments, like the Longpen, a technology company, and various green companies. The celebrity that Margaret Atwood is extends far beyond money. Due to the large amount and variety of her works she has become a respected voice in many issues, from the literary to the political sphere, she has become a spokesperson for social change with the ability to persuade public opinion (Kröller, 28). Moreover, what differentiates her from many other writers is that Atwood has managed to keep up with change and has used the power of social media to her advantage. We will see that this celebrity stature and power position of being a valuable voice in commenting on social issues will later contribute both to the series being used as a tool to inspire social change and to keep the story of the Handmaids connected to the original writer.

When looking at Atwood's novels a pattern quickly emerges, most of her novels are placed in Canada, *The Handmaid's Tale* is an exception. The novel's strong criticism of the United States politics and culture is in part possible as the Canadian author looks at the country from the perspective of an outsider. Moreover, all but one of her novels have women as main characters, and most have women with higher education as main characters. Not only that, Atwood often writes about the female experience which had previously been left out of literature, and her characters range from women as victims to women as monsters (Macpherson: 22). The writer reasons this by explaining that she writes mostly about women

because that is what she knows best. Atwood has always refused the affiliation to feminist movements, but her books, both fiction and criticism, center around creating a place for women in literature. She constantly claims that novels are under no obligation to choose political parties and that her novels are not political artifacts. Moreover, she claims that she is a mere observer of how women move in the world, not affiliated with a certain ideology (Macpherson: 23).

In *The Handmaid's Tale*, Atwood goes further than in previous books and not only tells a story with and about women, but discusses the feminist movement itself, reflecting on its different variations and criticizing its more extremist branches. The fact that the author is a feminist or not is secondary when we write about the book *The Handmaid's Tale*. Margaret Atwood's novels, since *The Edible Women*, have been read by women, self-identifying as feminists or not, and have given voice to female experiences. Atwood's writing is only possible because of feminism movements and she has subsequently opened the path for many feminist writers. So, the fact that Atwood is not a self-declared feminist matters as a social reflection but does not influence the value of her books as feminist writing. Atwood herself has claimed multiple times through her life that writers are just the medium to whom a book tells its story, and as soon as a book is published the writer loses control of the story. For that reason, all her books can be said to be feminist books, not because the author is a feminist, but because, the audience reads them as feminist texts.

Nature has always been present in most of Atwood's novels. In her early novels such as *Surfacing*, she wrote about how humans connect with nature, in her more recent works, such as the trilogy *The MaddAddam*, she writes about how nature deals with humans. Both *The Handmaid's Tale* and the trilogy have in common nature's revenge for being abused and damaged. Personally the writer has always been an advocate for responsible living, claiming individuals should lead a lifestyle that respects nature. In her books, characters often find peace or resolution in nature, nature being a link to spirituality: "(...) Soul as a repository of important values, among them a sense of awe at nature's power." (Hengen: 84).

With a 64-year career, Margaret Atwood's accomplishments as a writer, a literary and social critic, an investor and a public figure are unquestionable. She continues to innovate, from having a strong following on Twitter to offering master classes on creative writing online, Atwood hasn't left her career wind down. However, it is as a literary writer that she continuously impacts her fans, with the sequel of *The Handmaid's Tale*, called *The Testaments*, having been released in 2019 and having

being taught to Canadian pupils every year, her literature continues to influence readers of all ages.

Now we will look at the adaptation from the book to the series, in order to understand the decisions made in the process and how they impacted the series success. After looking at Atwood's career we will also see how the series works into the adaptation the female perspective contemplated in the author's books into the adaptation.

2.1. *The Handmaid's Tale*: comparative analysis of the novel and the adaptation

“Feminists were ‘a prime enemy’ for the New Right that evolved in America during the 1980’s, and to understand this point *fully* is to understand *The Handmaid's Tale* true point of origin.” (Bloom, 13)

According to Atwood herself, the idea for the book *The Handmaid's Tale*, came from a conversation with a friend about right-wing religious fundamentalists and what would happen if they were given absolute freedom to act out their beliefs (Bloom, 13). That was in 1981 and from that point on until four years later, when the book would finally be published, the writer saved newspaper clips from all around the world that would later serve as inspiration for the book. The clips were about the environment, fascism, and women's rights. The books *1984* (George Orwell), *Utopia* (Thomas More), and *Brave New World* (Aldous Huxley) also served as inspiration for the author as she intended to write a dystopia from a female perspective (Barajas). Academic and author David Ketterer (209) claims that *The Handmaid's Tale* book is the most famous science fiction novel to have been written in Canada. The book itself has won some of the most prestigious awards for science fiction. However, the author prefers to identify the book as speculative fiction, claiming that science fiction has to do with a story that could not happen with the technology available, while speculative fiction has to do with a story that “takes situations that actually exist to their logical conclusion if the cultural and political momentum of contemporary times continues on its trajectory.” (Keifer-Boyd and L. Smith- Shank, 139).

The Handmaid's Tale is set in a close future, in Gilead, the name of the new state- imposed by a religious group called the Jacobins. Taking power by exploiting the panic created by the high rates of infertility, using terrorist attacks, war, and propaganda to build support, eventually, this group becomes the ruling party of part of what was the United States. Infertility was a side effect of pollution but according to the new state's propaganda it was God's way of punishing women for their sins. The women are divided into Wives, women from important families that were allies to the regime and for that reason were given a Handmaid; the Marthas, women who serve the powerful families, because they weren't able to bear children and weren't "sinners", serve the state by working for the community; the Econowives, women who were workers, wives, and sometimes even mothers; but this type of women was slowly disappearing, and together with the Unwomen — women who, because of their sins, were sent to clean pollution in the colonies —, are the lowest in the hierarchy; and the Handmaids fertile women who were kidnapped, separated from their children and families, and taken to a training camp called the Red Center where they would be indoctrinated. These women were considered sinners that would be freed of their sins by having children for the prominent families in Gilead. The sins they were guilty of varied from being certain types of doctors, gay women, divorced women, or any women that led a lifestyle not approved by the regime. To this category belonged characters such as Offred, Moira, and Janine. If they didn't co-operate, they would be branded Unwomen, and sent to the colonies to work burying dead bodies and cleaning toxic dumps; and, finally, there were the Aunts, who worked for the state teaching the Handmaids their new role. The assumption was that the best way to indoctrinate women was through other women.

The men were divided into categories as well: the Angels were the army; the Eyes were a secret police, upholders of the faith; the Guardians were a police force used for more minimal jobs; the Commanders were powerful men, often politicians or army men; and, finally, the Econohusbands, not mentioned in the book, but the existence of Econowives foreshadows them.

This is a dystopian story, told in the first person by the main character, Offred.¹⁷ The first twenty-five chapters tell the story of her survival in Gilead. The last chapter is entitled "Historical Notes" and reveals that the story was recorded by a Handmaid while in hiding. The main character is a sinner by her marriage to a divorced man. She, her daughter, Hannah, and

¹⁷Offred is the main character in the book as she belongs to her Commander named Fred. In the book the reader is never told her name from before the regime but in the series she is called June. Offred is her Handmaid name in

her husband, Luke, tried to escape but were caught. She was taken to the Rachel and Leah Center (Red Center), and eventually taken to the Waterford's house where she lives as a Handmaid. The story follows her life under the regime, she goes on walks, to do the shopping, is often confined to her room, and once a month participates in the "Ceremony" where she is raped in order to conceive a child for the family. The household is composed of Serena, the Wife, Commander Waterford or Fred, the husband, the Marthas, Cora and Rita, and Nick, a Guardian and a secret Eye. While in this household Offred starts a forbidden romance with Nick and finds people connected to Mayday, a group fighting for the destruction of the regime.

The novel itself touches on many issues, similarly to other dystopias, it analyses the rise of totalitarian governments and their limits, the consequences of war, the conflict within the individual regarding repression, survival and free will, governments based on regressive values, and terrorist attacks (Bloom, 82-84). Issues regarding the environment also arise, as the novel studies the effects of nature destruction on human lives and the disproportionate consequences suffered by different social groups. Finally, the book touches on many feminist issues, presenting characters that showcase different types of women, depicting history through a female voice, and bringing attention to gender inequality. All these topics are discussed both in the book and the series.

The series "The Handmaid's Tale" premiered on the 26 of April 2017. It was created by Bruce Miller for the streaming service Hulu. The first season is divided into ten episodes and the story suffered changes in order to make it more television-ready. The first season ends in the same way as the book but leaves out parts of the book that would later be used in the following seasons. "The Handmaid's Tale" series is still an unfinished product, having already released its third season and with a fourth scheduled. Because the first season, despite the changes, still tells the Handmaid's story and finishes at the same point as the book, I will consider only the first season for this comparative analysis of the novel and its adaptation.

The book was adapted before into a film, an opera, a visual book, and a comic book. The writing of Margaret Atwood in *The Handmaid's Tale* creates the perfect conditions for visual adaptation. The book is populated with references and metaphors of color that translate well into the visual medium, especially the predominance of the red color: the "red smile" of the hanging man, the "red of the tulips in Serena Joy's garden", the red of fertility, the red of the uniforms. Moreover, Gilead is a world that uses color as a common denominator for strictly closed social groups, red for

Handmaids, blue for Wives, green for Marthas, and black for the Commanders and Guardians. The colors add symbolism to the book and on the visual

media they become even more powerful, the colors are a daunting reminder of class division, the lack of freedom, and the importance of fertility. On the screen, color divides the different groups in a society using the garments, the cars, and in different spaces, color defines every person completely. In episode nine we can see that the Handmaid has a red luggage to move around, these were made for them as they are the only ones in that society that will move from house to house and they were made red to guarantee they can always be identified. The red dress is the symbol of both the Handmaids' fertility and their oppression, but in the series, it becomes a symbol of hope and resistance, their flag, and the uniform of an army. We will see this further along as June changes in the series and takes control of her red attire.

Furthermore, the text adjusts itself well to the visual medium through the treatment of space and movement. In the book boundaries are set by the narrator's discourse, which creates a geographical perimeter: its outer layer is the freedom of Canada, then war, then Gilead, the Waterford house, finally the center is Offred and her narration. In the series, this geographical perimeter is constructed not only through the narration but also through image and sound. The more private space, Offred's bedroom, is at the end of a hallway in a high isolated part of the house, the Waterford's house itself is elevated, even Nick — June's lover, Serena's fixer, the Commander's driver and an Eye — has his house on top of the garage, after a long flight of stairs. To enter those spaces, stairs need to be climbed, doors need to be opened and gates need to be passed through.

The house becomes a barrier between the private and the public, where the ideals of Gilead regarding family should be put into practice. For the women, the house is a prison within a prison. In the novel, there are rooms inside the Waterford house where Offred can move around and others where she cannot. In the series, each space and who can enter it becomes even more complex. In the book women are not allowed in the office — except when Offred is invited by the Commander but then they are breaking the rules — in the series the office is forbidden to women but an exception is made for June who is allowed in to talk to the Mexican diplomat while Serena is not. This new border for Serena blurs the power hierarchy, Serena being more privileged than June but less valued than her. The house, both in the book and the series, is a space where Serena, Nick, Offred, and Fred all test the limits of how much they can infringe on the rules.

The visual medium permits the series to create a bigger contrast between spaces with different norms. The outdoors become part of a battlefield, where the

women wear their uniforms, walk in twos, and where they plot with each other the next move. In June's case, her

bedroom is a place not for action but for introspective thoughts, while the outside is a place for being part of something bigger than her. Despite this difference also existing in the book, in the series the difference is noted through, for example, June's clothes. In the book, we know she is either in bed, in the bath, or by the room window but in the series there is a visual contrast between June in the red cloak and June in white. We can also see this in the character's posture, in the sitting room June stands straight with her head down while talking with Serena, in the Office she sits comfortably with her foot out. Physical spaces and the visual media in the series work to mediate how much freedom each character has. Inside her room, June's only freedom is her thoughts, when she and Ofglen walk by the wall they can talk without being heard, when she and the Commander go to Jezebel's they walk through multiple checkpoints in order to be free from many of Gilead rules, and when Luke and Moira leave and run to Canada, they reach an outer layer of the perimeter where total freedom can be expected.

Spaces are again another reminder of each person's role in Gilead. In episode one we see that in the Waterford house the kitchen is where the Marthas belong, June stays in her room, Serena stays in the family room, and Fred in the office. In the following episode, entitled "Birthday," we are shown the Putnam's house, where, with many visitors the different women are found in the corresponding rooms but in a different house, showing a parallel on the use of different rooms. The Marthas only leave the kitchen to serve, the Wives stay in the living room and dining room area and the Handmaids are all in the same room. This contrast between episode one and episode two shows us how the system has created spaces for each group and how the family unit needs to be replicated in all families. This emphasis on an unchangeable family composition is a trait of autocratic, religious regimes and later, as we learn more about these families, the series shows us how this element is problematic by inciting secrecy.

Other spaces are claimed by the Handmaids, as when we see June often moving more freely in hallways, a space that does not belong to anyone but is used by her to move unnoticed. The shopping spaces, where Wives and Commanders do not enter, are spaces where Handmaids meet and in turn share their days, spread rumors, and conspire against the regime. The bathroom is a space shown being used only by June and Moira, the Handmaids claim this space to achieve privacy, becoming symbolic of freedom of speech for the women with no room of their own, while we can see Serena in the garden and Fred in his office. In episode one June and Moira conspire to escape from the Red Center bathroom, and in episode eight they go there

in Jezebels to meet. Jezebels, the brothel where the commanders meet

holds the name for a space historically for unruly women and in turn holds Moira, the one handmaid that was not tamed by the regime. The spaces used only by Handmaids become then a battleground against the regime, in this way the series also redefines what an agent of an insurgent is. By using the only spaces allowed to them to their advantage the Handmaids create a rebellious group within traditional female spaces, dismantling the stereotypical representation of the segregation between women that stay in the home and women involved in action and war-like groups.

Finally, the story benefits from the visual mode through the military-style walks and gatherings. The Handmaids always walk in twos with the wings on; when they gather, they are always positioned in geometrical shapes; and when they are alone the red stands out from all the other colors of nature or all the other uniforms. In Salvagings, a ceremony performed by the Handmaids, they sit in rows making a square, and later form circles for the stoning or beating, walking in rows of twos, and when being talked they form lines. These formations contribute to showcase the Handmaids as prisoners, as cattle, with every movement controlled and constrained. When captured on screen the effect is much more dramatic as it demonstrates the control of the state in every moment of their lives. This is also a reference to military parades made to show the power of a country's army. In this case, it is the prisoners that do this type of demonstration showcasing the system control over women. As they move like clockwork if they were to step out of formation they would stand out. The wives and husbands do not perform these walks. All in all, the visual adaptation of the narrative marked by color and scenic movements produce strong effects by constantly reminding the viewer of the forces that work within Gilead, either that being the strong division of class or the military/prison-like form of living.

Atwood said about the inspiration to create this story: "The majority of dystopias— Orwell's included — have been written by men and the point of view has been male. When women have appeared in them, they have been either sexless automatons or rebels who've defied the sex rules of the regime. I wanted to try a dystopia from the female point of view (2013: n.p.)."

The narrator in the book *The Handmaid's Tale* is, for almost the entire text, Offred, assuming the position of the first-person narrator. She tells us her story as a way to keep her sanity: "I would like to believe this is a story I'm telling. I need to believe it. (...) If it's a story I'm

telling, then I have control over the ending. Then there will be an ending, to the story, and real life will come after it." (Chapter VII: p. 49). In the book, the narration is limited to Offred's knowledge. For instance, when explaining what happens to Moira, she says: "But as far as I know that didn't happen. I don't know how she ended, or even if she did, because I never saw her again." (Chapter XXXVIII: p. 262). Moreover, the narrator tells the story by showing her experience as a woman, following Atwood's goal of creating a dystopia from a female perspective: "I avoid looking down at my body, not so much because it's shameful or immodest but because I don't want to see it. I don't want to look at something that determines me so completely." (Chapter XII: p. 72).

In the series, despite having June still narrating through voice-overs, the story is not confined to her knowledge/point of view, the point of view of the camera becomes omniscient. The viewer has thus a much wider perspective and, as a result, June no longer controls the story. This wider knowledge can be attributed to the running time of the series, as more time needs to be filled and different plots need to be created to keep the series flowing and avoid it's being repetitive. Due to the same factors, the character Offred also changes in the series. In the book, her experience occupies the center of the story and, while that happens in the series as well, the character becomes less solitary, filmic narrative is enriched by more dialogue and visual clues, and the narration (voice-over) becomes less frequent and more of the story is told through dialogue/images.

The structure of the series, similarly to many other contemporary series, is made of multiple viewpoints carefully constructed to meticulously follow each character. Those viewpoints are then interconnected to construct a continuous narrative that forms the overall series (Koistinen and Samola, 348). This kind of collage is an essential effect, although June is the main character, it's essential to show the plots around her. Also, as in the book, there is the to and fro between the past and the present. This technique is used to highlight the distinctions between life before and after the regime. In the book these jumps in time happen only to show the differences in Offred's life; in the series, we see the past lives of multiple characters around June in more detail.

One of the biggest shifts relates to the narration, the final "Historical Notes" that are not present in the series. Those notes comprise the final chapter of the book and refer to a conference in 2195, years after the Gilead Republic was over. It is then that the reader knows for the first-time that Offred's story was found in audio form, that she produced it while in hiding, and that later it was found and put together by two male

The main speaker in the conference, Professor Pieixoto, talks about the discovery of the tapes and how he and his colleagues proceeded to authenticate them as historical artifacts. Harold Bloom (74) argues that these final pages of the novel may serve as a critical comment on the academia regarding its power in shaping History: “ (...) it appears that Atwood wants to alert her readers to how scholars have the power to re-shape and warp the historical record.” (Ibid). And, as regards the way women are treated in history, Bloom argues that the academic discourse allows less space for the female experience in history, Bloom adds: “Atwood clearly intends to demonstrate how male narratives are still, in spite of all the progress toward gender equality, valued over female narratives” (75). The way Professor Pieixoto is represented through sexist jokes acclaimed by the audience, and the undervaluation of the female voice and experience, serve as a warning against the cyclic direction of history and its proclaimed objectivity. Having a scientific authority (Pieixoto is the Director of the Twentieth and Twenty-first-Century Archives at Cambridge University), making jokes about women when referring to Offred's story of torture, pain and abuse, brings attention to how intolerance and sexism can be naturalized and made invisible until they snowball into depriving women of their rights.

The reason for this last part of the novel being removed from season one of the series can be attributed to the fact that no ending is desired for the story so far and shows the willingness of the authors of the series to take the story into a different direction.

The epigraphs, historical notes and dedications are part of this process, but even within Offred's narrative the novel employs this ironic layering device. First, we note that Offred's text, the main portion of the novel, is Pieixoto's piecing together of recorded fragments. Second, within the tale puns, digressions, flashbacks, asides, rewordings, abound. (Bloom, 95)

These additions create a narrative within a narrative¹⁸ what ceases to exist in the series, there is, as a result, less space for doubting the story we are being told. Moreover, by not having the story framed through the lenses of a male academic, the series gives the control of the story back to the female characters.

