



REVISITING GILEAD

Viewers shuddered as they watched *The Handmaid's Tale*, the 10-part TV series inspired by Margaret's Atwood's dystopian horror story. They saw women suddenly deprived of their jobs, their money and their freedom to control their bodies. While everyone in Atwood's Gilead is subjugated, it is the control of women and their reproductive powers that still resonates 30 years after Atwood's book was first published in 1985. Gilead may seem unthinkable, but it's only because the transformation of women into a class of breeding slaves is so sudden and extreme.

Gilead and its über-patriarchy may seem far removed from most women's lives in North America today. But let's not forget that, until 50 years ago, Canadian women's reproductive autonomy was controlled by government. It wasn't until 1969 that contraception became legal in Canada and abortion became available only if a committee of three doctors determined that a woman's life or health would be in jeopardy if she carried her pregnancy to term. It took another full generation of feminist lobbying, and court challenges by Dr. Henry Morgentaler—leading up to the milestone 1988 Supreme Court victory—before abortion became an insured medical service.

In the U.S., the 1973 *Roe vs. Wade* court ruling protected American women's reproductive rights on paper, but many states are severely curtailing abortion. And U.S. President Donald Trump withdrew government funding from international organizations that provide or endorse abortion, something that former Canadian Prime Minister Stephen Harper did in 2014.

If you think scenes from Gilead couldn't happen, think again. Today, reproductive dictatorships are in place in countries such as El Salvador, where abortion is banned even when a pregnant woman's life is jeopardized and where women who have abortions are imprisoned. And a shocking new Arkansas law would require a rape victim who becomes pregnant as a result of an assault to obtain her assailant's permission to obtain an abortion.

Historically, women's lives have been controlled by laws made by men in order to maintain their dominance. It wasn't that long ago that Canadian men were permitted to "discipline" their wives using methods that would have been considered assault if they had been inflicted on anyone else. Ontario was the first province, in 1975, to

abolish the principle that a husband and wife are "one person" in law—a principle that had protected men from being charged for physical or sexual assault of their wives. And it wasn't until 1983 that Canada's Criminal Code considered marital rape a crime. However, in India, Singapore, Lebanon and Bahamas, among other places, laws still permit a man to rape his wife.

Women in *The Handmaid's Tale* are horrified when they are unable to access their money and keep their jobs—rights that we now take for granted. However, most women were expected to quit their jobs upon marriage well into the 1950s, and it was a given that they would quit if they became pregnant. Until Justice Minister Pierre Trudeau introduced important divorce reforms in 1968, getting out of a marriage was very difficult for women. Even then, a mother could not be assured she would receive financial support for the divorcing couple's children if she was awarded custody. And women were not automatically entitled to a legal share of the family's home and its assets until 1978.

In Gilead, as in Canada today, misogyny is an ever-present threat. Women who are sexually assaulted routinely have their cases dismissed by police as "unfounded." And if their case goes to trial, there is a good chance that a woman won't be believed and the rapist will go free.

Feminists in decades past achieved many advances, such as equal sharing of assets after a divorce, equality protection under the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, pay equity laws, decriminalization of abortion and paid maternity leave. Yet the battles in Canada are not won yet—we still need pay and employment equity, affordable child care, improved representation of women in decision-making positions and much more. Internationally, many women are still fighting for rights we now take for granted. Women in 19 countries are still obliged by law to obey their husbands, while those in 18 countries need their husband's permission to get a job.

To avoid a *Handmaid's Tale* transformation, we need to support organizations that speak out when governments anywhere attempt to enact policies that threaten rights. We need continued collective activism, relentless vigilance and a powerful sisterhood to fight for social justice and to speak truth to power. ❀

contributors



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Andrea Quinlan is an assistant professor in the department of sociology and legal studies at the University of Waterloo. Her research focuses on criminal justice responses to sexual violence and the history and influence of feminist anti-violence movements on sexual assault law, policy and institutional practice. Her article "How Rape Kits Have Hurt Women" appears on page 20.



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Karen Stote is an assistant professor of women and gender studies at Wilfrid Laurier University. She teaches the history of Indian policy and Indigenous-settler relations, feminism and the politics of decolonization, and environmental and reproductive justice. Karen is the author of *An Act of Genocide: Colonialism and the Sterilization of Aboriginal Women*, a book that forms the basis of her article that begins on page 16.



MAUREEN MEDVED

Maureen Medved writes film reviews for *Herizons* and is an associate professor in the creative writing program at the University of British Columbia. Her novel *The Tracey Fragments* was made into an award-winning film. Maureen's forthcoming novel *Black Star* will be published in 2018 by Anvil Press.



TRUDY MEDCALF

Trudy Medcalf is a researcher, writer and university instructor whose projects explore the experience of growing older and living in old age, including the development of strategies for social inclusion such as online elder circles. She lives in Ottawa, and she reviewed Jen Powley's riveting book, *Just Jen*, in this issue.



ELIZABETH WHITTEN

Elizabeth Whitten is a journalist based in St. John's, Newfoundland and Labrador. When she's not chasing her next story, Elizabeth is cuddling with her dog and reading a good book. Her article on Gemma Hickey's upcoming challenge of Newfoundland and Labrador's vital statistics act, on page 7, is her first article for *Herizons*.



ANNA EIDT

Anna Eidt is a migraine advocate, freelance writer, artist and blogger in Peterborough, Ontario. Her feature article on the widespread, yet misunderstood condition of migraine, "Brain Pain," starts on page 29 this issue. You can read more of Anna's writing on migraine at migraine-brainstorm.com and migraine.com.



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Linda Silver Dranoff is a lawyer, activist and the author of *Fairly Equal: Lawyering the Feminist Revolution*, published in 2017 by Second Story Press and the Feminist History Society. Her guest column on the legal subjugation of women and Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* is on page 41.



KATE SLOAN

Kate Sloan's writing on sex and feminism has appeared in *Maisonneuve* and on websites such as *Plaid Zebra* and *xojane*. She's written for *Herizons* on topics including *Drunk Feminist Films* and environmentally safe sex toys. Her article "Closing the Orgasm Gap" opens on page 26. Kate blogs at girlyjuice.net.



DEANNA RADFORD

Deanna Radford, who writes about multimedia artist Alexis O'Hara this issue starting on page 12, is a writer, poet, curator and cultural worker. Deanna is a student in the master of creative writing program at Concordia University in Montreal.



AVA HOMA

Ava Homa is a regular book reviewer at *Herizons*. Her collection of short stories, *Echoes from the Other Land*, was nominated for the 2011 Frank O'Connor Prize. She is an activist and a political analyst specializing on women's issues and Middle Eastern affairs.



SYLVIA SANTIAGO

Sylvia Santiago's writing has been published in *subTerrain*, *Ricepaper*, *Frogpond* and *A Hundred Gourds*. She has been a regular book reviewer for *Herizons* for 15 years.