Power, Gender and Politics: Forms of Control and Ecofeminist Resistance in *The Handmaid's Tale*[5]

Laura Cesaro
Università Ca' Foscari Venezia

Claudio Riva
Università degli Studi di Padova

Abstract

Set in the totalitarian society of Gilead, *The Handmaid's Tale* (2017 – ongoing) meticulously explores the intersection of power, gender and politics. Through the lens of protagonist Offred, viewers witness the systematic erosion of individual rights and freedoms in the name of societal order: echoing themes of authoritarianism, misogyny and resistance. In relation with the latter, the authors use surveillance studies to analyse political control practices and employ the lens of ecofeminism to read the handmaids' collective action. The article highlights how the TV series serves as a poignant commentary on contemporary political discourse. Through its vivid portrayal of dystopia, the TV series underscores the imperative of political vigilance and collective action in safeguarding human rights and civil liberties. As viewers confront the harsh realities of Gilead, they are compelled to recognise parallels and implications within their own socio-political contexts, thereby igniting discourse and advocacy for a more just and equitable world.

Keyword: The Handmaid's Tale; TV series; Power; Gender; Politics.

1. Preface: Media, Politics and TV Series

So far, studies on the mediatisation of political communication have examined the processes of defining and reorganising the spaces of interaction between citizens and political representatives (Mazzoleni, 2012, 2021; Sorice, 2016; Riva, 2021; Riva *et al.*, 2022). The issues raised, from time to time, include the relationship between voters and elected officials; the characteristics of citizenship; the processes of selecting the ruling class; the relationship between the state and civil society; the very ideas of democratic representation, political action and mobilisation around common interests; and participation in public life. In the current media landscape, characterised by *hybridisation* (Chadwick, 2013) and the formation of *networked publics* (Boyd, 2010; Boccia Artieri, 2012), we witness the emergence of *networked politics* (Cepernich, 2017), a communicative model

[5] This study was a joint effort by both authors, though paragraphs 1 and 2 are by Claudio Riva; paragraphs 3 and 4 are by Laura Cesaro.

of politics that integrates and sometimes opposes traditional media logics, typical of television, with dynamics specific to digital communication. These dynamics are represented by various channels, formats, languages and logics that transcend the boundaries of individual media, making themselves accessible to an audience equipped, more than ever today, with the ability to discover, appropriate, produce and disseminate political content.

This change marks a significant evolution compared to the past, offering individuals unprecedented opportunities for participation and interaction in political discourse within a deeply transformed transmedia ecosystem (Jenkins, 2006; Bernardo, 2014; Mittell, 2015; Leonzi, 2022).

Political discourse expands and enriches within a broad ecosystem of platforms, which promotes a layered and multi-level political narrative. In this context, popular culture emerges as an effective tool of political communication, owing to its innate ability to weave symbols, narratives and icons deeply rooted in collective imaginations. These cultural elements thus become intuitive and relevant entry points for political discourse, proposing and discussing themes that intertwine with the daily experiences, sensibilities and values of the audience, bringing politics closer to, and making it understandable and relevant for, the public; inviting active participation and transforming citizens from mere spectators into active participants in the political debate.

Transmediality, therefore, becomes a means to foster a greater understanding of political issues, stimulate active public participation and turn viewers into active citizens of the political debate.

The realm of television seriality, with its prolonged narrative development and its ability to delve into themes and characters, fits perfectly within the realm of transmediality and amplified political discourse (Bourke, 2006). Due to their form and structure, in recent years, TV series have transitioned from being merely entertainment vehicles to influential media capable of shaping and reflecting the sociopolitical fabric in which they exist (Banet-Weiser, 2018). TV series allow authors to address complex social and political issues with a depth of characterisation that often surpasses that of traditional media outlets. In this way, many TV series are not only mirrors of our societies but can also act as agents of change, capable of influencing public opinion and stimulating debate on issues of collective relevance.

As complex narrative works that can extend far beyond television episodicity to intertwine with other media, from podcasts to social networking platforms, from video games to novels, series not only enhance the scope and depth of political narratives but also make them a living part of the audience's everyday life, allowing political discourse to leverage a wide range of cultural symbols. Characters and plots, thus, become vehicles for political themes, reflecting and sometimes anticipating social, ethical and political debates of our time, allowing the audience to not only consume content but also react to it through discussions and creations on online forums, social media comments and user-generated content.