Many important aspects of the book were put into the series with fidelity, other aspects suffered much variation. One example is the gatherings where women partake in the murder of a criminal. In the book they are called “Particution” and “Salvaging”; in the series they are only called “Salvagings”. Atwood has justified this type of

¹⁸ In the book Offred's story exist affected by the order given by Peixoto.

historical precedent and claiming: "When the mob takes over, no one person is responsible." (Vineyard). While in the book all women can attend these events, in the series only the Handmaids are present. The "Salvaging" happens twice, once in the first episode and again in the last. In the book, Offred is anxious to get home to her lover, not wanting to witness the murder of the criminal, she lags and curses Ofglen for attacking him. In the series, following the literary narrative, the Handmaids kneel while they listen to Aunt Lydia's speech, but in the series June's behavior changes as she had previously been told about her friend Moira's death. After the speech they gather around in a circle and are allowed to beat the man that was accused of rape. June is the first one to hit him and viciously attacks him. This change in behavior is essential for the first episode as in the following scenes she and Ofglen reveal themselves as not "true believers". By re-creating this moment from the book but with a completely different reaction from the main character, the series sets out from the beginning that the protagonist in the series is going to be different from the one in the book.

In the last "Salvaging", however, she leads the women in the opposite direction and influences them not to attack Janine. By creating the same moment in the first and last episode the series emphasizes the progress made by the characters as they live through the regime. Another example is Janine, who in the first "Salvaging" smiles, speaking about Moira's death while happily caressing her pregnant belly, and now becomes the subject about to be stoned after attempting suicide. Changed by the trauma of living in Gilead, Janine smiles when the Handmaids come together and refuse to murder her. This difference motivates the viewer to continue watching as the series introduces variation that makes the series continuation a mystery. Also, creating parallels between the first and the last episode, the resemblances and differences between one "Salvaging" and the other ask for close and multiple watching, a possibility made available on streaming. The media are different, and in this adaptation the protagonist is not going to be passive or scared. In the first "Salvaging" June becomes a fighter and not someone that hides behind a crowd, someone that leads the fight instead.

Another moment that takes inspiration from the book but introduces a large amount of variation is the visit of Ambassador Castillo which follows part of the dialogue from the book tourist/trade delegation visitation. During that visitation Offred is asked "Are you happy?". In the book the answer is: "'Yes, we are very happy,' I murmur. I have to say something. What else can I say?" (p.?). In the series, she looks over at Nick and says squeezing her hands and without making eye contact: "I have found happiness". Later, she confesses to the Ambassador

that she did not find happiness and asks for help. The Offred from the novel would never be brave enough to ask for help or to take action so boldly.

In the end of the first episode Offred reveals her name, not used in the book, the main character is now called June. The showrunner said about the decision to name Offred:

It's an important thing that she has a name because part of the show is that she's not going to let that go. She is strong and stubborn, even though she has to be on the outside kind of content looking and silent and meek and keeping ahold of her identity was such an important part that it needed the name to do it. (Miller: n.p.)

This decision to give a name to Offred, as Miller explains, is attributed to the new character's personality. Offred is no longer just one Handmaid living in Gilead. Although still the main character her path is now contrasted with other Handmaids' stories. In the series she asks the Ambassador for help, in episode three she defends her friend and challenges Aunt Lydia by saying, "Blessed are the meek. And blessed are those who suffer for the cause of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of Heaven. I remember." She is also seen as a sort of leader of the Handmaids, in episode nine she is called to help Janine not to kill herself, and in episode five, before Emily runs over a Guardian, she looks at June that nods approving of her rebellious behavior. She takes a bigger role in the Mayday movement by offering to help and getting a package for them. When she is with the Commander, she learns how to lie and risk herself by trying to go again to the Jezebels.

Atwood herself has claimed: "The Hulu team made their Offred more active than my Offred. Partly because it's a television series, and partly because it's an American television series." (Vineyard). As Atwood claims, many changes were made in the show, as part of the adaptation process into television. Bajac-Carter Jones and Batchelor argue in their book *Heroines of Film and Television* that "Heroines are becoming more prevalent with more varied representations/portrayals in films, television shows, and video games." (10). They explain how women as heroines are becoming more common and are shattering the idea of heroism as a male trait. This heroism is put into June, something that Offred in the book did not reflect. This change was made for television purposes, to allow for more action, more intricacy between storylines, and also to allow for fans to rally behind the main character. As we saw in

chapter one, this series breaks away from convention where women roles are often the minority, not only by having many female roles but also by having the story revolving around

its female characters. Later in the text we will see how this reinterpretation of the main character plays out on the series success and message.

What does not change between the book and the series about the main character is her compassion, something that distinguishes Offred from other characters in dystopian novels, such as Winston Smith in *1984*. Offred, despite everything that happens to her, still thinks of those on the other side of the regime: "She doesn't make speeches anymore. She has become speechless. She stays in her home, but it doesn't seem to agree with her. How furious she must be, now that she's been taken at her word." (Chapter VIII: p. 56) "I ought to feel hatred for this man. I know I ought to feel it, but it isn't what I do feel. What I feel is more complicated than that. I don't know what to call it. It isn't love." (Chapter X: p. 68). In the book, Offred often looks at Serena or Fred and wonders how Gilead is for them, how they must feel. In the same way, in the series, June is compassionate towards her oppressors, she wonders about Fred's motivations, and she feels sorry for Serena for being excluded. June is now a heroine and a bold one, but by changing her into a heroine that continues to have compassion, as Atwood intended her character to be, the show deviates from the conventional representation of a powerful woman.

In chapter one we saw how strong female characters tend to be molded with male characteristics. The more independent a female character gets the more she loses the characteristics of compassion, maternal instinct, or kindness. June in the series holds such a transgressive part because her strength does not come from denying parts of herself to be strong, the opposite happens. The character is not strong despite being a woman as it would be expected but, instead, it is from womanhood that she derives her strength. As an example, her decision to conspire against Gilead is justified by her wanting to save her daughter. And in episode nine, "The Bridge", she manages to get to Moira and ask her for the package by seducing the Commander into going to the Jezebels, using her womanhood as both motivation and a weapon. Also, she convinces Moira to help her by mentioning her daughter. By doing this the series reiterates that it is motherhood that shapes June into being the heroine, by being her main motivation.

The story on screen allows for other characters' stories to be told, without reflecting on the narrator's life/personality. We discover, for instance, that Rita lost a son in the war, and we know more about Serena's past. Also, we are shown Janine's journey towards the decision to kill herself. All these new stories are necessary to create multiple plotlines for each episode, allowing for each character to become more

human and for the viewer to get a wider

perspective on the Gilead world from the points of view of different people and hierarchies. Moreover, it helps the series to show how the lives of different women are affected in this society. June is just one piece of a much larger puzzle that is the women's oppression in Gilead. By having multiple perspectives, the series shows women not as a unison voice but as a variety of complex characters. Characters are shown from an external point of view, and not only from June's also allowing for her personality to change in relation to the novel. She no longer bears the burden of telling the entire story through her words and perspective resulting in the character being more stubborn, fearless, and ruthless as the audience can now wonder what is her motivation.

Together with Offred, so does Serena become a different character. She is no longer a singer, no longer uses a cane, and she is much younger. The Serena we meet in the first episode of the series and the book seems to be fully indoctrinated in the regime's ideology and sees the Handmaid as a threat to her marriage: "He is my husband until death do us part. Don't get any ideas. If I get trouble, believe me, I will give trouble back." (Episode one). This feeling of June as a threat is also due to Serena's age, as they are now much closer in age, but despite having less power, June can do something Serena cannot: bear a child.

Serena is in both the book and the series a woman that was famous before Gilead for giving conservative speeches that encouraged women to stay in the home and have children, defending values that would be the foundation of Gilead ideology. It is speculated that this character is inspired by Phyllis Schlafly, an American constitutional lawyer that in the early 1960's started a political career on the platform of family values and published books encouraging women to leave their careers and go back to the home (Dray:n.p.). Serena's character showcases the paradoxical life of successful women that reap the benefits of a career, whilst simultaneously preaching domesticity, a criticism to a group of women that through the second part of the 20th century saw women's liberation as a threat to their own ideology.

In the series, Serena's book is called *A Woman's Place* and she intends to write the second one on "fertility as a national resource". She never gets to write the second book as she stops having the freedom to write. In episode six we are told more about Serena's past story, how she was a fundamental part of Fred's rise to power, how she helped in the writing of the laws, how she was part of the initial creation of the regime, and how she was forced back into the home under the premise that men were protecting women, that like her, had forgotten their duty when they devoted

themselves to a career outside of the home. In the

same episode, we see her book being thrown out in the trash (Attachment i), alongside it are her black high-heel shoes. This juxtaposition creates a breaking point in Serena's story between her past as a professional woman, and her present as a woman that no longer needs the black shoes because she would be staying home raising a family and wearing the color blue of a Wife. By adding that she intended to write a book, that she intended to be in the meetings, and that she kept, until the regime was installed, memorabilia of her working life, the series shows us that although she was an essential part of Gilead's formation she did not imagine how much her life would change.

When the Waterford household is visited by the Ambassador, Serena plays the hostess, but her voice is not valued by the man. When she is asked if she had imagined a society where women would lose their right to read, Serena is confronted with the fact that without opposition to conservative values her fight for "domestic feminism" was condemned to fail. Yvonne Strahovski, the actress that plays Serena, says about her and her journey, "Now we find Serena Joy living in this cage that she spent a lot of time constructing herself." (n.p.). Serena becomes exponentially more enlightened in relation to the real inner-workings of Gilead, she starts questioning the rhetoric of female-only infertility and why women have to serve men instead of God alone. Eventually, in the last episode, Serena confronts Fred and claims: "You can't father a child because you're not worthy." This journey of awareness of the injustice of Gilead is mostly not portrayed in the book, the series allows for more time and a different perspective that benefit this character's development. By developing Serena to the point where she has to question something that she defended all her life, the series creates a warning about how extreme this type of ideology is, and how conservative and progressive forces live in tandem to create a more equal society for all. By Gilead overpowering and silencing opposition, Serena was caught in a jail that she herself defended but could not predict the extent of.

2.1. Violence

One of the criticisms made to the series is the exposure of violence towards women. Although the book also contained violence, the series increases its occurrences and as some critics point out "(...) seeing something on screen is a little different than visualizing it in your mind's eye." (Steele, n.p.). *The New York Times* writes about the violence on the show:

Decisions over who wields violence and how it's depicted reveal a gap between the show's feminist aims and its lack of emotional development, which is sacrificed for the sake of its brutal portrayals of punishment. Violence could be used in this series as meaningful commentary on the ways in which women's bodies are manipulated by men in power. Instead it feels grotesque and unnecessary. (Bastián, n.p.)

Related to this aspect another critical observation is the series choice of putting the violence in the hands of the women and its use being so widespread. In both the series and the book there are two women that stand out due to their role in oppressing other women, Aunt Lydia and Serena. The latter is made more evil in the adaptation, she confines June to her room, hits her until she bleeds, and more predominately in the series, she mentally torments her. One of the most heart-wrenching moments being when Serena shows June her daughter from a distance. This psychological torture is rationalized by the Serena as a means to reach her goal of motherhood. We can see Serena's motivation when, in episode three, she interrupts June's beating because she thinks she is pregnant or pushes her to the ground and locks her in her room when she discovers she is, in fact, not pregnant. These scenes show that June's only value to Serena is her ability to bear a child for her. Despite all her privilege, Serena will never be able to have children so the violence is used as a way to maintain her power. Moreover, Serena has lost most of the attributes that made her herself. She no longer has a career, she isn't allowed to write, she no longer has an intimate relationship with her husband, and she can't give speeches. Having control over her household, having a child, and living for the values of Gilead are all that she has left. This character's anger comes from her having sacrificed everything and not yet having gained her reward. Violence is how she deals with all she has lost and one of the few tools she has is to achieve motherhood. By doing this, the show criticizes Serena's brand of "feminism", not valuing June as a human being exhibits how she does not value women in general. For Serena, women are only deserving if they can advance her position or if they live a life she approves of. Serena is not a feminist she is an opportunist.

Aunt Lydia, in the same token, not only complies with the system by teaching the women its rules and costumes but also uses violence, and mental torture to terrorize the women into obedient wombs. Throughout the book, this character has been shown as a true believer, but in the visual media, we get a closer look at her

motivation. In episode nine she sits by Janine while she is in the hospital. In the last episode, we can see through the

performance of Ann Dowd, the actress that plays Aunt Lydia, that the character does not use violence out of hate but instead out of love. Despite the pain in her face and the crackling in her voice caused by giving the order to kill Janine, she still goes through it because it is her duty. We gain the insight that she is a true believer, that she does care about the Handmaids and is doing what is necessary to “save them”. In episode four, while punishing June for trying to escape, she says “Do you know what's most painful? The most painful thing in this entire ugly incident is the ingratitude. Don't you realize the opportunity you have been given? (...) You were an adulterer, a worthless slut! But God found a way to make you useful. So, where's the gratitude?”. After the speech she watched while June is tortured, although she did not need to stay but she unflinchingly watched it. Aunt Lydia believes the women should be grateful for the violence as she is helping them become “worthy”.

These two women are both in positions of power, and through their use of violence, the show presents a critical view on women that comply with patriarchal systems instead of opposing them. The adaptation affects these characters similarly, as it made them both more violent and at the same time more human. By putting them on the screen, the series attempts to explain their reasoning. Ultimately, both have to deal with complex power imbalances, neither can have children and it is by keeping the Handmaids powerless that they can hold on to their place of privilege.

Moreover, the show brings to the screen graphic imagery of violence: June's bloody feet, her bloody forehead, Janine's missing eye, Emily seeing her girlfriend die, June being bitten with a rod, Emily's genital mutilation, and Janine's suicide. By portraying all this violence, the series shocks the viewer, partly for entertainment purposes, partly because by shying away from it, the series would allow the viewer to imagine a rosier picture of what life is under extremist regimes. By forcing the viewer to face the harm done to these women, the series forces them to reckon with both the consequences of what would happen if such a regime were to be imposed, but it also provides a visual image of things that have been historically done to women. One moment that captures this technique of using the visual media to hyperbolize female experience is when, in episode one, Janine tells her story of being raped and Aunt Lydia says: “And who led them on? Whose fault was it?” and all the Handmaids in a choir say: “Her fault”. Showing the torture of one of the Handmaids and forcing all the other Handmaids to contribute reflect the victim-blaming that occurs when women tell their stories of rape. Aunt Lydia represents all the voices in society that doubt or fault the victims and the effect being the torture being shown humanizes the victims.

2.2. Male characters

The men in the story are also used to create critical views that are not present in the original work. In the book, the relationship between Fred and Serena is almost non-existent, while in the series we are shown how their relationship changes as Gilead comes into existence. Before, Fred trusted Serena's opinion on political issues and together they wrote the laws. In the episode "A Women's Place" we see Serena trying to suggest going over the details for the meetings only to be entrusted by her husband as refers to the duty of planning the dinner. In the same episode, after seeing Serena excel in the dinner, he says to her: "You're an amazing woman. I forgot." Here we see how Fred has internalized so much about the belief of what a woman is supposed to be that he has forgotten why he fell in love with Serena to begin with. In episode eight Serena asks Fred while the body of their Handmaid that had just killed herself is taken away: "What did you think was going to happen?", and in the last episode he says: "They arrested three more Marthas in the West End. They were planning some kind of attack. Don't these people ever give up?". In all these instances Fred proves to be a flawed leader. By not seeing women as full human beings he has failed to fully realize how the system would play out for those that are not men and not in power.

June interacts with three men, Luke, her husband, Nick, her lover, and Fred, the Commander. The book was written with Nick and Offred's love story at its center, and Luke as just a memory, an idea in Offred's mind, as she doesn't even know if he is still alive. In the series, June also falls in love with Nick, but the love story, although central, is not its core. In her article "'Trust Me': Reading the Romance Plot in Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*", Madonne Miner argues that, despite the book being mostly read as a dystopia, it can be read as a love story. In the book, Nick is the one that helps June, allowing her to escape Gilead, at least in her own mind. Although in the series the love story between Nick and June continues to exist, she continues to go to him and finds in him a mental escape, he is not her saving angel, she does not tolerate her fate in order to continue her encounters. This plot difference can be attributed to the message conveyed by the show. June is a strong woman by not relying on Nick to save her and not letting herself use the relationship as anesthesia. The show thus renounces the trope of the "knight in shine armor" that saves her and instead shows June as the heroine with a complex range of emotions and relationships. The relationship between Nick and June becomes a synergic one, where Nick finds in June a partnership to live through Gilead.

Luke in the book only exists in Offred's memory, while in the series he has a more prevalent role by representing the lives of those that managed to escape. It's through Luke that the series reflects on many contemporary problems such as refugees, immigration, and new fatherhood representations. Luke in the series is presumed dead by June until the halfway point when she gets to write him a message. Episode seven, entitled "The Other Side", shows a country destroyed by war, and a group of war refugees as they try to escape. It presents a harsh criticism of those who profit from the war and how war affects civilians. In the last episode, the theme continues to be present by showing us the refugees' experience once they cross the border, showing a traumatized Moira being welcomed into Canada. This criticism of the way the immigrants and refugees are treated strikes a vivid resemblance to all the people that today try to enter the United States to escape war and poverty. However, in the series it is shown "The Other Side", the border is another one as they are escaping what was the United States instead of escaping to the United States. Canada develops a refugee program that welcomes all those escaping Gilead. By doing this, the series continues its analysis of contemporary problems and shows the audience a side that is often overlooked, the refugees' experience. By having the characters escape north and having the Canadian border as the ultimate passage to freedom, the series asks of the viewer to consider both the people that have been through similar circumstances and to put themselves in their shoes, how would Americans prefer to be treated if they themselves became refugees.

In 2016, at the time presidential candidate Donald Trump ran for office, one of his main promises was the building of a wall in the southern border, claiming that the worst people were coming into the country. Meanwhile, Europe debated over an increase in asylum seekers and economic migrants coming through the Mediterranean Sea and southeastern Europe. These events brought to the forefront the conversation about migrants, but rarely are the voices heard from those running away. The series, in the same way that it shows the women's perspective in relation to a "historical" event, shows a refugee crisis through the perspective of the ones living it.

Furthermore, Luke's and Nick's characters also contain a new representation of men that deviates from the convention set in film and series. Luke's story is rooted in family life, his motivation being to keep his wife and daughter safe. Both Luke and Nick are advocates of June and her fight to become free and despite the story becoming murky with Nick as he continues both fighting for the system and against it, they both become supporters of the women's fight.

These new representations of men can be seen as the series responding to the current goals of feminist movements that we saw in chapter one.

Recently two topics are prominent in movements for equality, first is the importance of “allies”, male/straight/white people have an important role, as the understanding of inequalities in society and the fight for change needs to include everyone in order to succeed. In the case of feminist movements, it is essential that men recognize their privilege and try to change the systematic discrimination, as fighting for a more equal society is the role of everyone and not only of the people that are oppressed. We also see this represented in the man that helped the couple escape and the man that helped June write to her husband when the Ambassador refused to help. The second topic, portrayed in the male characters, is that, in the end, movements for equality benefit everyone. Again, looking at the women's movement although this message also applies to Black Lives Matter and LGBT+, when parts of society are oppressed, the entire society suffers. In regard to women's work, we see Gilead loses by not taking advantage of female doctors, writers, engineers, and female voices in power. Luke, Fred, and Nick all benefited from women's freedom, Luke was able to raise his child, he wasn't entrusted the role of sole provider, he loved to cook and had an overall better life by dedicating himself to his family. Fred had a wife that was ambitious, and their relationship benefitted from them working together; Fred and Serena had, as we see in the series, a happier marriage before; Nick, although very young before Gilead was created, had a consensual relationship with June. Henceforward, the series gives more visibility to these male characters partly because the role of men in fighting for women's equality is today one of the main topics in feminist discussion and partly because equality for all is beneficial to all.

