The use of fear-inducing propaganda strategies and techniques in audio-visual dystopias. The case of Gilead in *The Handmaid's Tale*

El uso de estrategias y técnicas propagandísticas evocadoras de miedo en las distopías audiovisuales. El caso de Gilead en El cuento de la criada

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Abstract:

The present study addresses the use of fear-generating strategies and techniques related to the theory of propaganda in audio-visual productions, focusing on the analysis of the dystopian series known as *The Handmaid's Tale*. Although fear is commonly used in propaganda as a tool for social control and political domination, this study questions whether it is used in the political systems represented in audio-visual dystopias, as these are reflections of current fears of a catastrophic future. To achieve the objective, this study uses content analysis applied to the first three seasons of the aforementioned series involving scenes in which Fred Waterford, Serena Joy, and Aunt Lydia appear in the narrative as representatives of Gilead.

Keywords:

Audio-visual; dystopia; propaganda; fear; television series.

Resumen:

Este estudio aborda el uso de estrategias y técnicas generadoras de miedo de la teoría de la propaganda en el audiovisual, enfocándose en el análisis de la serie distópica de El cuento de la criada. El miedo es utilizado en propaganda como una herramienta de control social y dominación política. Esta investigación plantea si este instrumento propagandístico se utiliza en los sistemas políticos representados en el audiovisual, pues estos son reflejos de los miedos actuales en un futuro catastrófico. Para esto, utiliza un análisis de contenido que se aplica a las tres primeras temporadas de la serie mencionada a través de las escenas en las que aparecen Fred Waterford, Serena Joy y Tía Lydia, como representantes de Gilead en la narrativa.

Palabras clave:

Audiovisual; distopía; propaganda; miedo; series de televisión.

1. Introduction

On various occasions, the presence of propaganda in products of mass culture has been studied. As an example, Hernández-Santaolalla (2011) explains in detail how enemies are created in television series based on the theory of propaganda. Therefore, it is indisputable that the presence of this communicative phenomenon in audio-visual narratives is highly important.

Fear is a tool used in political propaganda that is very effective, and one that entails a high degree of social and political control and domination (Pratkanis and Aronson, 1994). With this in mind, after reviewing propaganda theory, strategies and techniques that induce fear have been identified in the works of researchers such as Brown (1995), Domenach (1962), and Morelli (2002), among others. These authors explain strategies such as the "vote of fear" (Zepeda, 2012), or the fundamentals of war propaganda (Morelli, 2002). All of them take into account the importance of this emotion in propaganda.

After analysing studies on audio-visual dystopias such as those of Claeys (2016) or Uribes Montes (2015), it can be seen that this emotion also has considerable prominence in dystopian narratives, as they tend to reflect the fears of the present in a catastrophic future. In short, fear is an emotion of great importance in dystopian narratives, both in form and storyline development.

The relevance of the study herein resides in the fact that *The Handmaid's Tale* is highly characterised by the emotion of fear (Hernández-Ruiz, 2019). However, studies carried out have focused on fear as a narrative genre, ignoring the fact that if one considers Gilead a political system that has had to achieve power, and subsequently maintain and reinforce it, this system has used propagandistic techniques and strategies that induce fear. This study attempts to discern whether fear has been used as a propaganda tool, as well as to gain knowledge regarding the topics that have been used to produce this emotion, and whether the strategies and techniques employed are those found in propaganda theory. If so, it would mean that fiction reflects the fear-inducing propaganda technique used in real-life politics.

1.1. Fear used for social control

As fear is the main focus of this study, it is essential to provide a definition of the term:

> Fear [...] is an emotion characterised by an intense feeling [...] provoked by the perception of a danger, either real or imagined, in the present or the future. It is a primary emotion that emanates from a natural aversion to risk or threat (Barrera Méndez, 2010: 9).

Fear plays an important role in today's society, which is characterised by the "culture of fear" (Furedi, 2007). With this term, the author refers to the social and cultural climate that makes individuals feel permanently worried, and where insecurity and uncertainty are a perpetual feature of the lives of citizens. Fear has become an essential emotion for understanding society and individuals.