Through stories ranging from utopian to dystopian, from hyper-realistic to fantastic, TV series offer the audience the opportunity to reflect on the reality that surrounds them, present alternative scenarios, question the status quo and promote a deeper understanding of the forces and dynamics shaping the contemporary world.

In this context, the present article aims to examine the role of television seriality as a space for cultural and political negotiation, analysing how it actively participates in constructing discourses that influence the audience's perception and interpretation of reality. By investigating a specific case study, the series *The Handmaid's Tale* (2017–ongoing), we seek to understand the ways in which TV series reflect and contribute to shaping the political and social landscape, offering critical insights into how serial narrative can act as a catalyst for change.

The TV series *The Handmaid's Tale*, based on Margaret Atwood's 1985 novel of the same name, is set in a dystopian future where, after a coup, the United States has become the Republic of Gilead, a totalitarian theocracy that bases its authority on an extremist interpretation of biblical principles, revolutionising its social structure around a hyper-patriarchal logic. In this social order, women are divided into wives, holders of domestic power, and handmaids, deprived of their individual freedoms and reduced to slavery for procreation.

The cultural resonance of *The Handmaid's Tale* goes beyond its narrative, becoming a reference point in debates on reproductive rights, bodily autonomy and civil resistance: "They shouldn't have given us a uniform if they didn't want to make us an army", sayd Offred in the first season (Ep. 01x10). The series has inspired protests and demonstrations, with activists adopting the attire of the handmaids as a powerful symbol of opposition against laws and policies perceived as restrictive or oppressive. It is, therefore, once again, a transmedial narrative product from which a group of political actors (in this case "grassroots") have extracted some iconic elements, well sedimented in the collective imagination and easy to recognise, to convey a message that, in turn, has attracted media attention and the production of further content (especially memes) by the public.

In the first instance, iconicity shaped rampant political cosplay. A theme widely addressed by scholars of visual culture and sociological approaches (Ehrenreich, 2004; Alotaibi, 2018; Swatie, 2019) as much as by journalistic reporting. Sceneries of rebellion by the Handmaids echo in the protests of movements such as #MeToo, the pro-abortion ROSA (for Reproductive rights, against Oppression, Sexism and Austerity), the Italian #Nonunadimeno and a series of initiatives by feminist activists; among others we remember that "in Washington [...], September 2018, opposed to the confirmation of the Supreme Court judge accused of sexual assault [or] the feminist marches in the streets of Buenos Aires to demand the legalisation of abortion from President Mauricio Macri in the summer of 2018" (Tirino, 2020, p. 252).

Today, a narrative product like *The Handmaid's Tale* is associated with the idea of a concrete political struggle, partly because the same narrative universe addresses similar themes and partly because a favourable canon is established for this form of interpretation (Boato, 2021). Thus, it is not only the physical protest of women dressed as handmaids that has political significance but also the ensemble of images and videos circulated on the Internet comparing the contemporary politics of different countries to the dystopian universe of *The Handmaid's Tale*. In this sense, the narrative transcends its medium to become a catalyst for social and political discourse, stimulating critical reflection on the directions our societies could take if we do not remain vigilant about the rights and freedoms we take for granted.

2. Gilead: The Oppression of Women

At the end of the twentieth century, the Western world is gripped by conflicts, environmental pollution, diseases, radiation and extremely low birth rates. In an attempt to curb these catastrophes, major world powers establish an agreement on spheres of influence, promising not to interfere in the strategies adopted by individual governments to manage the crisis. Gilead's response to this crisis is ruthless: the new government declaring alternative religions, marriages not being sanctioned by the State Church and homosexual unions being tagged as illegal. The most oppressed category is that of women; the entire society is restructured around a severe patriarchal order where women are subjected to a system that recognises and evaluates them solely based on their ability to procreate.