2.3. Music

Adaptation into the screen allows for new ways to convey meaning that are not possible in a literary text, one is through music. In “The Handmaid's Tale”, music often appears in the characters' backstories and symbolizes the freedom that was lost. For example, while June is running with Moira, they listen to a song called “F**k the Pain Away” by Peaches. While in other moments, instead of contrasting with the Gilead's environment, the music agrees with it, helping each scene to accumulate more meaning. In the first ceremony, a religious music by The Joslin Grove Choir Society plays in the background, helping to create continuity with the Bible reading before the ceremony, showing the ceremony as a religious

event and not as a personal one. Moreover, the extremely religious music overlapping Offred's rape accentuates how religion plays a role in excusing the inexcusable, and how Gilead has made rape acceptable by interpreting religious texts in their favor. Music in the show is also very connected to the feminist movement and its history, the show uses music by women that have historically introduced the female voice in the cultural arena. The music "You Don't Own Me" by Lesley Gore, heard in episode one was released in 1963 and it became an important anthem for female emancipation and one of the songs that capture the spirit of second-wave feminist movements. Nina Simone's music is heard three times, and in the last episode the song "Feeling Good" is played. This 1965 song by Nina Simone is representative of slave emancipation. Singing against a backdrop of "systemic racial discrimination against African Americans." (Dunga, n.p.), Nina Simone's music creates a powerful analogy to Gilead because she was ostracized by the musical industry by her decision to sing about women and black rights, her music having also been banned from the radio. All in all, music in the show is used to add to the meaning, creating parallelism between Gilead and the present but also bringing in the historical references of minorities oppression. In chapter one we saw how adaptation might be considered less valued by not having the same tools to express meaning, the series, however, uses music and sound effects, such as the church bells, as a new tool to add multiple layers of meaning.

2.4. Food

Food is an important element in Atwood's novels as reflection of women's experience. As Emma Parker observes, "While literature is suffused with scenes of men eating, there is a conspicuous absence of images of women engaged in the same activity. Margaret Atwood displays a sensitive awareness of how images of women eating have been suppressed and erased." (349). The authors' writing often disrupt the status quo by bringing about taboo issues: "The Edible Woman and Lady Oracle have been analyzed extensively in terms of food, particularly in terms of feminist theories of eating disorder (...)" (Ibid: 350). In *The Handmaid's Tale*, Atwood continues this practice, what is eaten and how food is presented is part of the greater context of living inside a regime such as Gilead, we will see now how this works in both the book and the series.

It's good enough food, though bland. Healthy food. You have to get your vitamins and minerals, said Aunt Lydia coyly. You must be a worthy vessel. No coffee or tea though,

no alcohol. Studies have been done. There's a paper napkin, as in cafeterias.
(Chapter XII: p. 75)

In this book excerpt, Offred tells us about the food she eats in her room, the food is bland but healthy, this further emphasizes how the Handmaids are kept healthy, along with the walks, their body is treated to be in the best condition to fulfill its purpose. The fact that all the food comes in a tray to them takes away their ability to choose what they eat. The food is not chosen by their preferences but instead by the studies that have been done to decide what is best for them. Moreover, by not having coffee, tea, or alcohol the text reiterates that while eating or drinking can be a leisure activity depending on taste, the Handmaids will not have anything more than what is absolutely necessary for them to have the children of Gilead.

Food mentions proliferate throughout the book, they mostly can be divided into two kinds, the food that reminds Offred of her past — the variety, the ability to choose, and the connection to happy memories and freedom —, and the food from Gilead — food just selected for health properties, which is available depending on the season, depending on the Commanders' wishes or depending on the war going well.

Food as a metaphor is also used heavily in the series. In the first episode entitled "Offred", we see Rita, a Martha, making bread, and June narrates: "Rita makes the bread from scratch. It's the kind of thing they like the Marthas to do. A return to traditional values. That's what they fought for." After that Rita tells June to get fresh eggs. The fresh eggs are a reference to fertility, having the eggs fresh the way the Commander likes them — "Let them know who it's for and they won't mess around" — is a reflection of the power relation inside and outside the house. When June goes shopping, she stops by Nick, and they again talk about food: "If you're going to All Flesh, you should avoid the chicken. I read they've got crazy levels of dioxin.". This conversation about food is quite different, Nick makes a joke and talks to June not as a superior, but nonetheless, his knowledge makes June think he is an "Eye" one of Gilead's spies. June's greeting of her walking partner — "Blessed be the fruit"— also refers to food but in its symbolic religious implication.

In another scene, we have two Handmaids going shopping and commenting: "Handmaid: Did you see? They have oranges. / Emily: Praised be. / Handmaid: The fighting in Florida must be going well. / Emily: Your Mistress likes oranges. / Handmaid: Make sure she knows you got them. Don't let a Martha take the credit." (Episode one). The camera then focuses on a large amount of oranges proving the war is going very well. This tells us a lot

about how these women communicate, they know the war is going well because there is a supply of oranges and they use shopping, one of the few times they can leave the house, in order to communicate. In episode nine it is through food packaging that June receives the package requested by Mayday. The food moments in the series follow similar patterns as in the book, there is the memory of food from before — the coffee with Moira, the hot dogs with Luke, making pancakes with Anna. This food always evokes happy memories, food is not consumed to survive but as a choice and as an enjoyable experience with friends and family. The mentions of food after the regime symbolize the lack of choice and is used as an exercise in power. In episode six “The Women’s Place”, the variety and quality of food is used to show the strength of the regime to the Ambassador. In the series, unlike the book, there is a visual component to the food, allowing it to play a bigger role as a conveyer of meaning, June’s food looks bland while the food in the Commander’s parties looks luxurious. In one of the demonstrations of power through food, in episode two, Serena and two other Wives stand next to a table full of sweets and offer a cookie to June. Not only do they offer her a piece of food usually given to a child, but one of the Wives then comments, “Oh, isn’t she well behaved?”, a comment as well made usually about a child. The juxtaposition of a table with an extravagant amount of food that the Wives can choose from and the cookie that was handpicked by Serena to give to June shows again food as power. Moreover, by showing Serena smoking and the powerful drinking alcohol the series reinforces the criticism on the most privileged by having rules that they themselves do not follow. All in all, food within the regime has two major symbolic implications, first privilege, and class differences, and second as a trope for lack/presence of freedom. Through the visual media, the adaptation uses the process of food metaphors often used by Margaret Atwood in her writing and expands on it, food being something that is intrinsic to culture and women’s experience and shapes it into both a symbol of power and, most importantly, into another tool that the women use to communicate among themselves and conspire.

2.5. Representation

The series follows in Atwood’s footsteps of creating a woman’s place in art. In chapter one of this thesis we saw how women are less represented on screen, either by not being present, not being the focus of the plot, or not having their experience thematized. The series actively resists this premise by prominently focusing on women and their culture. Images such as June and Janine giving birth, Serena and June living

on make-up, and a close up of June's bloody underwear, or also a close up of breastfeeding, all contribute to fighting stereotypical representations of women on the screen. Menstruation, breastfeeding, and shaving are still taboos in today's society and not often shown with prominence on screen, by choosing to show them, the series triggers the conversation on why these acts are often not present on screen.

Moreover, as we saw, women are often sexualized when put on the screen but, on the flip side, are given very little agency to control their own sexuality. In the series we see both Serena and June, in moments of freedom, taking control of their sexual life and enjoying it with their partners. Furthermore, the series creates a firm distinction between rape and sex when, in episode five, Nick apologizes to June for agreeing to have sex with her as per Serena's order. All the imagery surrounding women and their lives is not accidental and contributed to the show's recognition as feminist. Moreover, as the book was revolutionary in the way women were written about, the series shows women in transgressive ways, fighting the over-sexualization and lack of agency under the male gaze traditionally seen on screen (Mulvey, 19).

In chapter one of this thesis, we saw that women working behind the camera are less prevalent than men and this contributes to their lack of representation. Showrunner Bruce Miller talks about the importance of having women working in the series in order to create an accurate representation of the story, and about hiring the director Reed Morano, he says: "It's a very male-dominated field, so she's a badass basically." (Miller, 2017). Describing her a "badass" for being a director shows how women are so seldom found in this role as no man would be given an identical compliment for doing the same. The director said about her effect on the show: "But to start off a show, and to bring in a female perspective, particularly when our writer and showrunner is a man — it's actually really important for there to be female directors, because we are bringing the other point of view." (Morano, p.n.). There is also a plethora of women working in all aspects of the series. Margaret Atwood helped write the script and together with Elisabeth Moss helped produce the series. In addition, the show has a woman as head of production design, Julie Berghoff, a woman head of wardrobe, Ane Crabtree, and women in most other departments. Having more women present behind the camera benefits the final result, making the female perspective predominant in all aspects as the showrunner points out.

2.6. Race

When it comes to race, the prominent discussion around it and this adaptation can be justified by the distinct ways the book and the series choose to use it in the story.

"Resettlement of the Children of Ham is continuing on schedule," says the reassuring pink face, back on the screen. "Three thousand have arrived this week in National Homeland One, with another two thousand in transit." How are they transporting that many people at once? Trains, buses? We are not shown any pictures of this. National Homeland One is in North Dakota. Lord knows what they're supposed to do, once they get there. Farm, is the theory. (Chapter XIV: p. 93-94)

The extract above is the only mention of race in the book, "Children of Ham" being a reference to the biblical story of the curse of Noah. This story was used as a justification for slavery as an inherited condition, henceforth the "children" is a reference to people of color. When faced with the question of how would race be dealt with within the fundamentalist regime of Gilead, the book proposes that, as had previously happened in history, people of racial minorities would be transported to "homelands".

In the series, the issue of race becomes more complex. Bruce Miller, the showrunner, made the decision to include black characters, such as Offred's husband and best friend. Miller based this decision on two aspects:

[...] a huge discussion with Margaret Atwood, and in some ways it is 'TV vs. book' thing." After all, on the printed page, 'It's easy to say 'they sent off all the people of color,' but seeing it all the time on a TV show is harder. 'Also, honestly,' he adds, 'what's the difference between making a TV show about racists and making a racist TV show? Why would we be covering [the story of handmaid Offred, played by Mad Men's Elisabeth Moss], rather than telling the story of the people of color who got sent off to Nebraska?' (Gibney, p.n.).

The showrunner mentions in this quote one of the obstacles of adaptation, shifting to a visual media exacerbates the lack of diversity in this story. In this case, making an adaptation that uses fidelity as the main goal would work to the detriment of the final product. The book has been highly criticized through the years for its brush off of the issue of race and by using black suffering and culture, such as the "Underground Femaleroad", but not giving any black

characters its due place in a story that uses African-American history and suffering but not their voices.

With the intent on making the story more apt to its time, the series decided against having an all-white cast. However, the series has been criticized for making the decision to include black characters but not addressing any racial discrimination within Gilead (Phoenix, 206-208). Creating a story that seems to exist in a post-racist time when race does not factor in either the regime's policies or in the lives of the characters. Although the crux of the racial problem in the show is that it did not make the same effort to include current race discourse as it did in including ongoing themes related to women inequality. As an example, in the summer of 2017, the alt-right took to the streets of Charlottesville, inciting a new discussion on the return of Nazism and the K.K.K. ideals to mainstream America. N. Berlatsky comments on the connection between patriarchy and racism:

Conservative gender politics in the United States have been closely intertwined with racism for decades. Right-wing restrictions on reproductive freedom go hand in hand with right-wing Islamophobia and right-wing antipathy to movements like Black Lives Matter. In the United States, patriarchy has always been importantly both white and male. (n.p.)

Saying this, it is unlikely that if a system such as Gilead were to rise in America no racial divide would occur. For example, when in episode three Moira and June are called "Sluts" or when they march on the streets for women's rights, these are moments when the audience can find parallels between the lives of those women in pre-Gilead and themselves, however, when it comes to race, the series does not create those moments. Much of the success of the series is due to the fact that the story comes as a warning to the audience, and the question "Could this happen?" is the permanent aftereffect of the series. When showing Gilead there is never a moment when Moira or Luke are discriminated for their race. By excluding racism in the regime, the show diverges from their premise of making the show current and creates a show that uses history, songs, and experience from oppressed black people but does not recognize them effectively.

We saw in chapter one of this text how black women in films and series are less represented. Today including minorities is essential to any show's success and this justifies the participation of black actors as for Moira and Luke. However, by casting Samira Wiley (Moira), an actress with a major role in "Orange is the New Black" – a series praised by its portrait of

race and how it plays a role in the disproportional incarceration of black Americans - the show reaps the benefits of inclusion without doing the work of including the representation her fans come in search of. Moreover, by representing June and the most powerful families in Gilead as white, the series continues to have the option to use a largely white cast when it comes to promoting the series.

Race in the series is just one of the deviations from the book. Other changes were made to make the story more topical. Firstly, the women no longer get tagged with a tattoo, which would be reminiscent of the Jewish concentration camps. Instead, they are given cattle tagging on the ears. This new tracking device adds to the animalization of the Handmaids in the story, as mentioned above, but more importantly, it prevents the show from appropriating the suffering of the Jewish community that is not represented. A very frequent comparison in the book is the one between the Handmaids and cattle. As mediators of power, the Aunts are allowed to use the cattle prods as a tool for punishment. By being punished with a tool made for animals the Handmaids are dehumanized, humiliated, and reminded of their lack of rights, and of their duty to breed. This again uses the history of women slaves in the United States without the recognition of the story, black slaves were forced to breed and were punished in similar ways, but this is not recognized by the show. In the series, the cattle prods continue to be the Aunts' usual disciplinary instrument, but they become more horrific when shown on the screen. The prods are always in sight as a reminder of how the Aunts' authority is constant and brutal. In the same way as animals, the Handmaids are regarded as a possession, by having a tracker on their ears. Even when they are naked, with their red uniforms off, they can always be identified, which reinforces the idea that the regime is not temporary. It symbolizes that the Handmaids are no longer humans with their own identity but are instead property that needs to be accounted for.

2.7. LGBT+

The show, through Emily and Moira's characters and backstories, relates in detail to the struggle of the LGBT+ community. In Gilead "Gender Treachery" is a crime punished with death, and Moira and Emily only escape this punishment because they are fertile. Sexual orientation, although mentioned in the book, becomes much more prevalent in the series. In episode three, we see Emily being captured, not because she is part of Mayday but instead because she is in a relationship with a Martha. In the same episode, we see June and Moira being mistreated by a male employee while ordering a coffee. This episode emphasizes how normalized and seemingly

inconsequential acts of sexism can lead to the loss of fundamental

rights down the road. "In a gradually heating bathtub you'd be boiled to death before you knew it." (Chapter X: p. 66). With this the show continues to use its platform as a warning, putting in perspective discrimination acts of today and showcasing what they can lead to. Homophobia is discussed in detail in the series also because feminism has in the past been dominated by white middle-class heterosexual women. By making LGBT+ women a large part of a feminist show, the series changes its message to include a more current feminist message where all women are included. Now we will analyze specifically the different feminist currents represented in the novel and how the series adapts them.

2.8. Feminism

The book portrays two major generations of feminists, one being Offred, and the other, Offred's mother: "You young people don't appreciate things, she'd say. You don't know what we had to go through, just to get you where you are." (Chapter XX: p. 131). Offred's mother is a reflection of a more radical faction second-wave feminism: "That's it: she said we were going to feed the ducks. But there were some women burning books, that's what she was really there for." (Chapter VII: p. 48). She is a single mother that fought for women's rights most of her life. She represents all the women that marched, burned books, and fought for women's liberation. In the book she goes to the colonies, and in it she serves two purposes, firstly she represents what is considered a more "radical feminism"— as Offred narrates, her mother fought for a society that was focused on women "Mother, I think. Wherever you may be. Can you hear me? You wanted a women's culture. Well, now there is one. It isn't what you meant, but it exists. Be thankful for small mercies." (Chapter XXI: p. 137) —; secondly, she is used to create a contrast between a woman that fought for her rights and Offred, when it comes to feminism, Offred is a background character, although surrounded by feminists, as her mother and Moira. June narrates that she was passive and doesn't take any kind of stand when it comes to the women's movement. In fact, in the book, she only sees the denial of her mother's feminism as a way to step out of her mother's shadow.

Despite not dwelling on Offred's relationship as a daughter, the series, made more than thirty years after the book, replaces the criticism of radical feminism of second wavers with other forms of resistance. In the book the relationship between Offred's mother and Luke suggests the confrontation between feminism and sexism: "he teased her by pretending to be macho, he'd tell her women were incapable of abstract thought and she'd have another drink and grin at him." (Chapter XX: p. 131). In

the series, as the mother's character is absent, the standoff between Luke and Offred's mother is relegated to some extent to Moira. Moira in the

book is an activist and a heroine in Offred's eyes, she desires a women's culture, she fights for women's equality by isolating herself in a group with similar ideologies to hers. However, when Moira and Luke face each other, their friendship shows through, the argument exists because they care for each other, she is pro-women but not against Luke. In the series, the figure of radical feminism is diluted and almost disappears, reflecting the post-feminism sentiment of the 1980s when feminism was going through a wave of popularity, and people started to look at radical feminism as a barrier against change. In the series, however, none of the women is shown fighting for feminism before women started losing their jobs.

In the book Offred is a common woman, according to Atwood: "The voice is that of an ordinary, more-or-less cowardly woman (rather than heroine) because I suppose I'm more interested in social history than in the biographies of the outstanding" (Bloom, 16). When asked to join the resistance, Offred says no, and instead chooses to rebel in other ways, such as starting an affair with Nick. She is passive and does not fight to change Gilead in any way, instead her main goal is to survive, to last as long as she can by keeping herself sane. She never tries to improve Gilead for the other women. In the series, Offred changes, as we analyzed before, firstly she has a name, she is undeniably June, she is the heroine, she is no longer a story among many. The series splits the main character in two, one being Offred, the Handmaid, living by the rules of Gilead, and the other being June, the woman behind the Handmaid. Moreover, it creates a duality between her rebellious thoughts and law-abiding actions. We have seen before how June suffers change to fit the media but, more importantly, the main character is transformed to create a new message as a feminist character.

In 2016 and 2017, the world saw the results of not fighting against discriminatory ideology. The Brexit vote brought to the forefront racism, xenophobia, and nationalist ideology; the 2016 presidential election in the United States also became controversial due to the misogynist pattern on the republican candidate's record on women and also the rhetoric used towards Hillary Clinton.¹⁹ It was in these years that there was a mass recognition that after years of women not wanting to be associated with the feminist movement and of people in general not wanting to associate themselves with revolutionary causes, groups such as neo-conservatives, white nationalists, Neo-Nazis and pro-life movements were becoming more powerful.

¹⁹ Although there are many factors that influence the image of the candidate held by the American voter many articles have been written about how sexism played a role in the election and how Clinton was through the election berated with sexism remarks (Robbins, n.p.).

In the series, June starts by being as uncommitted as in the book. In a flashback, when talking about writing a paper on one campus sexual assault she and Moira brush off the issue, giving the idea of it being an unworthy theme for a paper. But as the series evolves, and Offred and Moira start to lose their freedom, they both start to be more militant, they both go to marches and Moira joins a group to organize protests. The book, after so many years, still holds many critical comments to the society and feminism that are current today, however, the show works within the paradigm of 2016 giving a bigger emphasis to something that is reflected in the book but has become a much bigger problem in the 21st century: the consequences of our indifference and passivity. I will talk more about the shows' impact and real-life consequences in the third chapter.