This situation creates an atmosphere that enables not only the imposition of security measures by authorities, but society's acceptance of such measures as well, despite the implication of social control (Couto, 2015). Bauman (2003) understood the concept of security and freedom as opposites, which can never occur at the same time: "Promoting security always requires the sacrifice of freedom, [...] freedom can only be expanded at the expense of security" (Bauman, 2003: 27). As stated by Korstanje

(2010), the emotion of fear leads individuals to take a passive role, and as previously argued by Ordoñez (2006), fear causes paralysis and induces the recipients to adopt measures of control, even if they are preventive (Pratkanis and Aronson, 1994).

The "Culture of Fear" is exploited by political power, not only to implement "security" measures, but also to incite individuals to be afraid of nearly everything (Furedi, 2007), with the goal of obtaining and/or maintaining power. In fact, as argued by Mantilla-Valbuena (2008), the emotion of fear is a perfect tool for obtaining political domination and social control. For this reason, it has been used for such purposes from the earliest origins of humans and societies (Zepeda, 2012). By cultivating a climate of fear, it is easier for someone to present themselves as the provider of security and protection (Useche Aldana, 2008).

1.2. Fear-inducing techniques and strategies in political propaganda

To begin, it is important to offer a definition of propaganda in order to understand the aspects of this phenomenon:

> *Propaganda* is a communicative phenomenon that consists of content and objectives that are ideological, through which a Sender (individual or group) transmits a message in a deliberate, self-interested way in order to achieve, maintain or reinforce a position of power over the thinking or behaviour of a Receiver (individual or group), whose interests do not necessarily coincide with those of the Sender (Pineda, 2006: 228).

Knowing that political power uses the emotion of fear as a tool of social control, it can be concluded that fear is an instrument used by political parties to persuade citizens (Pratkanis and Aronson, 1994). Fear is an effective propaganda tool, as negative emotions are intensified when the basic needs of citizens are not met (Brown, 1995). Security in a "Culture of Fear" is seen as a basic need that must be satisfied as soon as possible (Dalloso and Seghezzo, 201

The absence of security leads the individual to feel the emotion of fear (Cortés, 2012). This implies the existence of a group that is threatened by this danger, either the one who fears or the one who is feared. This becomes a strategy used by political parties in their struggle to gain, maintain, or reinforce power:

> Every successful electoral campaign articulates its strategies not only on the basis of its proposals, ideas, and national projects, but also by considering the arousal of emotion (mainly anger and fear) in the voters. [...] The fear of things getting worse, of losing what they have, or of going against the established system of values and beliefs. In other words, the electoral strategy focuses on communication and making the voters feel that if the opponents come to power, they will destroy, terminate, and threaten the system of beliefs, values, and property, and will generate instability and discomfort [...] putting the future of the country at risk (Zepeda, 2012: 136).

For strategic purposes, political propaganda plays an essential role with diverse techniques and tools. One example is to create an enemy, as it is necessary to use discourse to identify and link the enemy to all the wrongdoing and lay the blame therein (Pineda, 2004). This technique has been extensively studied, and Morelli (2002) devotes four of his ten essential fundamentals of war propaganda to blaming the enemy. These are the four foundations: (a) "the adversary is solely responsible for the war"; (b) "the enemy is a demon"; (c) "the enemy intentionally commits atrocities, and if we make mistakes, it is not intentional"; and finally, (d) "the enemy uses illegal weapons" (Morelli, 2002). Therefore, in order to "create the enemy", there are some important items to consider. Firstly, they must be pointed out –it must be stated who they are, and they must be associated with atrocities, or the so-called *atrocity propaganda*. The strategy of atrocity propaganda is used to link the enemy to inhuman

barbarities, which are carried out in a way that is deliberate and planned (Morelli, 2002). There are times, however, when the adversary does not have a defined description, but instead are organisations that are fairly ambiguous:

> As a result of the current context, contemporary television series increasingly show situations in which the heroes and heroines must confront certain secret societies and ill-defined organisations, which demonstrate the latent insecurity in society due to the feeling of living in a situation of constant threat, where the enemy is nearly invisible, and precisely for this reason, more dangerous. This generates a climate of intense fear and social distrust, where only one certainty exists –everyone who is not like me is bad, or at the group level, the others are bad because they are different from us (Hernández-Santaolalla, 2011: 766).