At the heart of this ecosystem of oppression are the handmaids, fertile women subjected to the logic of dominant male rule, represented by the commanders, at the top of the social hierarchy. A logic that reflects the biblical passage in which Rachel, unable to bear children, offers her handmaid Bilhah to Jacob to conceive on her behalf: "And she said: Behold my maid Bilhah, go in unto her; and she shall bear upon my knees, that I may also have children by her" (Genesis, 30, p. 3). The reading of this biblical passage justifies and precedes the "ceremony", the sexual act that occurs monthly during each woman's fertile period, in which the handmaid lies on the bed between the legs of the commander's wife, with her head resting on her abdomen and holding her hands. The handmaid's body is objectified in this public, mechanical act, aimed solely at conception.

In the Republic of Gilead, the subjugation of handmaids and male dominance over the female body is realised through a multitude of surveillance and subjugation devices: most women are deprived of all powers and confined to domestic or reproductive work. Women are even forbidden from practicing reading.

Gilead's social organisation is clearly manifested to the viewer through a combination of visual, linguistic and behavioural codes that make the divisions among the various layers of society evident. Those in high positions enjoy tangible privileges, such as living in luxurious homes, having the service of a maid and claiming the right to a Handmaid. Clothing plays a crucial role in the marked differentiation of social roles, with specific colours and styles assigned to each group to emphasise their status and function within Gilead[6]: her conscious use of colour to connect and simultaneously separate the state's classes is compelling, and the subtle design details that amplify and advance the humanity and individuality of the complex characters are captivating.

The handmaids wear red dresses and a white head covering that frames their faces and prevents them from freely raising or turning their gaze; the commanders' wives wear

[6] Annie Sutherland, associate professor at the University of Oxford, underlines: "In the introduction to the 2017 UK edition of *The Handmaid's Tale*, Atwood tells us that 'modesty costumes worn by the women of Gilead are derived from Western religious iconography'. This grounding of the costumes in the traditions of the church […] reminds us that, over the centuries, countless women in the Christian West have been defined by appearance or attire and have been variously objectified by those in authority over them". The costume designer, Ane Crabtree, of the Hulu production will resume Atwood's research. In 2017, Crabtree earned her first Emmy Award nomination for her work on *The Handmaid's Tale*. https://theconversation.com/the-handmaids-tale-symbols-of-protest-and-medieval-holy-women-118471 [last accessed 01.08.2024].

shades ranging from bright blue to navy blue; the Marthas, who perform domestic tasks, wear uniforms with shades ranging from faded green to beige; and the Aunts wear brown dresses and are the ones who educate the handmaids through physical and psychological violence at the Rachel and Leah Re-education Centre. Unlike all other women, the Aunts are allowed to read and write. Women who do not fit into these categories, due to age or uselessness, are designated as Unwomen and forced into the treatment and disposal of toxic waste.

The subjugation suffered by women reaches the imposition of a new name, which, for the handmaids who begin to serve a household, is composed of the prefix 'of', indicating ownership, followed by the male name belonging to the new commander. The protagonist of the series, June, thus becomes Offred (of Fred), which coincides with 'offered' and, at the same time, evokes the colour of the red uniform worn (of red).

In this regime, any form of rebellion is repressed with brutal punishments, exile to dangerous colonies or death.

In the television series, as well as in the original novel, the story of Offred/June Osborne provides a deeply personal perspective on the terrible realities of Gilead. Through her experience, viewers are immersed in a narrative that not only highlights the brutal oppression of this regime but also emphasises the resilience and struggle to maintain one's dignity in a system that seeks to dominate women's fertility and autonomy. The handmaids, recognisable by their distinctive red dresses and white head coverings, thus become powerful symbols of resistance, embodying both vulnerability and defiance against Gilead's oppression.

3. A World as a Prison

A fundamental role in Gilead is played by the control of the bodies of its inhabitants, especially women, pursued not only through the provision of a network of spies and informants but also through the implementation of established depersonalisation procedures that start from the seizure of the proper name in favour of functional designations – Handmaid, Martha, Aunt, Wife – to the conversion of clothing into a distinctive uniform of the assigned role, and, above all, by the different degrees of mobility and spatiality assigned always in relation to the tasks required. For example, the Marthas do not have to cross the boundaries of the house, as they are responsible for its care. The Aunts, identified by a brown uniform and a cattle prod, are bound to the Handmaid education centres; their movements, duly regulated, take place strictly under escort. The wives themselves, who occupy the highest female hierarchical rank, as participants in Gilead's project, confined in their uniform clothing, are confined to the rooms of their dedicated house, distinct from those of their husbands and subject to regulation of movements. Finally, the fact that the handmaids are forced to wear long red dresses and a white head covering – the latter worn only in public – prevents women from being attributed an identity. In recent years, this costume has become a symbol and vehicle of a message, in its being a *biopicture*, to say it with William John Thomas Mitchell (2011)[7], an iconic compendium of social oppression.