The series gives part of Moira's rebellious characteristics present in the book to June, but Moira gains a new storyline that further reflects the current struggles of the feminist movement. Up until episode four, Moira is stronger, more unruly than June: "Offred: It's just we'll be posted soon. Moira: Posted. You sound like Aunt Chlamydia. Offred: We're gonna get out of here. Moira: So? Posted could be worse." (Episode four). Moira is the one that stays rational when Janine needs help and she is the one that reminds June she needs to fight for her daughter. By the time they realize what their lives as Handmaids are going to be like they try to escape but the world outside has changed too much. While they escape, they spare the life of the Aunt, by using violence to escape but not taking revenge. The series distinguishes them from the other women in Gilead in the use of violence to achieve their goals. When June is caught, her punishment is to be beaten in the feet, after which she becomes bedbound, and it is the other inhabitants of the Red Center that bring her food and create a supportive women community to help. In these moments the series reflects on the importance of solidarity and sisterhood.

After the failed escape Moira is sent to work in Jezebel's, she starts to lose her will to fight and accepts her fate. Reversing the roles, it is June that tells Moira not to give up and to continue fighting. Then she helps the Mayday group get the package, kills a guard, and runs away. Moira is last seen after escaping to Canada, finding solace in Luke. Moira's new storyline is a beacon of hope for the feminist movement as it shows how persistent resistance leads to the possibility of victory.

In the book, Offred is content when Ofglen, Emily, abandons her push for the Mayday group: "Ofglen is giving up on me. She whispers less, talks more about the weather. I do not

feel regret about this. I feel relief.” (Chapter XXI: p. 283). This reflects on Offred's character in the book being less defiant and accepting her fate.

In the book, the Mayday group is introduced to Offred by Ofglen, who informs her of the group, their password, and even claiming that the guard killed in the Salvaging belonged to them. In the series, Emily introduces all these elements to June, but the group takes on a different dimension in the character's story. She asks how she can help Mayday and is eager to tell Emily the information she has uncovered “Ofglen. I can tell her that the Commander is going to Washington.” (Episode two). June rejoices in knowing the existence of the group “There is an ‘us’? It seems imagined (...) Now, there has to be an ‘us.’ Because, now, there is a ‘them.’” (Episode two). This new acceptance of the Mayday group by June, in the same way as the marches, creates the message of the importance of organizing countermovements.

In the book, the resistance asks Offred to spy on her Commander, to go through his office and find something that could incriminate him. She doesn't do it, instead, she goes but does not use these visits to Mayday's advantage. In episode two, when she is first asked to help, she says: “I don't know. I'm not that kind of person.”, to which Emily answers: “No one is until they have to be.” In this passage, the series shows how radicalization strings from oppression, giving the message that even women that do not have a history of disobedience need to rise to the occasion when there is no longer the option to be uninvolved. It is by living under the regime that June is transformed, and when she is asked to smuggle a package out of Jezebel's she plots to go and is more fearlessly involved in the cause. Moira protests: “It could be anything! A bomb. Anthrax. What do you know?”, to which Offred answers: “I hope it is” (Episode six). In showing June's journey from a bystander to a part of the Mayday movement the series exposes the flaws of Indifference and passivity and directs the message to influence its viewers into action. This message resonates with the period when the series is created because it prescribes that the inaction present in women's movements is no longer acceptable in a time when women are losing their rights.

Moreover, the series not only directs viewers to criticize society and to actively participate in making it more equal, but it also furnishes them with symbols in order to do so. June changes the book slogan from “Nolite te bastardes carborundorum”, which means “don't let the bastards grind you down” to “Nolite te bastardes carborundorum, bitches”. Transporting this slogan to the present and distinguishing it from the book. Also, and perhaps more important, the series popularizes the red cloak and changes its meaning from a symbol of oppression to a symbol of resistance: “It's their own fault.

uniforms if they didn't want us to be an army.”. In chapter three we will look at the impact of the red cloak on the series success.

In the series June risks everything to help the Mayday movement, Nick stops being a part of her acceptance of the Gilead system, and instead, she risks her relationship in order to keep the hope of one day saving her daughter.²⁰ June's story revolves more around other women such as Moira, Emily, or Janine but also around the way she learns to view her fellow Handmaids as a group that can be used to help each other and fight against the system. By valuing the themes of oppression, fighting against a regime, and the power of women working together above the relationship with Nick or June's mental health, the series makes the decision to tell a story with a more prominent message for social change.

2.9. Motherhood

Motherhood both in the book and the series is of most importance. In the origin of Gilead, as more women could no longer have children, motherhood becomes a nation's most valued resource. Both in the book and in the series Offred's daughter is a constant presence in her memory, she is so important to her that the narrator does not introduce her to us in either of the media. “She could get one of those over her head, he'd say. You know how kids like to play.” (Chapter V: p. 37). Both in the book and the series the daughter is presented as “she”, with no previous identification: “She comes to me so clearly in the bath.” (...). By choosing not to introduce one of the figures most valuable for Offred, both the book and the series convey that her daughter is so important to her that the main character sees no need to explain whom she is talking about, as there is no one else she would value more. Moreover, in the series, the first person to appear is June's daughter, thus reinforcing how important children are, not only for the character but also to Gilead.

²⁰ This trope of rebellion through force by non-violent characters is becoming a trope amongst women characters that have failed every other attempt to change their situation. Another example is the character Diane Lockard from the show “The Good Fight”, a bona fide gun-hating democrat that after innumerable non-violent protests, considers taking to the streets with guns as a protest against President Trump. In the same way, June demonstrates this escalation of violence after realizing that any other method might be inefficient. This option may be related to current events and trends. In the 2016 campaign, one of the democratic party chants was “When they go low, we go high”, a sentence coined by first lady Michelle Obama in the 2016 Democratic Convention which quickly became the answer to fight hate and oppression with dialogue and by being an example. By the time the 2016 campaign was over and candidate Hillary Clinton had lost to Donald Trump, the chant took a mockery meaning emphasizing why the Democrats had failed. The continuing desire to not fight dirty seemed to be the cause of the Democratic demise, and this feeling transpired to television where characters journey through non-violence towards violent protest.

In a society where children are so important, everything can be done to justify having them. Inside the regime, having children is synonym of class and reverence for God. Among the Wives, having a child is of ultimate importance, not only because they want to be mothers but also for what being a mother means for their status. In the series, the character of Naomi Putman, Commander Warren Putman's wife, goes through the process of motherhood by keeping Janine's baby. When the baby is about to be born, she holds a lavish birth gathering for the women, she walks in the street exhibiting the child, and gloats to Serena about the daily life of being a mother. Naomi Putman aspires to motherhood, but motherhood means something different to her. She is only shown being affectionate to her daughter in public and has no compassion for Janine and her separation from her child. Putman desires motherhood because she desires the respect and social status that comes attached to it.

Serena's version of motherhood is slightly different, in both the book and the series. As the series develops, we see her becoming more human but at the same time more ruthless in achieving her goal to be a mother. In the book, she is older, and her current predicament comes after a long life of work; in the series, Serena is younger, still able to raise children into adulthood and, if it were not for infertility, she would still be able to have children. In the book, Serena offers Offred a picture of her daughter in exchange for her trying to become pregnant by Nick. By doing this it reveals how, after all of Serena's preaching, the values she holds are secondary when weighed against having a child. In both works, Serena asks Offred to have Nick's child and uses a photo of Hannah as a bribe to get her way, but Serena gains a new evil dimension when she takes June to see her daughter but doesn't allow the two to meet. In the last episode, June finally sees her daughter, but only from the car where she is kept locked, while Serena talks to the child. In both media, June regards Serena as too evil to ever be a mother. Serena in the series is shown as a woman so obsessed with being a mother that she crosses all boundaries, beating June, locking her in her room, and risking both their lives by asking her to have sex with Nick. Although Serena is portrayed with more complexity, being more human, and being shown how she got to her present self, her obsession with motherhood overpowers all compassion she might have. In the end, both in the book and in the series, Offred reaches the same conclusion, that Serena should not be a mother. In the book she says: "She's made of wood, or iron, she can't imagine." (Chapter XXXI: p. 216); in the series she says: "How can you do this? You're deranged. You're... You're... You're fucking evil. You know that? You are a goddamn motherfucking monster! Fucking heartless, sadistic, motherfucking evil cunt! Fuck you, Serena! You are gonna burn in goddamn motherfucking hell, you crazy, evil bitch!" (Episode ten).

In the same episode however, Serena finds out about the affair between Fred and June and makes her have a pregnancy test. For Serena her husband was the only thing that she still had left and if that was going to be taken away from her, only a child could make it up for it. This devotion to and the instrumentalization of motherhood becomes clear when Serena kneels and prays for the pregnancy test to be positive, an object not allowed in the regime but that represents to her the possibility of a home, a future, and a new life: "Praised be His mercy. He's answered our prayers." Offred answers: "You think I prayed for this? You think I prayed to bring a baby into this house?" (Episode ten). The series emphasizes Serena's cold-blooded behavior by having her disclose to Offred that she is pregnant while the blood that results from Serena's punch rushes down June's face. Serena redefines motherhood because despite not having any compassion towards another human life she still desires, more than everything, to be a mother.

The three representations of motherhood, June, Naomi Putman, and Serena show different types of women that fight for their children in different ways but the biggest difference about them is how they represent different types of mother's love. June loves her daughter because she raised her, her constant thoughts are about her and the moments they spent together; Putman regards her daughter as a status symbol, as a way to belong to a group of mothers, she wants to experience it so that others know that she has lived through motherhood; Serena, on the other hand, has never had a child but wishes so hard to have one that she loses all human compassion which would allow her to be a good mother. The series again presents a transgressive representation of mothers, June despite being a rebel is the epitome of mother love, and despite being against Gilead she continues to be religious. Serena and Putman despite being Wives dedicated to their household, what would be the ideal scenario for examples of motherhood, are the antitheses of dedicated mothers.

The powerful families in the series, such as the Putman's and the Waterford's, lead lives that comply with the values of the regime but just on the surface. In the book, we are shown how they transgress the rules: "She had a cigarette, (...) must have come from the black market" (Chapter III: p. 26). The series builds the irony of the powerful selective obedience by having Serena use a pregnancy test, by having Commander Putnam committing the sin of lust by having intercourse with Janine and being described by Fred as a "strong defender of the faith" in episode ten, and by having Fred play the game with June, going into Jezebels while blaming Serena for bringing lust into the house and by saying, as in the book: "Better never means better for everyone. It always means worse for some." (Episode five, Chapter XXXII: p.

222). Both Serena and Naomi Putman are also considered by the regime as “women of faith” but none of them have the qualities of morality and compassion towards others taught by religion. The show expands on the book’s criticism by having more examples of how the ruling classes exploit their power whilst preaching values they themselves don’t abide by.

The adaptation transports many of the book resources to the screen, from the use of color to the narration. It adds meaning using the visual media that allows for more possibilities in showcasing the way the regime develops and enforces its power on the lives of all living under it. However, it is in the exploration of women’s culture, the insurgency, and its representations on screen that the series leaves its bigger impact on the story. The representation of women includes a wider range of female characters than the original work and by showcasing this range the series expands on the book’s inclusivity. By expanding on the book contemplation of feminist movements with black characters and more LGBT+ representation the series includes more women in those movements. Also, by having each character fighting to survive the regime in personalized ways the series showcases feminism as the heterogeneous movements that they are today. The biggest transformation of the adaptation was the importance it gave to the dangers of passivity in society and how the lack of resistance can have dire consequences for the oppressed. Moreover, by having June declare she was not the type of person to rebel but transforming her into an agent for Mayday the show messages that indifference in times of extreme inequality is not possible. We will now see what led to the book’s message and in chapter three the precedents that led to the series success.

2.2. Book precedent

The Handmaid’s Tale as a dystopia has been always compared to its predecessor, *1984*, which Atwood claims she used as inspiration. Both dystopias have a main character that struggles against the loss of individual freedom. *1984* was published in 1949 and was inspired by the regimes of the Soviet Union and Nazi Germany, being also a commentary on the Second World War, and how technology such as television and radio could impact war. *1984*, despite being a timeless story, that has found success throughout time, is a text that very much reflects on the epoch in which it was written, and the fear and questions people had as regards the future. In the same way, *The Handmaid’s Tale*, despite still being current today, was very much a product of the social climate of the period when it was written.

Kriss A. Drass and Edgar Kiser in two journal articles, one from 1987 and the other from 1988, set out to showcase the link between dystopian literary productions and periods when society enters into crisis.

A period of crisis in the core of the world- system is a time during which old economic, political, and cultural arrangements decline, and alternative institutional arrangements exist only in inchoate form. During such periods, relatively drastic changes in basic social institutions are perceived to be both possible and in fact necessary to ensure the reproduction of the system. Therefore, discussion of alternatives is not only tolerated but encouraged. (287)

Both *1984* and *The Handmaid's Tale* were written in one of these periods when the hegemonic power structure was put in question. As previously mentioned, Atwood had her idea for the book in 1981, but only started writing it in 1984. In 1981, Ronald Reagan became the 40th president of the United States. His campaign created a sharp television image that appealed to the middle class, suburban voters, and to a platform of varied Republican measures and family values.²¹ Neuman gives us a notion of the backlash in Reagan's times as regards women's rights:

Murders related to sexual assault and domestic violence increased by 160 per cent while the overall murder rate declined; meanwhile the federal government defeated bills to fund shelters for battered women, stalled already approved funding, and in 1981 closed down the Office of Domestic Violence it had opened only two years earlier. Pronatalists bombed and set fire to abortion clinics and harassed their staff and patients; Medicaid ceased to fund legal abortions, effectively eliminating freedom of choice for most teenage girls and poor women; several states passed laws restricting not only legal abortion but even the provision of information about abortion. The debate about freedom of choice for women flipped over into court rulings about the rights and freedom of the fetus. (860)

²¹ Reagan's presidency is hard to condense in a few lines, but some of his quotes capture the spirit of who he was and the time he was living in. In 1966 he said: "If an individual wants to discriminate against Negroes or others in selling or renting a house, he has the right to do so." (Black America Has Overlooked the Racist Policies of Ronald Reagan, 2009); in 1983 he proposed in his speech at the National Association of Evangelicals, a "new political and social consensus" and the return of "family ties and religious beliefs" ("Evil Empire"); later this new consensus meant for him connecting "pro-choice movements with infanticide, pornography, adultery (...)" (Berg, 47). As relates women's rights, Reagan targeted reproductive rights and put always an emphasis on traditional values.

During this period the Republican Party ideals became increasingly misogynist, traditionalist, with undertones of racism, exploiting the fear of feminism to manipulate the voters into more conservative positions (Berg, 60).

The Reagan presidency, therefore, reflected the rising of conservative forces such as the televangelists and Christian rights organizations. Famous evangelists such as Billy Graham, the Bakker couple, and Jerry Falwell, started in the 1960s and 1970s broadcasting on radio and television and by the 1980s they reached levels of fame that allowed them to broadcast all over the world, built megachurches, and turned to be religious advisers to powerful people worldwide.²² These had in common a religious message above all but they also, to different degrees, preached the power of family, the traditional family unit, women's duty as being the family, and taking care of the home. Some preached racist, homophobic agendas, and defended that the state should not be separated from religion (Reed, 2007).²³

The Evangelists have had an immense impact in the United States as they have perfected the use of the mass media for their advantage, with radio, and television programs magazines and books that have audiences of millions. By putting literature in its historical context, a connection emerges between some of the book messages and slogans that re-emerged in the 1970s and 1980s in the United States. *The Handmaid's Tale* takes influence both from the political and the religious developments of its time to imagine what would happen if people as these Evangelists managed to get to power with no one to object to them. An example is the use of religious texts to justify the discrimination of women and Serena Joy reflects the irony of the wives of all televangelists that preached for women to stay in the home while getting a paycheck (Neuman, 860-861). After decades of civil rights movements and big wins for equality, the rampant popularity of conservative forces created a period of

²² Taking Jerry Falwell as an example, his organization invested ten million dollars in the Reagan campaign for president. In common with Reagan, the preacher wanted the return of family values, moreover, he wanted the end of separation between church and state and he had a racist and homophobic agenda. In 1981 he said: "The idea that religion and politics don't mix was invented by the Devil to keep Christians from running their own country." (Reed, 2007).

²³ Although not all preachers want a connection to the Republican Party, such as Billy Graham, a man praised by Obama and an important figure in the Civil Rights movements, they all in one way or another preach a message that undermines the women's equality efforts. In 1969 Billy Graham published the text "A Vocation of Honor" in a magazine that reached five million households. In it he argued: "The Word of God teaches that the primary duty of a woman is to be a homemaker"; "Wife, mother, homemaker - this is the appointed destiny of real womanhood." (Long 2008: 79). Graham, in the same way as the preacher, looked at the Bible for justification to support women staying in the home, claiming that being mothers and wives is their God-given role and that they "will be happiest, most creative - and freest - when they assume and accept that role." (Long 2008: 80). Moreover, they claim that women should not have jobs because God has made women to be child-bearers and men to be breadwinners. Later in his life Graham retracted his interpretation of the Bible but by then people across millions of households had already shaped their lives to follow his preaching.

crisis. As a result, dystopian writing was an inevitable response to try to understand both what brought up the change and what the future consequences could be.

By the 1960s “40% of all American women over the age sixteen were employed, most in low-paying, low state job positions (...)” (Berg, 22). Women were leaving the household and getting more education and jobs. Although women were less discriminated, they were still encouraged to get less education, accept lower-paying jobs, and inequality in the household still held them back. With this in mind a new age of feminism started in the 60's with the goal of giving women more reproductive rights, more equality in the home, in education, in work, in the political arena, and proposing a redefinition of what being a woman means. This wave had its strides and in 1973, despite the enormous opposition, abortion was made legal in the United States by Supreme Court decision *Roe V. Wade*, and the year before, in 1972, the Equal Rights Amendment was finally approved by the Senate.

Feminist movements leading up to the year 1984 were not made only of victories, in fact, the movements themselves had always dealt with many disagreements, even before the vote was won, but in the 1970s and 1980s what a feminist was had changed. Atwood said in 1983: “Feminist is now one of the all-purpose words. It really can mean anything from people who think men should be pushed off cliffs to people who think it's O.K. for women to read and write.” (Callaway: 23). In the second-wave different feminist currents had a multitude of platforms that ranged from too radical to not enough.

With this in mind, *The Handmaid's Tale* is also a way to categorize the changes in the feminist movements and to find order in between all the chaos. The book was a long-awaited feminist dystopia, that explores power changes that were disrupting the order of a movement that was both changing but also being changed by all that opposed it.

The Handmaids' story reflects on a time where both reactionary and progressive movements were in rapid change. The years leading to the writing of the book were of crisis, for religious, conservative forces were growing in expression and influence, and the hegemonic power structures were being rethought. As we saw in chapter one of this thesis, feminist movements struggled with the lack of consensus on many issues. In the third chapter we will look at the factors that led to the revival of the dystopia in 2017, when the series was launched, by being a period of crisis and change, and how those factors affected the impact of the adaptation.

3. Chapter Three: the reception to the adaptation and its impact on politics and culture

"We're not living in Gilead yet, but there are Gilead-like symptoms going on."