The rationale of Morelli (2002), which states that "the enemy intentionally causes atrocities, whereas our mistakes are unintentional", foments the polarisation between "us" and "them", a concept expounded by Hernández-Santaolalla (2011) as well. This idea is essential in highlighting the morality of the sender and the evil and amorality of the adversary (Huici, 2017). Likewise, Pineda (2006) notes that among the different types of political propaganda, negation uses negatively-charged messages, such as defamation.

Zepeda (2012) explains the process of the so-called "vote of fear" strategy. This author stresses the need for the issuer to present him or herself to citizens as the only viable option to put an end to the lurking threats and dangers, or in short, as the only choice in overcoming fear. The author discusses the importance of pointing out the limited ability of opponents to address concerns and fears, thereby presenting themselves as the only solution, as Useche Aldana (2008) had previously argued. Zepeda (2012) also highlights the need to associate the political opponent with dangers and threats, which is directly related to the creation of an enemy mentioned by Morelli (2002).

It is indispensable to refer to Domenach (1962), as he lists the rules of propaganda: (a) simplification; (b) a single enemy; (c) exaggeration or distortion; (d) orchestration; (e) transfusion; and (f) unanimity. According to the author, all these rules are essential for the creation of political propaganda. Some of these have already been mentioned. However, it is important to highlight transfusion. As outlined by Domenach (1962), this rule is based on the difficulty of generating new ideas and making them thrive. Thus, as a solution, propaganda must be based on ideas, emotions, etc., that are already latent in the senders and that guide communicative efforts toward those ideas. This assumes that fear is an emotion that is being experienced, but in order for propaganda efforts to prosper, strategies and techniques must be focused on issues that generate fear that are already present in the receiving society.

1.3. Fear in audio-visual dystopias

It has been emphasised that dystopias emerge as a negative response to utopias:

> The concept of dystopia […] can, in several respects, be identified with the utopian tradition as such. […] Dystopia emerges from the same set of problems: how to control industrialisation, widespread poverty, the concentration of wealth, and an increasing tendency toward collectivist solutions to these issues. But in an age also characterized by growing individualism, some saw the more repressive and puritanical attributes of the older utopian tradition as part of the problem rather than the solution […] Dystopia often implies a negative condition caused by an excess of (one or other kinds of) utopian zeal (Claeys, 2016: 274).

Therefore, "utopia" is a concept that refers to that which is extremely good, while the term "dystopia" is its antipode (Uribes Montes, 2015). In light of its origins, a definition is presented as follows:

> Dystopia might be defined as representations responsible for staging undesirable futures through the extrapolation of the evils of the present, whether these are posed in terms of politics (e.g. the possibility of a totalitarian shift), social aspects (life control, overpopulation, or the loss of values), economics (poverty, unemployment), and ecology (scarcity or depletion of natural resources, global warming, pollution, etc.), as well as other problems arising from these, such as the spread of disease, an increase in xenophobia and racism, intensified misogyny, etc. (Rey Segovia, 2019: 73).

In short, as argued by Uribes Montes (2015), audio-visual dystopias are reflections of society's uncertainty in the face of a "catastrophic" future that might result from the current situation. As already mentioned, the "culture of fear" means that individuals live permanently with vulnerability, insecurity, feeling afraid, etc. (Furedi, 2007).

> This situation of instability and uncertainty is reflected in audio-visual productions that try to represent cynical societies in which people seem to have an unpromising future [...] In recent years, different types of dystopias have appeared in the world of film and television fiction that seek to represent current or future societies, which are set in the not-too-distant future (Uribe Montes, 2015: 10).

Dystopias try to make the reader or viewer understand the narrative as a possibly terrifying future, which could happen if the present situation continues along the same path:

> In the dystopian genre [...] it is essential that the reader is able to perceive the story as a warning of what could possibly happen during his or her own lifetime, so that there is the chance of keeping the hope alive of escaping the pessimistic panorama (Moreno Trujillo, 2016: 188).

The relationship between dystopias and fear is very strong, as it tries to reflect the consequences of society's present fears regarding an ominous future that awaits them (Rey Segovia, 2019). In fact, Salvador (2015) states that the common denominator of a large percentage of dystopias is fear: overwhelming, collective fear.