[7] William John Thomas Mitchell, in his study *Cloning Terror* (2011), defines a biopicture as an image characterised by instant reproduction and viral circulation; the intrusion of twins, doubles and multiples

Driving the narrative is the obsession with the presence of an indefinite and intangible gaze. A "non-standard" stylistic feature is the obscuring of scopic technology, provocatively absent, eclipsing the reverse shot between the observer and the observed. Here, the fault lines become a breeding ground for criminal resilience, not at all resolutive or oppositional to the controlling surveillance device, which is the governmental form. In fact, in human "desertification", a surveillance device is hosted that configures disciplining arrangements that invest material spatiality, between passable or forbidden zones, and manage the valences of individual and collective subjectivation. In the general dematerialisation of the surveilled body, Gilead's horizon restores in the shared imagination the existence of physical bodies that respond, in the suffering of the flesh, to their own proxemics.

At the same time, Gilead's landscape of control – which, despite its technological archaism, deploys the staging of a concealed and reticular surveillance gaze – is, in contrast, particularly effective in conferring material consistency to the processes of localisation and tracking refined in the most recent phase of governmental forms of control. Although the technological component is practically absent, the installation of Gilead's totalitarian theocratic regime embodies the Foucauldian reading transposed into contemporary *panopticisms*. As Susan Flynn and Antonia Mackay acknowledge, "Gilead asserts itself as a surveillance system [that] imposes control by threatening to see all [...] offering a physical space (not a lens, nor a single embodied surveillant) as all-powerful" (Flynn and Mackay, 2019, p. 3). What is given, in *The Handmaid's Tale*, is a distributed panopticon built and thought such that the Eye can act, in its mutability, undisturbed. The architectural dimension of the prison is transposed into the world of Gilead, divided into designated and authorised spaces in which all inhabitants (not only the handmaids) perceive themselves as constantly exposed to an observing gaze: from the closed architectural form, one passes, therefore, to a network device that penetrates daily trajectories. In addition to coercion, found in the division of authorised spaces, the dimension of confinement is accentuated by the ambiguous toponymy of the Republic, emphasised by iconographic references. In relation to this process, events such as the demolition of Saint Patrick, once in New York, are referred to, or we witness the demolition of Saint Paul-Minneapolis. In the third season, we see in Washington the monumental marble obelisk, opposite to the National Mall, to commemorate the founding father and first president, replaced by a giant white cross; the monumental statue of the Lincoln Memorial decapitated – in the face and in the right hand, symbol of reason – and the iconic inscription erased: "In this temple as in the hearts of the people, for whom he saved the Union, the memory of Abraham Lincoln is enshrined forever". Lincoln has been deprived of the power of speech; and so too are all the handmaids forbidden to speak: a leather mask covers their mouths and prevents any facial movement. But the hope that the place recalls in memory is projected again: "I can be silent, but my work here is not finished", June thinks. This is perhaps one of the most impactful sequences in the series. The top of the statue, once representing Lincoln, is introduced

into the sphere of public imagination and mass consumption; the reduction of the human to bare life or to a mere image, to a corpse waiting to be mutilated, disfigured and destroyed; the corresponding loss of identity and the proliferation of faceless and headless images of headless clones. Mittell's main reference is the study of the iconic image of the Iraq War, the Hooded Man, the Abu Ghraib Man. A marked comparison is drawn with the icon of the Handmaid.

through the gaze of Offred/June: the prohibition of speech emphasises the subjectivity through which the informative detail is conveyed.