Margaret Atwood (ABC News, 2018)

The Handmaid's Tale, the Trump Presidency, the #Metoo Movement, Women's Marches, the Brett Kavanaugh nomination, #OscarsSoWhite, worldwide movements for women's rights, it is impossible to say one led to another and one only exists due to the other. When we consider what came first if the chicken or the egg it is not true to say *The Handmaid's Tale* prompted all these events, but nothing exists in a vacuum. The very making of the series is a result of a change in society and what it is willing to talk about, but the series' impact in history, culture, and society cannot be denied. In this chapter, we will analyze how well the series fits into the time in history when it was made, how it affected society and propelled change and most importantly, how it inspired women in the United States and around the world to fight for their rights.

3.1. Series precedent

"The Handmaid's Tale", Season One, started on the 26nd of April 2017 and ended on the 14th of June 2017. The following are just three out of thousands of reviews on the first season that we can find: "No television event has hit such a nerve." – *The Guardian* (Wollaston: n.p.); "It is unflinching, vital and scary as hell." – *The New York Times* (Poniewozik: n.p.); "[A] magnificent and effectively haunting 10-episode series." – *The Washington Post* (Stuever: n.p.). The series was the first piece of television created by a streaming platform to win an Emmy award, and it won five, including "Outstanding Drama Series" and "Outstanding Writing for a Drama Series" (2017). Moreover, it won two Golden Globes (2018), one Bafta Television Award (2018), among others. The show has been critically acclaimed due to its technical aspects, photography, editing, writing, and Elizabeth Moss's performance. It has caught special attention not only for its artistic qualities but also for its treatment of women's issues, for reflecting upon them and inspiring the conversation on them instead of shying away. ABC's nightline ("Behind The Scenes", n.d.) said the show was "catapulting themes of oppression against women into a cultural phenomenon" and *The Huffpost* said: "The Lasting Impact of 'Handmaid's Tale' Is the Activism It's (sic) Inspired" (Brooks: n.p.).

On Nightline, ABC News (n.p.) Margaret Atwood and Elisabeth Moss were asked if the show would have had such a big impact if Hillary Clinton had won the election. The two women agreed that if it had happened, the series would reflect how the country “missed the boat”. However, because Trump has won, the series has become a reflection on our current society, even sometimes foreshadowing the events that would later happen. By 2016 right-wing ideals were becoming more popular all over the world, and with this, countermovements for equal rights increased exponentially. The series works by giving the viewer a reflection and putting into context through art what was happening in society.

In order for us to understand the success of the series and why it raised the manifestation of such strong opinions either by fans or critics, we have to go back to the 2016 elections and briefly study the rhetoric in the United States at the time. On Tuesday, 8th of November 2016, Donald Trump became the president-elect of the United States despite losing the popular vote by three million votes against the Democrat candidate Hillary Clinton. The campaign that led to this victory was marked by attacks on immigrants, women, and almost all minority races. In October 2016, *The Washington Post* released a tape of Trump bragging to *Access Hollywood* on how his power allowed him to sexually assault women without any consequences (Filipovic: n.p.). This tape was degrading to women and brought attention to how the then possible future president of the United States, and all who supported him, viewed women. Donald Trump has a history of controversial stances on women. In 1992, in an interview with *New York Magazine*, Trump said about women: 'You have to treat 'em like s---'." (Cohan: n.p.); in 1997 Trump bought the Miss America organization saying a series of sexist comments about it (Ibid); in 2011 he called breastfeeding “disgusting” (Ibid); in 2013, instead of questioning why so many complaints go unreported, he blamed sexual assault in cohabitation in the military, with the tweet: “26,000 unreported sexual assaults in the military — only 238 convictions. What did these geniuses expect when they put men & women together?”; and in 2015 he tweeted: “If Hillary Clinton can't satisfy her husband what makes her think she can satisfy America?” (Ibid). These are just a few examples out of many that showcase the pattern of Trump's derogatory views on women.

Donald Trump galvanized a following that saw in him a “tell it like it is”- kind of person. He contributed to the Birther Movement when defending President Barack Obama was not a United States citizen (Barbaro: n.p.). During his campaign, Trump contributed in large strides to normalize sexism, racism, homophobia, and

transphobia. By the time, in 2017, Donald Trump was sworn in as president, his message of dividedness continued, establishing a "Muslim

Ban" in his first week of office (Valverde: n.p.). On the 12th of August, a man drove into a counter protest during a white nationalist rally in Charlottesville, making one fatal victim. The driver of the car was a 22-year-old neo-Nazi that had previously attended similar far-right protests (The Guardian: n.p.) The following day President Trump responded by saying that there was an "egregious display of hatred, bigotry and violence on many sides" and "You had a group on one side that was bad. You had a group on the other side that was also very violent" (Astor, Caron, Victor: n.p.). Trump took four days following the attack to denounce white supremacists and, as *The New York Times* (2017) pointed out, in a time when the country needed a reaction from the president and a reassurance that he would not stand for hate, the people got the opposite.

3.2. Women's marches

Trump's victory over the first woman candidate nominee of a major party in the United States outraged and saddened many who objected to his past treatment of and statements about women, as well as his controversial positions and rhetoric during the campaign (Women's March 2018: Protesters Take to the Streets for the Second Straight Year.) It also saddened many people who were hoping to have a woman president who would symbolize all that women have achieved. An accomplishment to all that have fought for equality, having a woman in the White House would reinforce the idea that women should have a place in power. As a response to the fears propelled by a growing normalization of sexism, racism, homophobia, and transphobia, on the 21st of January, the day after the inauguration, women marched, an estimated 500 thousand in Washington and 4.1 million in "sister marches" all over the world (Ibid). The Women's Marches became a historical event, their message was that the hate towards minorities that marked the electoral campaign would not stand: they "voiced their support for various causes, including women's and reproductive rights, criminal justice, defense of the environment and the rights of immigrants, Muslims, gay and transgender people and the disabled — all of whom were seen as particularly vulnerable under the new administration." (Ibid). The Women's Marches reinforced the awareness of the women's position in current society, and the importance of not letting hate stand unchallenged.

The series "The Handmaid's Tale" would bring to screen a story that put in perspective both the campaign but also how women's equality can be fragile if it is not fought for constantly. The similarity of the series' message and the marches' goals was not lost on the fans that took the series as an undoubtedly political commentary on

issues. Moreover, despite being released after the marches, the series recorded the scenes where we see women marching against the rise of Gilead before the marches of the 21st of January. As a result, the story gains a veracity to its claim to predict the degradation of women's rights by accurately foreseeing the marches as the first step to fight the rise to power of an entity that is not congruent with women's advancement.

3.3. Handmaids' protests

In the first three months of 2017, the series started to be promoted, and on March 2017 the first full trailer for the show was released. However, as a testifier to the show's impact, one of the first protests using the red dresses as a symbol happened on the 20th of March, one month before the series premiered and in the midst of the show promotion, women dressed as Handmaids went to the Texan capitol and sat in protest (The Handmaid's Tale protests taking place across the world: n.p). The protest was organized by NARAL Pro-Choice Texas and had as its goal to bring attention to a number of proposed bills, one would ban second-trimester abortion, another would "prevent doctors from being sued for failing to tell women about fetal abnormalities, in light of which they might opt for an abortion" (Ibid). From that point on the Handmaids' dress has been used in multiple protests in Texas where a group called "Texas Handmaids²⁴" was created to fight against new conservative bills that are being put forward in the State.

It [the red cloak] has become a very useful visual symbol that started in Texas. So, it was Texan women who wanted to go into the Texas legislature and where you saw a line of men in dark suits making laws about women's bodies. They dressed up and they just sat modestly so they couldn't be thrown out for creating a disturbance and they couldn't be thrown out from dressing immodestly because they're completely covered up, but everyone looking at them knew what they meant and that has gone around the world as a symbol of protest against women's bodies being controlled by people who aren't them. (Author Margaret Atwood on New Book "The Testaments")

We have talked about the history of abortion in the United States and how abortion was made legal through a Supreme Court decision and not by law. In order

for us to

²⁴ In the official website of the Texan Handmaids they have three major goals, first, "Educating Texans about reproductive justice, the merging of social causes and reproductive rights", second, "Working to end state funding of crisis pregnancy centers through protest and print campaigns and pressuring businesses who privately donate to stop", and third, "Improving pre and postnatal care for ALL Texas women through passing legislation that will improve the Maternal Mortality and Morbidity rate in Texas." This group defines itself as a "political action group

understand the context of these protests we will now look at the laws that are being proposed. In 1973 *Roe v. Wade* allowed abortion (Bach: n.p). In 1992 *Planned Parenthood v. Casey* created the “undue burden” exception, in which each state could regulate the abortion process for health and safety reasons as long as these measures do not mean an “undue burden” on the women. This exception has allowed states to limit abortion, reducing the number of clinics, not spreading information, and putting impediments on the process such as waiting periods. Although the decision is not new in the Trump era there is a new push for anti-abortion bills and more restrictions. The decision creates a loophole where states can regulate abortion to almost the point of having no providers of legal abortion: “States across the country are passing some of the most restrictive abortion legislation in decades, deepening the growing divide between liberal and conservative states and setting up momentous court battles that could profoundly reshape abortion access in America.” (Tavernise, 2019).

Before Trump was elected, the Supreme Court did not have the five pro-choice votes needed to overturn the decision, but with his opportunity to choose two Supreme Court seats there has been a race to create restrictive abortion bills so that they can pass while Republicans have the majority. According to *The New York Times*, nine states have passed bills on abortion that “challenge the constitutional right established in *Roe v. Wade*.” (Lai: n.p.). In Alabama, a law was passed declaring that abortion is only legal if the mother’s life is at risk or the fetus cannot survive, no exception for rape or incest, and Louisiana passed a bill where abortion is only allowed until the first heartbeat.

In chapter one of this thesis, we saw the path for abortion regulation and how feminist movements united behind the cause of legalizing abortion and its deregulation. The new wave of anti-abortion laws in the present is supported, in the same way as in the past, by conservatives and religious leaders, and the people that oppose them defend that making abortion illegal will only lead to unsafe abortions and the oppression of women. *The Handmaid's Tale* is a book based on historical facts, henceforth the adaptation reminds people of the injustice women already suffered to conquer their freedom of choice. The road to making abortion legal was a hard-fought one, and all the subsequent achievements in women’s equality came after years of women’s suffering, of organizing, marching, writing books, giving speeches, and changing cultural understanding of the women’s standing in society. Both the book and now the series are reminders that for each victory many women had years of suffering.

The show also portrays a society where women start to lose rights they once had, specially the right over their bodies. In the 1960s Betty Friedan wrote the book *The Feminine Mystique*, often pinpointed as the start of the Second Wave feminism (Grady: n.p). This wave occurred in the 1960s and 1970s and marked a time when different women's equality movements had great momentum, making feminism a mainstream movement in the United States (Bergeron: n.p.). These two decades saw the push to ratify the Equal Rights Amendment with large women's strikes for equality, *MS. Magazine*, Title IX Amendment, The Equal Pay Act (Napikoski: n.p.), and the first black woman running for president, Shirley Chisholm.

The second wave worked on getting women the right to hold credit cards under their own names and to apply for mortgages. It worked to outlaw marital rape, to raise awareness about domestic violence and build shelters for women fleeing rape and domestic violence. It worked to name and legislate against sexual harassment in the workplace. These decades brought the discussion of the women's position in society and, as Grady remarks, the second wave's focus on changing the way society thought about women was just as central: "The second wave cared deeply about the casual, systemic sexism ingrained into society — the belief that women's highest purposes were domestic and decorative, and the social standards that reinforced that belief — and in naming that sexism and ripping it apart. (Grady: n.p).

In 1977 the National Women's Conference brought 14,000 women to discuss and form a plan of action to deliver to the president. But this period also brought large opposition within the women's movement, most notoriously Phyllis Schlafly, a political activist that opposed the ratification of the E.R.A. and the feminist movements of the time. She would later inspire the character of Serena in the book.

The end of the strike of advances that marked this wave is often linked with the 1980s Regan conservatism (Grady: n.p). Although this was a period of great change for women, the enthusiasm and power of women fighting for equality reduced greatly in the following years. Gloria Steinem said about the period: "In terms of real power — economic and political — we are still just beginning. But the consciousness, the awareness — that will never be the same," (Bergeron: p.n.). *The Handmaid's Tale's* message of loss of rights was very much inspired by setbacks of the movement of this time. The warning about the loss of women's power is very much correlated to the conservatism of the Regan years.

The adaptation, released in 2017, obviously refers to a different time frame and events. The series puts in perspective the laws for restrictive abortion and the rise of a different conservative ideology, making it clear that the achievements of the women's movements are not exponential, are sometimes intermittent, and are always in danger of retrograding. In its representation of the feminist movement, the series highlights how this consciousness for women's movements present in the second wave has been lost and this lack of enthusiasm is hurting women's advancements.

The show brings attention to how it is not enough to fight to maintain the status quo and how women need to constantly fight to improve their standing in society. The protests wearing the red attire in the Texas Capitol, as mentioned above, come as a reference to the series on how the smallest restriction to birth control or abortion, if not opposed, may open the door for widespread women discrimination. At the same time, the series popularized an image that summarizes these points into a visual symbol, the red cloak, making the protests that use the series as reference largely meaningful for women's rights. The first protest in Texas in 2017 was inspired by the series' promotion but it was when the series premiered that women all over America, and eventually worldwide, took upon themselves to dress as Handmaids to protest over a number of women's related issues. In May 2017, the protest was about "a budget provision that would bar uninsured women from getting services from a doctor or facility that refers them to abortion providers." (Liptak, 2017: p.n.). In June of the same year, Handmaids appeared in Washington to protest the congressional new budget: "Budget analysts estimated that about 15 percent of women in some areas would lose health care access because of provisions to defund Planned Parenthood and would not find an alternative source of care." (Sanger-Katz: p.n.). In New Hampshire, women in red cloaks went to the Legislative Office Building in Concord to demand the expulsion of a Republican senate that was involved in a Reddit forum full of misogynist content (Hauser: n.p.). What started as a protest by a few women from one organization inspired then other organizations or stand-alone women to put on the red cloak and protest a wide range of issues.

On July 9th 2017, President Trump nominated Brett Kavanaugh, who was accused of sexual misconduct as a teen ("Conservatives Fought For Brett Kavanaugh"), for a seat at the United States Supreme Court. This nomination can be seen as harmful for the equal rights movements. Firstly, he was replacing Justice Anthony Kennedy, who would float between left and right decisions. Kavanaugh's nomination was a "rare opportunity to solidify a conservative majority for a generation" (Ibid), which means that as a judge he would most likely defend pro-

life and other conservative verdicts such as anti-LGBT+. This impacts the women's movements especially because the new seats in the Supreme Court increase the probability of having *Roe vs Wade* overturned. Secondly, Kavanaugh was an extremely important nomination as it reinforces the president's and other major conservative voices views on women. During Kavanaugh's confirmation hearings, there was a divide, and issues such as believing women that come out declaring that they have been sexually assaulted, or the lack of representation of women in the White House gain massive importance in the national political discourse. And much larger than one accusation made against one man, the support behind Kavanaugh brought to the forefront a pattern of silenced women in the current administration. Moreover, the nomination of a man that has constantly supported policies that reduce women's rights has shown how both the current president and the Republican Party will continue devaluing women and depriving them of equal political representation (Haslett: n.p.). In the conversation around Kavanaugh's nomination many fans of "The Handmaid's Tale" saw resemblances between the lack of value assigned to women's voices by Republicans and what happens in the series. On the day of Brett Kavanaugh's confirmation, fifteen women stood in silence in the Handmaids' red cloak to protest his stance towards abortion and the high probability of his support to reverse *Roe v. Wade* decision (Ibid).

Growing protests in the United States using the series for inspiration, propelled by social media, from individuals protesting on their own and the creation of organizations, have inspired similar protests around the world. The protests have continued throughout the release of the series, protesting Donald Trump, Mike Pence, and political events that are connected to women's inequality. The protests are often silenced but they have used social media, billboards, and sometimes chants to add to the already large symbolism of the cloak. In 2017 a group of women protested Mike Pence's speech at the Christian Group, "Focus on the Family", and despite being mostly silenced they later wrote on Facebook: "We will rally to show Mike Pence and Focus on the Family that this community rejects hatred and bigotry in all its hideous forms" (The Handmaid's Tale protests taking place across the world: n.p.). When Donald Trump visited Ireland, he was greeted by protesters dressed as Handmaids with signs saying: "This is how it starts" (Quinn: n.p.). The show has not only given a reason for women to come out and protest the ideologies they see as threatening to women's freedom, it has also given them a symbol for women worldwide to communicate and shape the fight against what is applicable in their country.

“The handmaids are ominous, silent, semi-faceless, and the most powerful protest costume since hacktivist collective Anonymous popularized wearing Fawkes' smirking face over a decade ago.” (Ellis: p.n.). And this “powerful protest costume” does not have its power limited to the United States. The show has become a global success and its impact has motivated women to protest their rights all over the world. In Argentina, where bills to expand the conditions in which abortion could be performed were up for a vote, Atwood went on twitter to say: “Don't look away from the thousands of deaths every year from illegal abortions. Give Argentine women the right to choose!” (Handmaid's Tale' Protesters Demand Abortion Rights: n.p.). This tweet, the vote and examples from other protests culminated in women from Argentina to come to the streets dressed in the red cloak and white bonnets to protest for their rights. The Argentina protest gathered up to 1 million women (Goñi: n.p.) and captured attention from news sources, such as *The Guardian* (Ibid), *BBC* (Bell), *Telesur* (Handmaid's Tale' Protesters Demand Abortion Rights), *Comunidade Cultura e Arte* (“The Handmaid'S Tale” Inspira Protesto”), or *The Independent* (Dracott). From all over the world news sources reported on the protest and on the impact the cloak was having in encouraging women to come to the streets. *Telesur* news claimed: “The novel's inherent symbolism where women are enslaved and used for reproduction has touched millions of women across the world who have taken to streets in different countries to protest against patriarchy and anti- abortion laws.”(n.p.)²⁵. In Ireland, a similar scenario occurred, where women came out to the streets to protest against strict abortion laws and they also communicated through social media and media outlets (Wildish: n.p). The protest got worldwide support and influenced a whole new set of protests. Other countries where the red cloak has been used as a symbol of protest for women's rights are Northern Ireland, with a protest against an anti-abortion law, Croatia with a protest to bring attention to violence against women and domestic violence, England and Poland, where protesters got together during Trump's state visit, and Italy, where despite abortion being legal since 1978, doctors can still refuse to do the procedure leaving women without access to it (Bell: n.p.). Although the series brings attention to the protests, the exchange is not one-sided, the protests themselves have contributed to the impact and importance of the show by reproducing its message and bringing people's adherence to it.

2017 was the year when it seemed that women had gained a renewed awareness of all the forces in society that do not yet treat them as equal despite the surface level appearance of equality. Inequal pay, lack of representation, lack of reproductive rights, sexual assault,

²⁵ Although this quote states the novel as part of the reason for protest the entire article gives credit to the series for its impact in making the red cloak and bonnet recognizable.

victim-blaming, slut-shaming, domestic violence, and violence against women in general, are all issues that are treated in the series but were already subject of awareness regardless of *The Handmaid's Tale* adaptation. However, the show seems to have been released at the exact time to be able to influence the conversation on these issues and impact in directions at least to proportions that they would probably never reach. The silenced women in the red cloak have given protest a sense of urgency that was barely there before.