> Dystopian fiction acts as the unrestrained image of its time, to the point that we could say that the dystopian condition of the story is itself a witness of its own time. This transformation, or change in point of view of the story, manifests itself in pessimistic political fiction which, by seeking the same objective as the utopia [...] establishes a system of absolute oppression produced by a dominant ideology (Uribe Montes, 2015: 24-25).

Dystopias express the tendency toward barbarity by projecting a negative, inhuman, oppressive future (Claeys, 2016). They are a deviation from present expectations about the future. For this reason, fear plays a key role, not only because dystopias are narratives that reflect current fears, but also because the emotion of fear is prominent in these narratives as well (Salvador, 2015).

It bears mentioning that dystopias can be prompted by a rejection of technology, or of the rapid development that is currently being experienced at the present time in the field of science and technology, making this a turning point that has led society to this ominous future (Rey Segovia, 2019). In fact, Salvador (2015) explains common features of dystopias: "They highlight the two sides (positive and negative) of techno-scientific progress and [...] underlie both the demand for environmentalism and the claim to alter the course of the future" (Salvador, 2015: 92).

In short, audio-visual dystopias are a reflection of the fears of the present that reach their most catastrophic outcome, creating a dark, negative future for society. Likewise, both fear and violence are features that tend to appear in this type of narrative, as well as the aspect of questioning the technological and scientific advances of the present.

1.4. The case of The Handmaid's Tale

Among all the dystopias in the audio-visual field, the present study focuses on *The Handmaid's Tale* (2017-present). This series is produced by MGM Television and is based on a literary work by author Margaret Atwood: "The series [...] has become a ratings success from the moment it premiered and has helped to revive a novel that was published more than three decades ago" (Muñoz González, 2019: 78).

The dystopia tells the story of a not-too-distant future characterised by a low birth rate and high levels of pollution, among other problems. Faced with this situation, a totalitarian, theocratic, Christian government called Gilead takes power in the United States and proceeds to restructure society into one that is hierarchical and militaristic, with exacerbated powers as well (Cambra Badii, Mastandrea and Paragis, 2018). Gilead is a terrifying place (Hernández Ruiz, 2019: 249), where fear plays a key role in the development of the narrative.

> The plausible world of *The Handmaid's Tale* proposes a reality in which the structures of security and well-being on which Western civilisation was based have disappeared. The loss of rights and freedom has occurred gradually and unnoticed, and after a few years, the totalitarian system that governs the country exercises absolute dominion over its citizens, based on terror and violence (Hernández Ruiz, 2019: 2).

Moreover, Gilead is a political system characterised by significant "elements of power and social control" (Cambra Badii, Mastandrea and Paragis, 2018: 187), which can be identified in the narrative: "[it is] a totalitarian political system [...] in which terror dominates" (Hernández Ruiz, 2019: 13).

All of this is closely related to the social and political context of the present, and as stated by Muñoz González (2019), the situation is represented by the rise of the extreme right, such as Trump, Bolsonaro, and Le Pen. This supports the ideas of Uribes Montes (2015), Rey Segovia (2019), and Moreno Trujillo (2016), expounded in the previous section, which state that audio-visual dystopias are reflections of the fears, instability and uncertainty experienced in the present.

The Handmaid's Tale is a series based on the rise to power of a totalitarian political system in the United States that changes society as it is known today, based on problems and fears that can be detected in the present, such as the low birth rate, environmental problems, and terrorism, to cite just a few examples. Therefore, as fear is the main resource used in this narrative from a political point of view, propaganda must have been essential, which shows specific, fear-inducing political ideas that can be identified in the story.

1.5. Objectives and research questions

The primary aim of this article is to analyse the use of fear by Gilead, the political system in the dystopian series, *The Handmaid's Tale*. The study focuses on the fear-inducing propaganda that appears during the three seasons of the series. This objective is complemented by secondary objectives, or SOs, which are as follows:

SO 1.   To delve into the importance of the use of fear in dystopian narrative series, especially in *The Handmaid's Tale*.

SO 2.   To determine the topics that Gilead uses to generate fear, such as the propaganda used in the narrative to achieve and maintain power.