The mechanism adopted by Gilead incorporates a well-established practice, as Atwood reminds us, reflecting actions taken in every violent change of power, which television screens have contributed to making familiar to us. In this context, Offred's visit to her father's parish and the church where her daughter Anna was baptised becomes an exercise in resistance and resilience that acts in counter-tension. The architectural space as a device is recognisable in both its repressive and subjectivising functions; therefore, it needs to be defused. In the same vein, the treatment given to the staging of the protagonist's gaze, which has become a hallmark of the series, based on the subjective narration of June-Offred, works. Emphasised both by the camera angles and the actress's facial expressions, the gaze of the woman is prominent, challenging the prison world of Gilead; the same gaze seals her internal monologues, her deepest and most personal thoughts, to which she would not otherwise have access. Narrated by the protagonist's voice-over, they constitute a resilient and resistant space of freedom. In June's counter-offensive, Foucault's dull and "prolonged noise of battle resonates" (Foucault, 2003, p. 340). At the same time, the medusa-like gaze of the protagonist, concluding with her silent reflections addressed to her audience beyond the screen, chains them in the enduring intensity of the close-up. She inhibits any visual movement of those who listen to her. The acting performance, combined with the compositional framework of the shot, contributes to embodying the power of the controlling gaze from which the Handmaid herself is imprisoned, restoring its claustrophobic significance.

Gilead's system, in addition to reclaiming the disciplining role of architectural and urban space, incorporates the violence of the punitive component into the spectacle of the series, serving the function of observing control. Emblematic is one of the procedures provided by Gilead, namely the branding suffered by the handmaids, perhaps the only practice that attests to the use of modern technology. Like modern tracking systems, women are implanted with a subcutaneous microchip that monitors their every move. Although this technology, long used on animals, is still considered almost unthinkable for humans by many and seen as a science fiction scenario, it is worth remembering the hypothetical perspectives in the medical field and the experiment of a Swedish startup, Biohax, founded in 2013, which is working to spread the device as a passkey in managing daily life, emphasising its compatibility.

In the series, the implant is motivated by the value of the handmaids in Gilead's society: "You are too precious, we don't want to lose you", says Aunt Lydia while explaining the reasons for the branding. Obviously, the term "precious" has no emotional value here. From the second season, June's desire and escape plans must first confront the possibility of freeing herself from that fleshly GPS' (*June*, Ep. 02x01). In one of the series' most brutal scenes, we see the young woman mutilating herself by cutting off the part of her ear where the transmitter is located, to expel it. Organising the escape from Gilead, for the protagonist of *The Handmaid's Tale*, means having to create shadow zones. The hideout and shelter of some Marthas and many children who later managed to escape at the end of the third season – as we will see later – will be the home of Commander Joseph Lawrence, a leadership figure and architect of the republic. June appropriates the headquarters, the dwelling of the Eye, which finally appears embodied in a weakened man

incapable of manoeuvring the countless ramifications, uncovering the only place in the prison community from which it is observed without being observed.

Margaret Atwood has been acclaimed for her ability to touch on various sensitive topics, including the persistence of a patriarchal system that turns women's bodies into tools and objects of subjugation. As often happens in dystopian fiction, viewers are presented with the most drastic solution to the most controversial problem, which calls into question the role of women in society. But this is how dystopia works in literature and on screen; it produces a sense of estrangement. In this geography of visibility, the magnifying lens of ecofeminism seems to be a tool for reading the plot. Reading more deeply, the response given by the women of Gilead is not a subversion of power, so that women sit in the place of men. But it is to place themselves at the centre: a mechanism that begins especially in the third season and finds development in the fourth and fifth seasons. This placing oneself at the centre[8] is directly linked to recognising oneself as a fundamental part of the survival of the system's ecology. If the planet disappears along with the men who inhabit it, it will be due to the neglect of political action (totalitarian, capitalist and consumerist) on two key issues: the environment and fertility.