In 2011 Nancy Pelosi (Epstein: n.p.), now speaker of the House of Representatives, claimed that there was a “war on women” propelled by Republicans in the United States, using issues such as abortion, contraceptive availability, and overall women’s health. Part of this “war on women” are the continuing attempts to limit contraception availability to women.²⁶ According to the Center for Disease Control and Prevention, in a study made between 2015- 2017, two-thirds of women in childbearing age used birth control. With this widespread use of birth control, it should follow that its use would be normalized in society. When it comes to contraceptives, the Republican Party has never accepted the method, but it has been during the Trump administration that the opportunity arose to push for more conservative ideology regarding birth control. On March 2017, the American Health Care Act was introduced, with the goal to repeal parts of the Affordable Care Act (ACA). If it had passed it would have “blocked low-income patients’ access to STIs tests, cancer screenings, and birth control at Planned Parenthood health centers” (Planned Parenthood: n.p.). On the 13th of April 2017, President Trump overturned an Obama administration rule that protected Title X, a grant program that provides family planning through organizations such as Planet Parenthood (Kiene: n.p.); on the 22nd of May, the administration budget proposed to cut all funding from Title X to Planet Parenthood; and, on 12th of July, a spending bill was proposed by the House eliminating Title X and The Teen Prevention Program; on the 27th of September, HHS strategic plan describes life as “beginning at conception” — the planning document carries no legal force but ideologues have employed a similar language to attack not only abortion but also common methods of birth control

(Planned Parenthood: n.p.) —; in October 2017, the

²⁶ In The United States birth control has a long history. In the 1840’s the diaphragm was patented in the country, while condoms had been in use even before that but, in 1880, with the creation of rubber, they became cheaper and more reliable. When these two methods failed women, they would either go to an abortionist or do the abortion themselves at great risk for their health. According to Freedman (253-4), although often kept secret, birth control was widespread in the 19th century: “married women’s efforts to control their fertility were so successful that doctors and politicians worried about population decline.” Therefore, a movement to criminalize contraception and abortion emerged between the 1930s and the 1960’s. By the 20th century, some feminist movements prioritized contraception as one of their main pillars to achieve women’s equality. By the 1960s, when oral contraceptives came on the market, married women gave it preference, abandoning other forms of birth control. The pill was a great advancement for women’s liberation in general, as Freeman observes: “By the end of the

twentieth century over 60 percent of women of childbearing age in advanced industrial countries used contraceptives, primarily the birth control pill or the condom." (257).

Department of Health and Human Services put forward interim rules allowing most employees to evoke religious grounds to opt-out of covering birth control on health insurance. Under the Affordable Care Act, all employers have to provide at least one method of birth control free of charge under the employees' sponsored health care; in 2014, after a lawsuit against the United States government, an exception was made for religious entities only, and under the new proposed rules, all companies with "sincerely held" religious beliefs could opt out (Quinn: n.p.), on the 7th of November, two rules became official, one that permitted the "sincerely held" religious belief exception and another that allowed for small business and non-profits to ask for a "non-religious moral conviction" to exempt them as well. In her article in Vox, Anna North observes that these bills can be just the result of the new administration trying to take away the previous administration policies. But, combining all the history of both the Trump administration and the Republican Party against contraceptives, we may say that it gives a clearer picture of what Pelosi calls the "war against women".

In the series, we see how taking small freedoms away from women is the first step to then control women's bodies and reinforce the patriarchal system. In real life, although in different circumstances, this control over women relates to the series' viewers who see these bills, funding cuts, and family values rhetoric as a path towards that assail of women's rights. An activist that dressed as a Handmaid in a protest organized by Planet Parenthood said: "Dressing up as a Handmaid gives a clear message to our administration and the Senate about how seriously we take their decisions and how radically it can affect our lives" (Bondarenko: n.p.). In Denver, after learning of the new rules that would allow for companies to opt-out of including birth control in their insurance, women gathered around at Denver Federal Court dressed as Handmaids and claiming that the new rules were a "misogynistic move made by the Trump administration". Here the red cloak was used by protesters to bring attention to the underline reasoning of these new rules, that they are ultimately "misogynistic" and against women ("Handmaids Protest Pres. Trump's Birth Control Rollback").

3.4. #Metoo

On the 5th of October 2017, *The New York Times* released an article entitled "Harvey Weinstein Paid off Sexual Harassment Accusers for Decades" (Kantor and Twohey: n.p.). It explains how Weinstein, one of the most powerful men in Hollywood, had through the years used his power to sexually harass women and, in collusion with his company, had kept the victims from coming public. After the article came out it caused a domino effect when women started to tell their own stories of sexual

harassment by powerful men. Eventually, the

expression "metoo" coined by Tarana Burke (Garcia: n.p.), the creator of a non-profit organization that helps victims of sexual assault, was popularized: "The hashtag was widely used on Twitter, Facebook, Snapchat and other platforms; on Facebook, it was shared in more than 12 million posts and reactions in the first 24 hours, according to The Associated Press." (Ibid). #Metoo became a way for users to tell their experience with sexual violence and stand in solidarity with other survivors leading to the resignation of up to 70 men in powerful and influential positions (Almukhtar, Gold and Buchanan: n.p.). But maybe the lasting result of the #MeToo movement is the shift in professional relationships (Ibid) and the starting of the conversation about silencing victims, women not being believed when they testify, and victim- blaming.

Because the #Metoo movement only started after the first season of "The Handmaid's Tale", it did not impact the series directly, however, the paradigm that led to the movement also led to the series. Issues such as slut-shaming, women silencing, and work discrimination are all problematics discussed in the series. In the case Harvey Weinstein, and more recently Jeffrey Epstein, numerous victims had spoken to the press and authorities for years before the #metoo movement was popularized, being mostly ignored. It was after the 2017 election and the Women's Marches that the United States found itself in the correct moment to discuss these issue. The series went on to influence the #Metoo movement in many ways. The series reflects on the position of women in today's society, with its representation of the rhetoric employed in creating Gilead, the use of religious discourse to justify women's submission, and the disparity between the powerful and the Handmaid's. Articles such as *The Sydney Morning Herald's*, "A Handmaid's Tale Isn't Science Fiction, it's a Warning" (Squires: n.p.), *The New Republic's* "The Handmaid's Tale Is a Warning to Conservative Women"(Jones: n.p.) and Facebook groups such as "The Handmaid's Tale - Real Life Parallels Discussion Group", "The Handmaid's Tale Wasn't an Instruction Manual" and "The Handmaid's Tale isn't a how-to guide, Champ" have sparked waves of comparisons between the oppression of the Handmaids and the way women today are silenced and controlled.

3.5. Phyllis Schlafly, Serena Joy & Ivanka Trump

On April 2018, Michele Wolf gave a speech at the White House correspondent dinner where she compared the at the time White House Press Secretary, Sarah Huckabee Sanders, to Aunt Lydia. In the same speech, she also mentioned other female members of the Trump administration such as Kellyanne Conway and Ivanka Trump. These women are the incarnation of what the show criticizes through its

character Serena, white rich women using the doors

open to them by feminists only to use their position of power to close those same doors. Ivanka Trump, for example, has been considered an important female voice in the White House, someone that is supposed to balance out the male voices of Trump and his sons. However, as Michele Wolf explains in another video, this time from "The Daily Show" (2017) Ivanka is only trying to support women when she is trying to sell them something from her brand, when it comes to policies and opinions we have seen very little from Ivanka that has to do with supporting women. Gloria Steinem has also publicly spoken out saying Ivanka is not a feminist and that her policies on women are characteristic of "authoritarian regime(s)": "That happens to be the same policy as every authoritarian regime on Earth that I know of, including Hitler's Germany," Steinem said, "I'm not saying that she knows this, but [the Nazis] were paying women to have children. By accident, perhaps, that's her policy." (Glassman: n.p.). The comparison between Trump's administration and Gilead is due to the fact that women such as Ivanka defend and stand on the side of leaders that have made sexist remarks about women and have policies that undermine women's equality: "She gets wheeled out whenever her father is having a tough time convincing the world he's not a raging, misogynist despot and is then told to smile and look pretty for the cameras as sure-fire evidence that he respects women." (Baxter: n.p.). Ivanka is specifically compared to the women that supported Gilead because she has often portrayed herself as defending women, but she constantly conforms with the patriarchy. As Holly Baxter questions and remarks,

Does feminism look like a woman using her privilege to further the cause of gender equality? Absolutely. But does Ivanka Trump walk the walk after she talks the talk? Does she go home to the US and pressurize her father not to separate children from their mothers at the border; not to defund Planned Parenthood; not to stand and watch as an abortion ban is introduced in the state of Alabama? Absolutely not." (Ibid)

More people have seen this connection on Twitter, as a trend emerged calling Ivanka OfJared or OfDonald (De Maria: n.p.) due to her lack of agency. About episode six, called "A Women's Place", journalist Anita E. Weis wrote an article called "Ivanka Trump & Serena Joy: The Faces of Complicity" where she comments: "In both of these scenarios we see the face of complicity. Of women who have succeeded as individuals at the expense of society as a whole, who have couched women's oppression in the language of women's rights, who have prospered because of their connections to men with power while turning a blind eye to the atrocities they perpetuate." (p.n.). Although Ivanka and Serena, or even Phyllis Schlafly, are ideologically very far apart, this

comparison is an example of how the show is helping its

viewers to have a more critical approach on politicians, including to question how each woman in a position of power either works towards women's equality or complies by patriarchal values. Also, the show has helped to bring the criticism from the book into the present, while the female characters that supported Gilead were inspired by women from the 1980s, it has helped the viewers to look at women in power today and question their role as relates to female equality.

3.6. The red clock: a symbol

The first women's march was in January 2017, in it the “pussyhat” became an iconic symbol, even having its own cover in the *Times Magazine* (Vick: n.p.). The symbolic hat started to stand for the advance in women's rights through the arts, education, and social dialogue, according to The Pussyhat Project website (PUSSYHAT PROJECT™). But in 2018 other symbols started to be used to unite women and bring attention to women's rights, the red cloak and the white bonnet used by the Handmaids. In the period from 2017 to 2018, when the series was released in its entirety, the Handmaids clothes became a standout protest symbol. Abc's *Nightlight* calls the cloak “a breakout star” and says that “[it] is catapulting the show themes of oppression against women into a cultural phenomenon” (n.p.). The red cloak has been seen in protests and as a general rule seems to appear when women's issues are in question. The cloak summarizes the book messages into a powerful visual reminder whenever a small step to undermine women's freedom ultimately leads to the devaluation of women's lives and acts as an impediment to equality.

In an article entitled “The red cloak of 'The Handmaid's Tale' is becoming a symbol for reproductive rights” (Davy: n.p.) the PRi organization gives examples of how the cloak is being used worldwide to protest for legal abortion, sexual education, birth control or even against politicians. News entities are not only reporting on individual uses but are also recognizing the attire as an important symbol for 21st century feminism. In an interview for *Variety Magazine*, showrunner Bruce Miller said: “When you see women wearing red robes in the street protesting someone who wants to literally take every woman's bodily autonomy away from them, that's why we do it.” (Malkin: n.p.); *The Guardian* claims “[t]he outfit worn by Margaret Atwood's handmaids in (...) recent TV adaptation has been in evidence from Argentina to the United States, the UK, and Ireland, and has emerged as one of the most powerful current feminist symbols of protest, in a subversive inversion of its association with the oppression of women” (Beaumont and Holpuch); other news outlets have testified to the trend such as *The Telegraph* (Malkin), *Vanity Fair* (Bradley), and *The New York Times* (Hauser).

recognition and the power of the outfit is an important step to start the conversation, but what does the cloak mean, and is it an effective symbol for the feminist moment of the 21st century?

Traditionally the red of the cloak can be associated with fertility, and its long, round shape would mean women's modesty. The white bonnet comes from a long tradition of garments that have a religious significance. Hiding the women's hair means repression of their sexuality. In the Christian and Jewish tradition head covering is a symbol of submission to God, the husband's prerogative, and the repression of sexuality; in the Islamic religion it is also a symbol of modesty. In *The Handmaid's Tale* the covering of the hair seems to represent all these historical/religious meanings, but adding to them, the story brings a new significance to the covering by making it a symbol of oppression. While in religious environments women will sometimes be forced to cover themselves and sometimes they will choose to do it, the Handmaids have no choice in covering up their body, hair, and face. The story creates a society where women have no choice, and instead have a religious state entity that controls them. By having the women's oppression being so obvious, the series brings attention to how women's bodies and lives are controlled today.

Another element of the garment is the white cover of the face that prevents the Handmaids from seeing and being seen. Moreover, the uniform is based on historical garments, Atwood declared: "The modesty costumes worn by the women of Gilead are derived from Western religious iconography" (Margaret Atwood On What 'The Handmaid's Tale' Means In The Age Of Trump). This adds to the meaning of the clothes by reminding people of how women have been oppressed through history and how history should not be repeated. The entire garment used by the Handmaids is a reminder of women's lack of freedom, but the show has added a new meaning to the garment. Reminding the already quoted observation by Offred in season one: "They should have never given us uniforms if they didn't want us to be an army." This line has helped to transform the uniform into a symbol of resistance. This new meaning directed towards action and change is, in part, a consequence of how the adaptation has inspired its fans. In the second chapter of this thesis, we saw how Offred has changed from being passive to a fighter, this change has also impacted the meaning of the red cloak, as now activists around the world have a different and more instigating point of reference. The adaptation has managed to transform a symbol of female oppression into a symbol of female agency, and for that reason, it has elevated the outfit into a symbol for a movement for change.

The red cloak, however, is not the perfect feminist symbol and may present challenging limitations. In an article on arty.net, Alina Cohen explains how the cloak, due to being so intertwined with the story, may inspire women to fight against the loss of rights but may not inspire women to think of the future and themes not included in the series. Moreover, the show is not openly a feminist show, and some of the people that work on the show still avoid the label. To explore the show as a feminist product would prompt the education of its audience on feminism as a movement for equality. Instead, in what is often called a post-feminist world, where feminism is seen as irrelevant or seen only as extremist, the tendency is to deny the feminist label. The show separates itself from feminist movements consequentially separating all women that have fought and still fight for equality under the feminist umbrella and the women that fight for equality motivated by the Handmaids. By distancing itself from feminist movements the show is actually making a disservice to all that has been conquered through them. Finally, because it is a symbol coming from a fictional show, and not from real life, the producers, writers, and actors of the series hold the power over a great part of the symbolism of the red cloak.

As an unfinished fictional product, the series runs the risk of continuing to change the story to a point where it may again transform the symbolic meaning of the red cloak. Part of the risk of creating an adaptation is to ruin the legacy of the original work, with each new season made there is the risk of damaging all the work that was done previously. Lastly, the series "The Handmaid's Tale" is a creation of a streaming platform, and, as we saw in the first chapter of the thesis, streaming is a relatively new industry that has been suffering major changes throughout its first years. Hulu is now owned 60% by Disney, which took control of Hulu production (Low: n.p.), so the fate of "The Handmaid's Tale" and its role as relates to women's issue is uncertain as is at the hands of a billion-dollar company. By being a business, Hulu's main goal is to generate profit, this may create a problem for the red cloak as a feminist icon due to the fact that, as an enticer of change, the series will always be constrained by the rule of profit-maximization of a capitalist society.

Despite all these factors, June, the red cloak and the "The Handmaid's Tale" world have still been claimed as symbols for the feminist movement and sometimes the show's flaws end up working in favor of the movements. By having the cloak representing the fight for rights that have been jeopardized, the show triggered a sense of urgency in women not to let women's achievements be forgotten. Moreover, although women around the world are at different stages in the path towards equality, by calling attention to the value of certain rights

instead of associating them to specific moments, the show has actually been a source of inspiration globally. As the show is fictional, each individual woman can find in the red cloak her own point of view and her own voice. Moreover, by not having one central figure that dictates what is right and what is not, the show opens up for a greater number of voices and opinions.

3.7. Social media and culture

As we have seen when talking about the #MeToo movement, social media and other types of online presence have an enormous impact on the success of a show and, in the case of "The Handmaid's Tale", it has changed the way the show has been received, from a mere story to a starting point of social change. As we saw in the first chapter, part of what today makes a television show successful is the large online presence, including discussion groups, videos, how-to-guides, and celebrities' support groups and Twitter that give the protesters the necessary tools to organize themselves.

On Facebook, the original series group has a large following, there are over 70 pages and groups dedicated to the series, from "The Handmaid's Tale Costume", to fan-groups from different countries, the fans use the platform to be able to comment and connect with other fans of the show. But most important it is how these groups, that started as fan groups of the show, have evolved. Some Facebook groups not only allow for but encourage political discussion, these groups hold endless posts of discussion on women's rights, everything from news articles to personal stories that present similarities between real life and the show. The Facebook group "The Handmaid's Tale – Official Fan Group" consists of posts from fans on the series, suggestions, discussion of the plot and even politicized posts with thought-provoking comments about a wide variety of issues, personal stories and also posts about Margaret Atwood, both her personal life and her writing. On attachment ii we can see the members of Handmaid's fan groups using the show to criticize current news; on attachment iii we can see examples of posts from a group called "Clash of the Handmaids, Political Debates and Discussions", where everything is discussed from capital punishment to pollution and propaganda. These groups started with the purpose of discussing the series and made the transition to speaking about a wide variety of issues that do not relate directly with the show but instead relate with its message of activism and human rights. These types of platforms have the advantage of constantly being updated, covering a wide range of issues, and being free. Unlike other elitist texts about the show, social media platforms are free for everyone, creating in some groups an environment where people are encouraged to put questions in

order to start a conversation. While, for example, an article gives voice only to one individual, the posts on Facebook give voice to anyone who wants to discuss theories or opinions.

On platforms such as Reddit "The Handmaid's Tale" is not only a presence to set off the discussion of details of each episode but also to analyze deeper issues through memes and comic relief. One of the groups called "The Handmaid's Tale" allows its users to filter by politics, meme, discussion, fan content, and news (Attachment iv). Moreover, when analyzing a particular episode, the comments may educate on the historical inspiration and the message. Due to the popularity of the series worldwide and amongst audiences that might not be knowledgeable on the themes debated, the platform comments may educate the viewers by bringing attention to the historical background and hidden messages.