SO 3.   To analyse the fear-inducing propaganda techniques and strategies used by Gilead.

Another research question has been added to explore the issue further, which is the following:

RQ: Does the narrative of *The Handmaid's Tale* use the same fear-evoking propaganda strategies and techniques that appear in real-life politics?

2. Methodology

In order to address the subject, as well as the objectives, and research question, a quantitative methodology has been used, which is content analysis as a data collection technique. For this reason, we refer to classics, one of which is that of Krippendorff (1997). Content analysis makes it possible to obtain the total number of times fear has been used in political terms during the three seasons, as well as the fear-inducing propaganda tools that appear, and their frequency. As a result of the coding sheet created, it has been possible to quantitatively observe diverse aspects, such as the following: references to the adversary's limited ability to confront fears; the existence of a threatened group; techniques for creating an enemy (mentioning the adversary, making derogatory comments, and/or the use of atrocity propaganda); polarisation by referring to *us* and *them*; portraying the adversary as the cause of the danger or threat; and finally, presenting oneself as the solution and/or hope.

These contributions are the result of the functionality of fear-inducing propagandistic concepts and strategies that appear in essential works such as those of Domenach (1962) and Brown (1995), among others, which have been analysed in the theoretical framework. In addition, two relevant contributions have been added: fear-generating topics, in order to understand the types of fear used by Gilead; and the concept of a threatened group.

The coding sheet mentioned has been applied to those scenes in which Fred Waterford, Serena Joy, and Aunt Lydia appear as representatives of Gilead in the narrative. Such scenes are characterised by Gilead's use of propaganda to induce fear. The scenes are from all episodes of the first three seasons of *The Handmaid's Tale*.

3. Results

After applying the methodology, significant results have been obtained. Firstly, in the three seasons, twelve scenes were found in which fear is induced by Gilead through propaganda, personified in Aunt Lydia and the Waterfords. This finding leads to the idea that the viewer does not know in detail how Gilead's leaders rose to power, nor is it known exactly how their ideas became accepted by society. However, there are twelve scenes starring Serena, Fred, and Lydia, the system's executive officers, which show not only Gilead's discourse, but the way in which it evokes fear as well, because as mentioned above, it is well known that fear plays an important role in establishing and maintaining power.

Of the twelve scenes, ten pertain to Aunt Lydia and two involve the Waterfords. This imbalance can be explained by the fact that Lydia bears the burden of Gilead's use of fear, as she is in charge of training the maids and spreading the ideals to them, thereby maintaining and reinforcing power. In fact, the discourse of the struggle for power resides in the two scenes featuring Serena and Fred.

Results obtained related to the fear-inducing topics:

Chart 1. Fear-inducing topics of Gilead
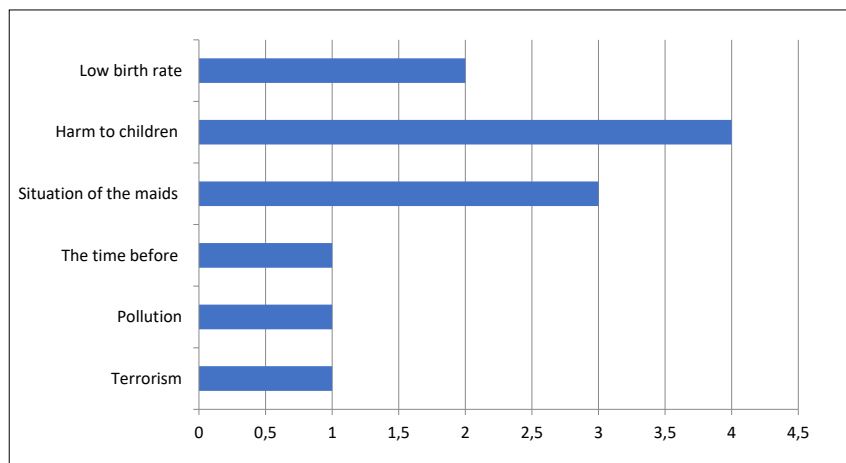
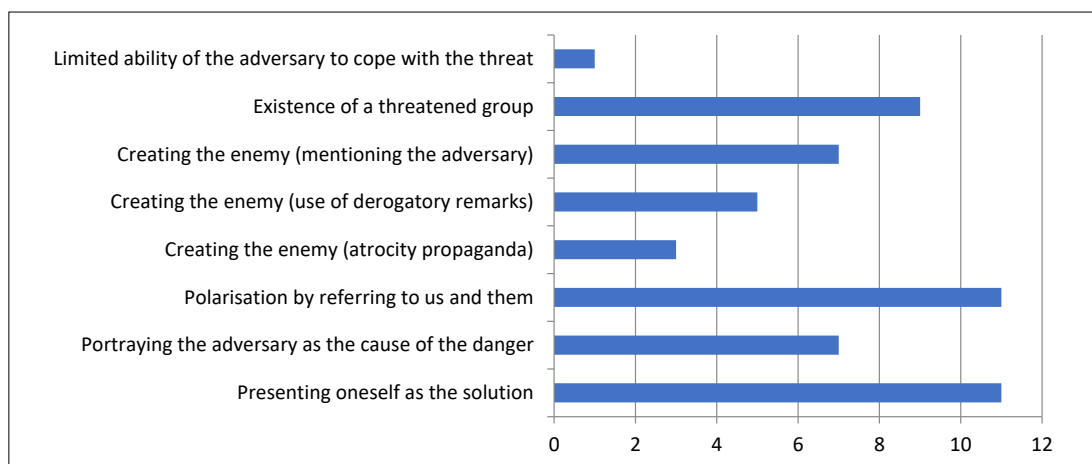Source: prepared by the authors