4. Ecofeminism: Medicine against Dictatorial Power

It is in Françoise d'Eaubonne's texts, *Le féminisme* (1972) and later *Écologie et féminisme* (1978), that we first encounter the contraction of ecology and feminism in the term *ecofeminism*. It is also a contraction of two ideas to which the writer refers, namely those of Serge Moscovici (*La société contre nature*, 1972) and Simone de Beauvoir (*Le deuxième sexe*, 1949). d'Eaubonne, who published several times on the topic of ecofeminism (1972, 1974, 1976, 1978), begins by denouncing the sexist organisation of society, which has led to men's domination over women and the destruction of nature. In her view, the ideological framework that allows men to dominate women is the same that allows men to dominate nature (d'Eaubonne, 1978, p. 15): "Man's relationship with nature is more than ever the same as man's relationship with woman". The destruction of nature is, therefore, not the fault of humanity as a whole but of men, who have built a sexist and scientist civilisation and, more generally, a society of domination. Following this line, we will see how starting from Françoise d'Eaubonne's ecofeminism, *The Handmaid's Tale* prompts the idea that the feminist revolution against political power is the necessary ingredient for the ecological and social revolution.

The parallelism between the power control over nature and over women's bodies conducted by the commanders is evident. Overnight, women have been deprived of every good, every right, and every freedom, divided into fertile and infertile ones. Thus, the environment has been divided into habitable zones and highly polluted areas to relegate nuclear waste. A dichotomy, that of the Republic of Gilead, which is not far from the European society read by Françoise d'Eaubonne at the end of the 19th century, destined

[8] The *modus operandi* that characterises the other face of motherhood, that of the Wives, is also evident in the finale of the second season. In particular, it is highlighted when Serena Joy and other women approach the council to propose an amendment. They express the desire to teach the sons and daughters of Gilead to read the Bible. Serena takes out Eden's Bible and begins to read, an action that the women in Gilead were not allowed to do. However, Serena will be punished with the amputation of a finger from her hand as a consequence of her disobedience (*The Word*, Ep. 02x13).

for self-extinction. With *Écologie et féminisme*, she asserts that the discovery of the male role in procreation induced new mental structures characterised by illimitism – that is, the absence of limits in the pursuit of power: over women, over nature, over other groups and peoples, an extreme exploitation based on the thirst for the absolute, a Promethean illusion that in its delirium of appropriation would lead to annihilation of life. In this "race towards infinity, competitive aggressiveness is essential [...] and competition entails the progressive intensification of violence and massacre" (d'Eaubonne, 1978, p. 163). Patriarchy is a society of adults against children, of one sex against the other, of one class against another, of one nation against another, a struggle of all against all, an inherently conflictual and Manichaean logic in all forms of thought.

The solution is promptly emphasised by Atwood: to the narrow vision of feminism, crystallised around the issue of equality between men and women and sexual freedom, an inclusive feminism must be implemented, one that claims equality in a world of inequality. d'Eaubonne called this aspect "le féminisme de maman". She opposed the need for a radical change in civilisation. It was about going to the root of domination, restoring to the entire planet the feminine part that had been taken from it, affirming a new ecofeminist humanism capable of overcoming the misogynistic and ecocidal foundations of Western civilisation. The only way to escape the destructive grip of universal patriarchal power is, therefore, the overturning of that power, which has led to agricultural overexploitation. Not matriarchy or power to women, a dichotomy that would have reproduced an oppositional dualism, but the destruction of power by women for an egalitarian management of the world, a world that should have been reborn, not a world to be protected, as still believed by soft ecologists:

> This time it's a much broader issue than the "liberation of women", and "sexual freedom". It's about the future of humanity itself. Better: the possibility of having a future at all. The continuation of our species is threatened today by the fulfillment of patriarchal cultures, by madness and crime. Madness: demographic growth. Crime: environmental destruction (d'Eaubonne, 1972, p. 352).

Demographic pressure, ecological destruction, nuclear madness and genetic manipulation threats – the most serious threats of the future – are inherently feminist issues. The solution does not lie in matriarchy, "but in the resurgence of what we call, using the sexist language of the enemy, feminine values" (d'Eaubonne, 1972, p. 164). This interpretation allows us to understand the narrative framework in which the protagonist's actions take shape. An action system, resilient from within, which makes Offred a dissident. Often actions that may seem hypocritical to the viewer – apparent acceptance of coitus; friendship with Waterford that allows her to train reading; being part of the punishments inflicted on other handmaids are just a few examples – but which, in the season finales, prove to have been indispensable for a higher purpose: the self-implosion of the system itself.