However, the social media website with biggest impact on the political realm of activism regarding the series is Twitter. The platform gives a voice to an endless discussion regarding women's issues and reaches a wide audience in a very short time. The series works again as a starting point for a larger conversation. As an example, on the 20th of January 2018, the day of the second Women's March, the series tweeted a link called "We Walk Together: Stories of Resistance from the Women's March" that led to a collection of tweets from women protesting (Attachment v) (Twitter, 2018). Margaret Atwood, the book author and series producer, has an astonishing 45 thousand tweets on her account alone, where she discusses current issues around women's rights, environmental rights, and current political issues. She certainly contributes to the cultural meaning of the show and what she shares becomes associated with its overall symbolism. In turn, her messages help motivate other women to fight and organize for change. In his book, *Twitter: Digital Media and Society*, Dhiraj Murthy analyses how Twitter affects protests. He comments on their impact on the 99% March and the Arab Spring: "Twitter helped focus the international spotlight on these events and disseminate timely, personal, and relevant breaking news to international news media and the global public." (109). In the same way, the social media platform has contributed largely to ignite social movements, organize protests, spread the message, and renew the conversation on women's issues. Twitter and its users have helped document what is happening in a precise moment in time, creating a record of events that is much more democratic and reflects different points of view with a broader social representation. In news articles we have cited in this chapter, tweets can often be found as sources of information regarding protests. Moreover, photographs taken by Twitter's users reveal an inside perspective that otherwise would

As previously mentioned, one of the show's biggest impacts is that it gives its viewers a platform and/or entry point for news on human rights. We have seen how Facebook and Twitter have contributed to protests, but other platforms have become centers of fan discussion as well. On Pinterest, a search of "The Handmaid's Tale" shows countless posts with everything from official promotion, fan art, inspiration quotes, photos of the authors, photos of protests, photos of merchandise, and much more. Discussion of the show can also be found on podcast and YouTube where we can find analyses of each episode focusing on an abundance of issues, the show's storyline, the wardrobes, the setting, etc. Podcasts such as "Mayday: The Handmaid's Tale Podcast", "The Red Center: A Handmaid's Tale", and "All Flesh Podcast: A Recap and Discussion of Hulu's 'The Handmaid's Tale'", not only help create more discussion around the show but they help explain its subject matter to the audience. On YouTube, the series works in similar ways as in other platforms, where there are videos created by The Handmaid's Tale official account and then a wide range of related content created by fans of the show, news outlets reporting on many issues related to the series, Margaret Atwood's interviews, parodies, analysis of the show, analysis of the book, actors' interviews and much more. One thing almost all the platforms mentioned have in common is that they have content made by official accounts of the series, and then later this content drives the viewer to other posts that can include discussion of women's issues or environmental questions. Different platforms stand out for different things, while Facebook allows for a large number of users to be involved in the conversation around the series, YouTube promotes creative content which allows for new material to be built either around the series or inspired by the series. Now we will see how the series inspired other cultural productions.

To look at the cultural impact of the show we will start by looking at the direct cultural response to the series. The Handmaid's story was adapted to a multitude of media before the streaming version but, after it, the story became a cult show with a large following, which led to a large issuing of products related to the story. The most notorious related production is the sequel, *The Testaments*, a novel written by Margaret Atwood that brings a story set within the Handmaids' universe. It was announced in November 2018 (Cain: n.p.) and published in September 2019, coming 34 years after the original book. It is a testament not only to the book's success but also to the power of the adaptation which influenced it. This sequel to the book allowed the author to continue to be in charge of the story, which adds to the cultural meaning of the story itself but also to the cultural meaning of the tension between the two media.

In 2019 another adaptation came to be in the form of a graphic novel with the same title, illustrated by Renee Nault, a Canadian artist, illustrator, and graphic novelist. The book not only brings a new perspective on the original story but is also another work of literature that comes to be after the series' success. The graphic novel was again a success and again was created both for the fans of the story and to gather a wider audience.

Since 2017 the story has also inspired numerous Saturday Night Live skits. The satire show uses *The Handmaid's Tale* to scrutinize the lack of political engagement of men on women's issues on one of its skits (The Handmaid's Tale - SNL, 2017), as well as the normalization of women's oppression and the comparison between the series and real-life (Handmaids in the City - SNL, 2018). Other parody videos have been made from various shows, most of them adding to the feminist message. The Funny or Die video entitled "They Finally Made a Handmaid's Tale for Men" (2017) criticizes many men's rights activists and compares them to feminists. The French television channel "Florence Foresti" (2019) created its own adaptation parodying the differences between the feminist movements in the United States and France. Skits such as these proliferate through the internet and they add to the cultural overall meaning of the story, bring attention to women's issues and continue the series goal of acting as a reflection and critic of society.

Another impact of the show has to do with the influence on other works that question women's and environmental issues. As argued in the first chapter of this text, female representation has historically been lacking in television, and streaming has helped fill the gap with shows such as "Orange Is The New Black" and "The Handmaid's Tale". However, despite this new push for female-centered stories, the Handmaid's adaptation by Hulu has become an example of how female-centered shows can be as successful as other series that are male-focused. The success of the adaptation has inspired other series to put women in the front and center. An example is the series "Leila", a production from Netflix India that depicts a dystopia of a "totalitarian regime that suppresses women" (Verma: n.p.). This series is being called "The Indian Handmaid's Tale" (ibid). Another show, this time made by Hulu, possibly to please the subscribers brought by "The Handmaid's Tale", is "Harlots", a period drama around the lives of women in two competing brothels. This show, despite having a plot completely different from "The Handmaid's Tale" is often compared to the series (Franklin, n.d.) due to its female-focused story and hard-hitting representation of the female experience. All in all, the series has inspired female-centered content that stretches even further than the series itself, from literature to parodies and more series.

Social and cultural impact comes in many different ways and one of them is merchandise, an old market that has reached a new dimension. Products related to a show or film have become multi-billion-dollar business, for example, Harry Potter merchandise franchise is worth an estimated 15 billion dollars while the films made 7.7 in the box office. In the same way "The Handmaid's Tale" story is not worth monetarily only for the show itself, but for all that is sold around it, from new editions of the book, clothing, phone cases, coffee mugs, etc. (Redbubble: n.p.; Teepublic: n.p.). In fact, the adaptation permitted the story to become part of a much bigger enterprise. By turning the Handmaids' story into a franchising, the show has made the Handmaids' world into something that will leave a cultural mark and will be recognized even by those who have never read the book nor seen the series. The commodification of the red cloak is a double edge sword, on the one hand, it puts the symbol at the mercy of business goals, on the other hand, it increases recognition driving people to the series and its message.

All in all, the 2016 presidential campaign and the consequential victory of President Donald Trump can be seen as the pivotal moment that created the necessary components to launch a new era of social movements. The Republican win on a pro-life, conservative, family values platform exacerbated the detriment caused to women's movements in the last decades by conservatives and the inaction of counter forces.

The premiere of the series was instantly perceived by its audience as a reflection on the new president, the new Republican Party, and a warning of what was about to come. As a result, immediately women dressed as Handmaids started to appear whenever women's reproductive rights were at risk, showcasing how the series had succeeded in its goal of reflecting on the current society and inspire women to protest.

Movements such as the Women Marches and #Metoo received wide popular support, as with the Handmaid's Tale success, it proved that the popularity of women's movements had risen from its downturn. In the same way, the outpour of social media groups created to discuss the series and the issues surrounding have demonstrated to the viewers the desire for a place where they could be informed and galvanized about the themes at hand.

Finally, the show has not only created the tool to inspire people, such as the use of social media for fans to discuss amongst themselves or the twitters of people official associated with the show, but it has also given them symbols that they can rally

behind and transmit the message. More than the book ever could, the series, due to the visual media, has

transformed the red cloak into a symbol that both represents all the historic oppression of women and a warning for the importance of women's movements.

Conclusion

The Handmaid's Tale's story has proven that its success is limitless, either in book form

— widely read, translated into forty, winner of several awards, taught in schools, being part of the cannon — or in one of the most successful series of 2017, or still as an inspiring force for protest all around the world. Not only resisting the test of time but also adapting to it.

The Handmaid's Tale is one of the most successful dystopian books; the adaptation, however, is burdened by this success. When we judge the adaptation by its fidelity to the book, we can conclude that the first season of the series was partially successful, showcasing a great variation. However, the series was acclaimed by critics, earning multiple Emmys, and being one of the most-watched streaming series of 2017. In order to understand this success, we looked into the changing standards used to evaluate an adaptation, how fidelity has fallen out of use in favor of how the new work uses the new media to create its own meanings and how it adjusts to the new cultural paradigm. The visual media has created new meanings for this story in three main ways. Firstly, using visual and sound clues to give the viewer a more in-depth understanding of Gilead and its people. The details of the clothes, the sets, the acting, the choreographic movements all contribute to new effects; secondly, creating a long-running series that demands an expansion of secondary plots. By choosing to create a series instead of a shorter piece, such as a film, the first season of "The Handmaid's Tale" has given this story more space for each character to develop its own role in Gilead. In turn, given more time to smaller characters has allowed for a change in the message of the story from June to a multitude of female representations. And finally, shipping the burden of storytelling from the main character to the camera, this change has allowed for the expansion of other characters and has created room for a more democratic representation of all the characters not tainted by Offred's narration. The visual media has henceforward worked in favor of the story, by bringing to life the fictional world created by Atwood.

In the same way, it has used the camera in ways that extend the book premises of using the female experience. Women in Hollywood are traditionally represented under "the male gaze" (Mulvey, 19) but the series rejects that precedent and revolutionizes the way it presents its female characters. Women are not sexualized and when they are, they take control of the look. There is a focus on the main character's face, presenting the wide range of emotions acted by Elizabeth Moss. An abundance of images of women giving birth, breastfeeding, cooking, menstruation, enjoying sex,

being in love, being in pain, being beaten, enjoying each other's company, exchanging looks, and talking amongst themselves, all put

women on screen without the image being tainted by male desire, instead women are autonomous beings with agency and are looking instead of being looked at.

The second factor of success was how the series worked the themes of oppression set out by the book. Atwood as a writer in the 60's stood out as a woman writer. The book *The Handmaid's Tale* is a natural progression in her career writing about themes that were known to the author, such as female experience, the environment, and reflecting on society. By setting out to write a dystopia from a female perspective, a genre up to that point with a majority of male main characters, the author created a work that became one of the most important contemporary dystopias and one of the most significant contemporary pieces of feminist literature. The adaptation in a similar way creates a product that is very transgressive, considering other series and films focusing on female characters made until its release. Women are often represented in very constricted roles and they are often absent from political series; this adaptation not only creates a story led by women but creates a plot from the perspective of female characters, besides discussing topical issues that are both cultural and political, and shattering the line that in the past divided "series programming" and female works with proper female representation.

We can conclude that the way the adaptation made a clear and concise effort to expand on the book message — of female experience, female ownership of their bodies, and women's lives within oppressive regimes — was widely applauded, and in the end was what drew fans to give such large support to it. In the book, the love relationship between Offred and Nick takes center stage in what shapes her journey through Gilead. In the series, there is still a big emphasis on the love between the two characters, but Mayday, June's daughter, and other women living under the regime take precedent as the ultimate focus of the main character's life. The series gains a new dimension of representation of women's issues by showing more female characters and their relationships. And it continues the book's criticism of society by showing instances of discrimination that strongly resemble what women face today. As a result, the relationship between *The Handmaid's Tale* book and the series is not a hierarchical one, instead, the series expands on the book's goals. The book and the series become complementary, not opposite.

The series also gives more importance to Emily, Moira, Rita, and Beth, developing their characters as various representations of female characters instead of confining them within stereotypes. All these women, by surviving in different ways without oppressing other women, represent in themselves how feminist movements are

diversity that will work in different ways either to escape, fight or survive a patriarchal society. In the book, as relates to different positionings in feminist movements, we have Offred's mother being a more extreme feminist, and Offred being a passive bystander. In the series Emily is a doctor that is both married to a woman and a mother, and, within the regime, she has a relationship with a Martha, this way holding the message of LGBT+ as a fundamental part of gender equality. Moira is also gay but is not in a relationship, she has the main goal to escape and, along with Emily, uses violence to revolt against the system. Janine, on the other hand, tries to appease Aunt Lydia and ends up with series mental issues that lead her to suicide. It is this multitude of characters that the show presents, women as unique individuals, with singular stories. The show's message on feminist movements is updated: from a duality between extremism and apathy to being a coalition of women and messages.

Although the plot of the novel seems to be set in the years after 1985 the show places the starting point for the story in a time around 2016, setting out the story as being possible in the present days, as, for instance, the mention to Uber, Tinder and using modern phones implies. All the women in the series experienced freedom before the regime was implemented. In episode three, June narrates their passivity before that insidious implementation: "I was asleep before. That's how we let it happen. When they slaughtered Congress, we didn't wake up. When they blamed terrorists and suspended the Constitution, we didn't wake up then either. They said it would be temporary. Nothing changes instantaneously. In a gradually heating bathtub you'd be boiled to death before you knew it." (Chapter X: p. 66). In this adaptation more than the imagine near future of the 1980s, the women in Gilead experience women in positions of power, women more than ever in the academia, women with a more equal part in a relationship, and women that have lived through more LGBT+ rights. Regardless of this advance of women in society and of how much technology has evolved, the series, by setting forward how a regime, such as Gilead, can come to power if people stand by idly while human rights are infringed upon, triggers off the critical stance of the viewer.

June is in both media a character that was born free to work, have a family, and live in a society that does no outright restrict her ability to choose her fate. As she starts to lose some of her freedoms, the character does not immediately second-guess the intention of those changes and trusts that all will be temporary. Even in the Red Center, June still trusts that being "posted" will change things for the better. However, when faced with the reality that her indifference led her to ignore all the signs of an autocratic, oppressive regime, June realizes

that she had blindly cooperated with its implementation. This plot is a warning to the importance of challenging all the steps in society that oppress minorities as, without questioning and disputing, all ideologies risk falling into tyranny.

The changes made to June's character in the series are related to the series' contemporary reflections. In the book *Offred*, despite thinking critically of the regime, is not a risk-taker and does very little to fight against it, she is also averse to violence and never faces those that oppress her, she narrates many oppositions but her actions for the most part follow the directions of those above her. June is bolder, defiant, and a bigger risk-taker. The character that gives up on Mayday becomes an agent for the Movement, a love story as an anesthesia becomes a partnership for change, and an affair with the Commander becomes a calculated tactic to gather information and retrieve a package for Mayday. When the series shows June using violence to escape or facing Aunt Lydia in front of a Guardian, the series creates a character that does not accept her fate and is instead more stubborn in fighting for her freedom and a leader defending her fellow Handmaids. This change from the book to the series is a reflection of the different moments the two works were created in: while the book was created at the end of a large period of feminism popularity, the series comes after a moment where indifference is a plague hindering women's advancement. The series hence creates a character that was indifferent to the changes in society and transforms her into an inspiration for women to actively challenge those that oppress them.

By having Moira, Janine, and June at some point break and accept their fate, but then having them recover and continue their fight towards freedom the show faces the futility of compliance as a path towards change. The message is unequivocal that in order to achieve change there needs to be a different path than the one that led to the regime, in June's case the indifference and the resignation to her predicament. Without opposition, any regime of the sort will become exponentially worse for those that are oppressed. This message resonates with the viewers faced with continuous discrimination, as there needs to be a countermovement that stops and reverses the current trends.

When, in episode six, Moira protests: "It could be anything! A bomb. Anthrax. What do you know?", and June answers: "I hope it is"; or when in episode five Emily runs over a Guardian and June nods in approval; or also when she leads the Handmaids not to kill Janine, June becomes also a leader amongst the other women. By not making June solitary in her fight the series vindicates that is through group awareness and unity that there is a chance for opposition.

Finally, by having June claim "I'm not that kind of person" when presented with the opportunity to help Mayday and then transforming her into an agent for the group willing to risk her own life, the show renounces the idea of insurgency only restricted to radicals, and reinstates the message that when faced with oppression it is everyone's responsibility to challenge it. June says in episode two: "Now, there has to be an 'us.' Because, now, there is a 'them.'" The series suggests the idea to its viewers that rebellion is fundamental when there is such an imbalance of power and an ideology so harmful to a group of people. Challenging it is not a choice but instead a requirement for freedom and survival. This is ultimately the message offered by June to the viewers, even women that today are not political evolve because they have never been radicalized or because they have never seen their rights at risk, have the responsibility to take a stand before they stopped having the freedom to do so.

In the series, some men take a bigger role, not as oppressors but as allies to the women, portraying how fighting for equality is not limited to the oppressed and how solidarity is essential for the building of a truly egalitarian society that benefits all the people living under it. For the men that support the regime, the criticism directed to them is focused not only on sexism but on the duplicity between the rules they create and the rules they live by. For instance, presenting the Commanders not as examples, but instead as the ones who take advantage of the system they have created.

The series is criticized for how it put a bigger focus on women as oppressors. The Aunts and the Wives are the two groups that are complicit in the regime's oppression of women. In the series, there is a probe into these women where we discover the different reasons for their actions. By telling the stories of these women the show continues to further the representation of women by showing how the oppressed may internalize the messages of the society they are immersed in until they believe the oppressors' message. By humanizing women that work against other women, the show challenges the concept of oppressors and victims as a dichotomy. Instead, this technic allows the viewer to question what other people in today's politics use pro-women narrative while impairing women's equality.

As we have seen, the show details a path of how a regime such as Gilead would use women as wombs, as labor force, and as oppressors. The show also includes LGBT+ characters and how their sexuality would be used to oppress them further. Through Nick, the series shows how different classes would transition into the regime. How the series transforms current inequalities and reimagines them in a world where they have no opposition is both the premise of the story and what contributes to

the series as a warning. Race, however, did not

get the same treatment and we can say that the invisibility of the racial issue stands out amongst the series' themes. The book mentions that black people would be shipped to "motherlands", the showrunner of the series decided instead that having an all-white cast would further the lack of representation of racial minorities on screen. Black characters do not see their transaction into Gilead being impacted by their skin color, they do not experience racism during the transition and there is no race discrimination once the regime is established. The fact that this series is so topical is what exacerbates this lack of representation of racial inequality. The fact that racism is so ingrained in all aspects of the United States society creates a disparity between what would realistically happen if Gilead were to become a reality.

Black representation being essential to any show's success would justify the implementation of more diversity in the adaptation but the lack of a proper analysis into race relations within autocratic regimes showcases how tokenism is still present on television. By having black actors, the show reaps the benefits of inclusion without doing the work of including the representation their fans come in search of. Fundamentally, by not giving the theme of race the same importance as other topical themes, the series showcases the risk of having art being created with profits in mind. Hulu in this case profiting from representation but not delivering it. By not including race the show fails to give a fully accurate representation of feminist movements today as it does not include racism as a feminist cause.

The popularity of dystopia rises during periods of crisis in political power and periods of deep change in the social order. Atwood's book was released when the Evangelicals and other conservative voices were gaining power, and right after feminist movements had achieved greater visibility in the United States society. The book holds such strong criticism of the feminist movement in part because it analyses second-wave feminism. Identically the series arrives in one of these moments where there has been a change in political powers, however, the shift in the women's movements is contrary to the one documented by the book.

Feminist movements for the last decades have been called "post-feminist" as women are said to have already achieved equality and hence some argue that they are no longer relevant. Up until 2016, there was a lack of urgency in fighting for women's equality and a loss of pride in fighting for causes in organized and proactive ways. Feminism, a word that has been controversial through the years, has increasingly become a label to be avoided and even detrimental for change when mentioned. However, it is this lack of urgency given to women's issues that has debilitated some

previously won victories and allows for conservative groups to further their message reach. The 2016 election was the culmination of this moment when

minorities started to see ideology that is directly discriminatory being supported by the highest levels of power and in turn normalized within a large part of the population that looks at political leaders for guidance.

In the months following Trump's election, there was a push of the so-called "heartbeat bills" propelled by the changing of seats in the Supreme Court and the rise of abortion as a political issue. There has been a change in the map of abortion accessibility: "275 facilities nationwide have closed since 2013 (until 2019)" (Lai and Patel, 2019) and "The South had a decline of 50 clinics, (...) By contrast, the Northeast added 59 clinics (...)." (Associated Press, 2019). There has been a decline in access to safe and legal abortion, more laws restricting funding for reproductive health care, and mandatory paid birth control by the employee. It is with this background that the series was made and was received, the story of loss of rights by the Handmaids is then taken by its viewers as a reflection of their own time. For many young viewers that have lived their whole lives without questioning the advancements made by past feminists, never having had to imagine a future where their rights could be taken away, the series creates a parallel with previous moments in history and combines the lessons learned into a fictional story that promotes a new revival of equality movements.

Time Magazine called each of the years of 2017 and 2018 "the year of women". In those years there was an awakening to the forces that impaired progress in social movements. After the series and through 2017, we saw the #MeToo and Times Up movements becoming colossal campaigns for women's equality and achieving shifts, in a short period of time, inspiring women to come out with their stories, making predators accountable, and addressing workplace discrimination. These movements saw in "The Handmaid's Tale" a portrait of how victim shaming and power discrepancies between victims and abusers affect women's ability to speak out. The nomination of Brett Kavanaugh to the Supreme Court was given a spotlight that was not only centered on his politics, but it also rose great indignation around how a political party furthers systemic sexism by doubting women's stories and not incentivizing a debate around sexual assault accountability. The commotion around this nomination also raised awareness of the importance of judicial appointments. Having women dressed as Handmaids appearing in the Senate Judiciary Committee brought attention to the process of nomination by associating the series message to the way voices against women gain power within the government. The series has in this instance, brought attention to all that has not been achieved towards women's equality, while society's awareness for feminist movements

was down and they were even seen as no longer essential, the series showed how feminism is essential now as ever.

The rhetoric of the current United States president towards women, his campaign, a number of policies on abortion and reproductive health, growing hate towards immigrants, asylum seekers and people from minority religious and cultures, the growing power of right-wing values and political parties, Blue Lives Matter, #OscarsSoWhite and immigrant women being separated from their children at the border, all these issues paint a bleak picture of the place of minorities in the United States. However, there is a current awareness of equality movements that propel outrage against politicians' messages, laws, and other occurrences of discrimination. The series creates a space where people can rationalize all the changes in current society and critically look at them from a historical and human rights perspective, while something that can be seen as inconsequential can be used as a steppingstone for assaults on equality.

Both Elizabeth Moss and Margaret Atwood have agreed that the show would have "missed the boat" if Hillary had won. Margaret Atwood said in an interview:

The cast woke up on November the 9th and thought, this just took on a different meaning. And that is true. So I think had Hillary been elected, you would have had a reaction to it more like, look at an alternative reality that might have happened. Whereas now you're getting: this might actually happen. Not in quite the same way, not with the same outfits, and probably they will not be able to shut down women reading. But the rollback of rights might well happen. (Wilstein, 2017)

Atwood brings attention here to how the series, that was being made during the presidential election, took on a different meaning. For its effect on the viewers, the series transformed a far-fetched dystopian story into an envisioning of a possible future. This new meaning was immediately recognized by critics and journalists with multiple articles exploring the possibility with the question "Could it happen?". Later, articles shifted from just warning to an effort to educate, to call attention to what was already happening. On the 25th of June 2017, *Metro* published an article entitled "Stop saying that The Handmaid's Tale couldn't happen here – it's frighteningly realistic" (Chandler: n.p.); on the 26th of July 2017 *ABC* published "Could The Handmaid's Tale happen today? For some women, it's already reality" (McCormack: n.p.); and on the 5th of May 2018 *The Guardian* published the article "Elisabeth Moss on The Handmaid's Tale: 'This is happening in real life. Wake up, people'" (Mulkerrins:

n.p.). With these articles, we see the shift from when the series' first started to come out and its effect after the first season had finished, the series become more than a warning, a vehicle used by journalists to speak on current women's injustices.

All of the movements we talked about throughout this thesis started or gained new momentum after the 2016 election. As a result, we can argue that it was the victory of a party and in extension its conservative message that worked as a catalyst for the social revolutions that followed it. The series "The Handmaid's Tale" did not single-handedly start the pushed-for women's movements, but it premiered at the right moment to make audiences relate to its message and inspire change. This change shows that the series is not only remarkable in capturing the current moment but that it was successful in bringing attention to issues facing women today. By being used as an analogy the series' name brings its fans and all those that recognize it to articles that educate on issues presently affecting women. In the article by Ange McCormack (n.p.), the journalist uses the series as an entry point to elaborate on women's rights in the United States and around the world, on food shortages and infertility. Moreover, despite the series being based in the United States, streaming, global culture, social media, and the fact that it is a fictional show, make the correlation between the series and current affairs worldwide.

The book *The Handmaid's Tale* was adapted into a film four years after the book's success and, although we did not discuss it here, it is worth noticing that it was neither a commercial success nor was it acclaimed by the critics. Sophie Gilbert (n.p.) explains that its production had many obstacles as a result of the themes in the book, from people not wanting to work on the project – "(...)many actresses feared the stigma of being associated with such an explicitly feminist work" – to Hollywood thinking it would fail. In retrospect, in her article "Why The Handmaid's Tale is so relevant today", Rebecca Hendin attributes the film failure to its treatment of the female characters: "Offred, was not only stripped of her agency – the script avoided voiceover, losing the urgency of the book – she seemed more objectified than ever."(n.p.). Contrasting with this, the series announcement was received by the public with enthusiasm, it captured many famous names in Hollywood to be part of the project, and the series treatment of the female characters was applauded by the critics. The variation factor is the period when it was created and the media. Today there is a push for female-centered production and streaming has allowed for diverse shows to find their audience.

"There have been previous adaptations (...). But none have sparked the torrent of memes, slogan T-shirts bearing lines from the book, and even, apparently, tattoos of

quotable mantras." (Mulkerrins: n.p.). With publicity tours, official online groups, discussion groups created by fans, fan-art, organizations created due to the show, merchandise, Halloween costumes, billboards, messages used in the marches, tweets that influence political movements, and all other artifacts that have contributed to the recognition of the series have contributed to the "global system of meaning" that is now much larger than the series itself. The series has driven the creation of memes that have expanded the presence of the story online, and henceforward the conversation around the show themes. "The Handmaid's Tale" is now a cultural phenomenon that has made the series into a cult show that holds meaning even to those that have not read the book or seen the series.

Social media, more than most academic and journalistic comment on the series, has shaped its power in continuing its message as a criticism of society and politics. Facebook, Reddit and, Twitter have created spaces that bring together groups of fans and, as the series stops releasing new episodes, the groups continue the work it has started. As the following seasons are released the Trump administration implements its policy of separating families at the border, leaving children and their families in separate imprisonment camps for long periods of time. Although this does not follow under the scope of time we have looked at, this new policy has been extensively commented in the series fan groups. Moreover, as the president prepares to appoint another Supreme Court judge, these groups have instantly been used to comment on the new nominee's positions on women's and equality issues. Finally, as the new election approaches, the discussion on the candidate's platforms has continued to spur dozens of posts a day. Because the new season of the series has been delayed due to the Covid19 pandemic, there are relatively fewer posts about the artistic aspects of the series but the discussion around each new political news has kept the groups more engaged than ever. As a demonstrator of the social and political impact of the series, the official accounts of the series have coined the slogan "Blessed be the voter", which is impacting society beyond fiction into tangible change.

"It wasn't until last year, when *The Handmaid's Tale* premiered on Hulu as a television series adaptation, that the work got its pop cultural due." (Hendin: n.p.). This place in pop culture furthers the reach of the story much more than the book could ever do. The revival of the work through an adaptation has inspired content creation and an online recognition that will last many years after the series is over. The book, independently of having its place in the canon, has its reached impacted by being a literary work and from having been released in the

1980s when women's movements had started a downturn and social media was still to become part of people's lives.

The series has made the red cloak into a worldwide recognized symbol and has inspired protests and conversation around women's issues in ways not achieved by any of the previous works. The series, and how it chose to transform the story, was given immense power in shaping the story's message and influence. With such a power to shape public discussion and the story, it is essential to consider the role of a company such as Hulu to guide this story into a place that is both descriptive of the current society and prescriptive to change it.

The biggest proof of the show's impact on feminist movements is the red cloak. Seen in protests for women's and environmental issues, the cloak has appeared all over the United States and the world. This cloak has given a symbol to protest that is widely recognized, which holds an abundance of meaning but at the same is unequivocally in its message for reproductive rights. The role of the series in making this symbol recognized worldwide is undeniable, but the changes to its meaning are probably its biggest legacy. The red cloak from the book was symbolic of oppression, representing women that had their rights taken away, forced to wear a symbol of their lack of freedom. In the series the same red cloak incorporated the main character's journey, transforming it into a symbol of resistance. In the last episode, June narrates: "It's their own fault. They should have never given us uniforms if they didn't want us to be an army.". With this sentence, instead of a hamper imposed by oppression, the red cloak becomes a weapon to be used for change. The cloak is modest and when used to protest, the women wearing it cannot be thrown out or accused of recklessness as they stand fully clothed, in silence, and often motionless. In the same manner as the Handmaids on screen, the protesters use the rules set out by the patriarchy to advance their cause. When they sit in while bills for more restrictive abortion are being proposed/passed (Attachment vi) they stand out from the sea of men in black suits; when they stand in front of the Capitol to protest funding cuts to Planned Parenthood (Attachment vii) they project with no words a message of urgency in their fight; when they walk in protest (Attachment viii) they symbolize women's unity and sisterhood. The success of this symbol comes from being widely recognizable, standing out in a crowd, inspiring women to come together and form the "army" the series mentions, having a multitude of meanings, and being a visual aid spreading the show message whenever it is used. When someone dressed as a Handmaid appears to fight an abortion bill or any other issue of women's equality, the issue is automatically thought of as part of the greater context that is women's discrimination. No longer is a budget cut to

women's health just an economic decision, or a conservative judge nomination just a hindrance to progress. When the cloak is present it scrutinizes everything in the context of the current war on women.

The book is a reflection of the feminist movement that had just passed, of the revival that occurred from the 1960s until the beginning of the 1980s; the series was created after a downturn in the feminist movement and right at the cusp of a feminist revival in culture, and politics. Since the series was launched there has been many instances where the women's movements lost causes, after years of passive, sometimes inactive and mostly symbolic protest, women in 2017 saw in a crossroad where - despite all the of the achievements in economic freedom, representation and political power - fighting for women's rights had become a taboo and in turn, it had reversed some of what had been achieved. The series then premiered not at the end of a great moment for women, but the opposite, at a moment where women were being silenced not for being unequal but because they had "achieved enough equality". Through its release, a new age of women was ushered in, an age that uses social media and cultural works to promote women's equality. An age when a series such as "The Handmaid's Tale" would be received not despite its female representation but because of it. When women would use a common interest in a show to discuss their position in society and would be inspired by it to come out on the streets and fight for what they believe is a time of retrogression in women's equality.

Atwood, despite all the different works inspired by the book, maintained her voice as the mediator of its global meaning until the release of the series. However, due to the series' success, there is much knowledge around this story that exists independently of the book, with people that have viewed the series but not read the book, and people that have just heard about the series through its cultural context not knowing of its origin. In 2019, Atwood released the sequel, *The Testaments*, set in Gilead and portraying the final years of the regime. The book is set a few years after the original story and after the events portrayed in the series. By setting this new novel at the end of the regime, the author has regained control of the story and given it a conclusion, taking back the ability to have the last word and control the message that now surrounds her story. Much more than just a continuation, this new book presents criticism of the current society not introduced either in the original or the series. Despite the power of the adaptation, Atwood does not let the series fully control the destiny of the story and freely creates a book that is also independent from the adaptation. The author

demonstrates the power of literature in its inventiveness. *The Testaments* is bold in its analysis of conservatives, autocratic or patriarchal societies, and presents criticism that is audacious.

The series, despite presenting themes that are groundbreaking when considering the media, is constricted by the fact that it is made by a large company, having profits in mind, and having been produced within a culture that scrutinizes films and television productions. Although there are also obstacles to any book's production, *The Testaments* shows how series are much more dictated by the market than literary productions. The new book is also much less ingrained in the current moment than the series, this speaks on the liberty of the written mode to be much more abstract and create works that are plurisignificative through time.

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Annexes

i



ii

Kathy Roberts Kennedy shared a photo to the group: The Handmaid's Tale - Official Fan Group. 20 hrs · 🌐

May 16th -

HOW MANY ^{o's} DOES THE WORD ^{=BROODMARE} HAVE?

PRAISE BE BEST. BOOKREADING IS A LIBERAL ABOMINATION, AUNT KAY.

“When injustice becomes law, resistance becomes duty.” - Thomas Jefferson

The Daily Don 20 hrs · 🌐 Like Page

Day 845: Praise be Talibama for forcing births so that they can give even more kids the worst education in the country. #blessedbetherapefruit #magaisformorons #thedailydon

👍👎🗿 57 4 Comments 9 Shares

Like Comment Share

iii

The image shows two screenshots from a Facebook group titled "Clash of the Handmaids: Political Debates and Discussions".

The top screenshot shows a post by Alicia Clugston from June 22 with the text "How does this even happen?!!". The post includes a photo of a yellow "POLICE LINE DO NOT CROSS" tape. Below the photo is a link to an article from THEHILL.COM titled "Alabama governor signs law allowing church to have its own police force". The article has 14 comments. Two comments are visible: one from Amanda Robinson stating she doesn't object to private security guards but has concerns about private police powers, and another from Sara Ann stating she finds the law fine as long as the police protect the public and don't hide things.

The bottom screenshot shows an announcement from Anastacia Josette, Admin, dated May 19. The announcement states that articles within a red rectangle will not be approved due to inaccurate information, propaganda, and damage to public discourse. Below the text is a "MediaBiasChart.com" chart. The chart is a grid with "Left" and "Right" on the x-axis and "Most Extreme Left", "Hypocritical Left", "Stable Left", "Neutral", "Stable Right", "Hypocritical Right", and "Most Extreme Right" on the y-axis. It plots various news organizations and media outlets, with a red rectangle highlighting a cluster of outlets on the right side of the chart.

Clash of the Handmaids: Political Debates and Discussions
Annmaria Mitchell shared a post. 4 hrs
Meanwhile in Saudi Arabia...

SAUDI ARABIA ALLOWS WOMEN TO TRAVEL WITHOUT MALE GUARDIAN'S PERMISSION
Other Gender-Based Restrictions Remain in Place

abc NEWS
BREAKING NEWS
ABCNEWS.GO.COM
Capital punishment to be resumed by federal government
27 Comments

Sam Rusk ▸ **The Handmaid's Tale - Real Life Parallels Discussion Group**
20 hrs · 🌐
AOC is right.


Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez @AOC
Abortion bans aren't just about controlling women's bodies. They're about controlling women's sexuality. Owning women. From limiting birth control to banning comprehensive sex ed, US religious fundamentalists are working hard to outlaw sex that falls outside their theology.

36 7 Comments
Like Comment

About Community ⋮

The Reddit destination for discussing The Handmaid's Tale.

95.7k **133**
Members Online

 Created 16/07/2016

CREATE POST

COMMUNITY OPTIONS ▾

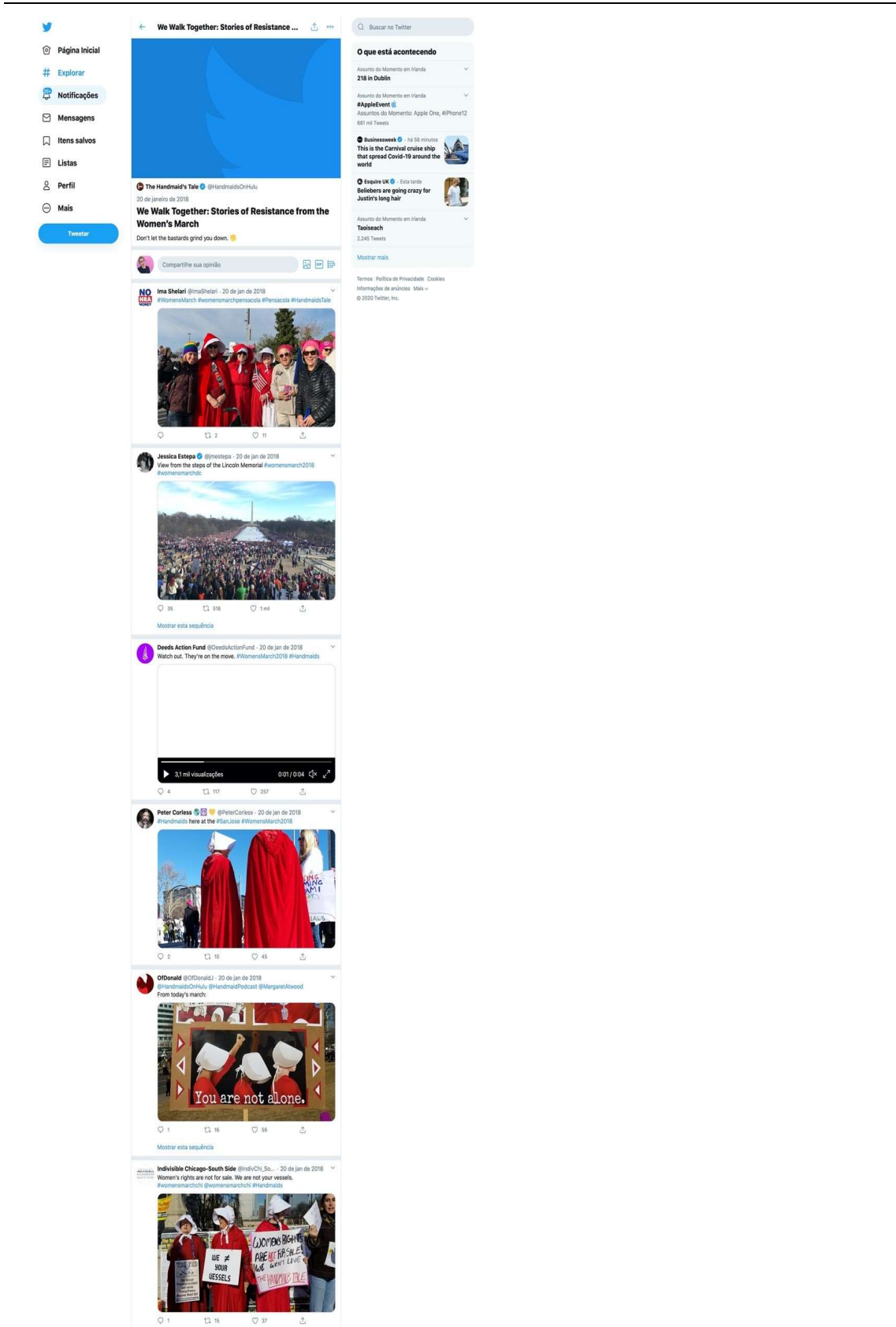
Filter by flair

Politics Meme Other

Question Discussion

Fan Content News

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Twitter Thread "We Walk Together: Stories of Resistance from the Women's March" from @HandmaidsOnHulu.

v

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Demonstrators dressed as characters from the novel "The Handmaid's Tale" at the Ohio Statehouse on June 13 to protest a bill that would criminalize the state's most common abortion procedure. Credit...Jo Ingles/Ohio Public Radio and TV, via Associated Press

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Demonstrators dressed as characters from the novel "The Handmaid's Tale" at the Ohio Statehouse on June 13 to protest a bill that would criminalize the state's most common abortion procedure. Credit...Jo Ingles/Ohio Public Radio and TV, via Associated Press

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Women dressed as handmaids protest against US vice-president Mike Pence in Philadelphia, 23 July. Photograph: Matt Rourke/AP