The pinnacle of this process is the mentioned collaboration that Offred strikes during the third season with Commander Lawrence, architect of the Republic of Gilead. In the journey they take together, we can observe a constant: the reappropriation of their own bodies and their relationship with nature, caring for each other and the living space. The cruelty of man bends; he is afraid of an unpredictable woman, a woman who is mother

and earth. Mother and woman not of just one daughter but of the children of the entire community; she also thinks about safeguarding Lawrence's well-being first.

In repeated attempts to overcome carceral conditions, Offred acts with the spirit that guided the French feminist in her research on pre-patriarchal societies: to oppose narratives that render powerless and present the future as inevitable, with narratives that give confidence, offering cultural, historical and psychological resources to "destroy what destroys us" (d'Eaubonne, 1999, p. 30). If read from this perspective, which makes Offred an ecofeminist heroine, the search for femininity in the TV series becomes even more understandable to the audience, in which subjectivity as subjugation to one's anatomical dimension produced daily by patriarchy is transformed into a community strength: the handmaids find allies in the Marthas and some wives:

> Fifty-two kids will be brought to the Lawrence House after sunset. We will move in darkness. We can hide in the dark, at least. We have a chance, at least. If there is actually a Martha network. If this all isn't a trap set by the Eyes. We will get the children to the airport. The plane leaves at midnight[9].

The reference to individuality becomes a group thought. Motherhood is not to be read within the serial narrative as a natural function of women but as social. Because, and let there be no ambiguity about this point, ecofeminism does not consist in saying that women are closer to nature than men; rather, it is not possible to understand the environmentally destructive consequences of dominant trends in human development without understanding their gendered nature.

In the episode *Mayday* (Ep. 03x13), for the first time, a plane loaded with children and Marthas manages to escape the Eye and reach the border of Canada, a free country. The difference in positioning around maternity and procreation is crucial:

> So, with a society finally feminine that will be non-power (and not power to women), it will be shown that no other human category could have achieved the ecological revolution; because no other was equally directly interested at all levels. And the two sources of wealth diverted towards male interest will return to being expressions of life and no longer elaborations of death; and the human being will finally be treated as a person, and not primarily as a man or woman. And the feminine planet will bloom again for everyone (d'Eaubonne, 1999, pp. 318-319).

The TV narrative places us on the opposite side of the boundary between reality and fiction. The series asks the viewers, as well as the horizontal gaze, to activate the vertical one to transmute into visible what the dominant system assigns to the indeterminate. In the synergy among the narrative, intense and spectacular visuality and theoretical and ideological refinement, *The Handmaid's Tale* emerges as the truthful form of the action of politics, and power on resistant bodies logically implies a rethinking of the functioning of societies and, above all, of the inequalities between men and women. Development requires greater social justice and better distribution of current wealth, and the production and sharing of that wealth that does not compromise the well-being of future generations, as stated in the Brundtland report, *Our Common Future*: sustainable development that takes

[9] June to Lawrence in *Mayday* (Ep. 03x13).

into account a gender analysis in all activities, in any field, not limited to environmental concerns but also economic and social ones.

At a time when concerns for ecological, environmental and social sustainability occupy much of the media and political scene, beyond the dramatically effective plot, the seasons produced so far exhibit a systematic project focused not just on the theme of bodily violence. As well as offering the chance to investigate contemporary events, *The Handmaid's Tale* supports an ecology that avoids two of today's traps: it does not support either the artificialisation of living beings and human control over nature and political power or a restorative utopia, which naturalises social relations and sacralises nature. It, therefore, goes against all forms of extremism.

The women of Gilead are against patriarchal institutions (Tolan, 2007). They demonstrate their self-determination and renegotiate, at every moment, the necessary violence to survive, not for personal but collective freedom. The women of Gilead continue to fight, all of them.

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About the authors

Laura Cesaro is a research fellow at Ca' Foscari University in Venice, where she teaches courses on television and digital culture. Her main research topic concerns the study of forms of contemporary visuality. She attended international conferences and published articles in academic journals. She is the author of the monograph Geografie del controllo nella scena audiovisiva contemporanea (Bulzoni, 2022).

Claudio Riva, PhD, is an associate professor at the University of Padova. Currently, he teaches Sociology and Sociology of the Media and acts as a member of the Academic Board of the Social Sciences PhD programme. His research interests include transmediality, political communication, new media, youth and media.