As can be seen in Chart 1, harm to children is the main concept for generating fear, which is spread by Aunt Lydia to scare the maids and basically warn them why they should follow the guidelines assigned by Gilead. Next is the low birth rate, which appears in two scenes, one with Aunt Lydia (S1, E1) in which she explains the extreme danger of the declining birth rate. Furthermore, in the first fear-inducing scene involving Serena and Fred in an act of propaganda at a university (S2, E6), they also mention the low birth rate as the main problem. In fact, it is important to highlight the way in which this scene is divided into two parts. Firstly, they try to speak in what appears to be the university assembly hall, but as there are many detractors, they give up and leave. Afterward, in what appears to be the faculty hall, Serena dares to raise her voice, and she starts talking about the issue, emphasising the low birth rate as the heart of society's problems, which will lead to the extinction of humanity. At this point, students in the room begin to nod, and in the end, they even dare to applaud Serena. This is inferred as an effect of the speech.

On the other hand, another topic that appears as a fear inducer, which is played out by Lydia, is when she delves into the idea that the maids are in constant danger from the outside world, and if they step out of line, they might have a very tragic ending, the aim of which is to avoid rebellion by the maids so they will continue to remain under the protection of Gilead.

The topic of "the time before" is used by Lydia to refer to the time before Gilead, which is characterised by other fear-inducing issues such as pollution, terrorism, the low birth rate, etc. Therefore, by imbuing the previous system with these characteristics, the act of mentioning "the time before" is also an inducement to fear, or an attempt to differentiate the good from the bad, or salvation from fear. There are two other instances in which fear-generating themes are mentioned as well. Pollution is used by Lydia to highlight the sustainable productive development of Gilead. In fact, there is another scene in the series in which the Mexican ambassador visits Gilead, and Fred sells the idea of production with arguments about reducing pollution (S01E06). Serena and Fred mention terrorism in one of their scenes as well. Serena is shot after the propaganda activity at the university, and while in the hospital, she helps Fred prepare a speech. He mentions an attack by a "fanatic", and Serena forcefully corrects him by affirming that they are "terrorists". Thus, the adversary is portrayed as a terrorist, thereby converting terrorism into a fear.

Regarding the fear-generating propaganda techniques, a few examples appear in Chart 2:

Chart 2. Fear-inducing propaganda techniques used by Gilead

Source: prepared by the authors

All the fear-inducing propaganda techniques mentioned above can be detected in the scenes analysed. The one used the least is pointing out the adversary's limited ability to cope with the danger or threat. This occurs only once, involving Serena and Fred in episode six of season two, when Serena is in the hospital and Fred tries to reassure her that they will catch the terrorist who shot her, and she responds, "I have faith in God, but not in the police" (S2, E6 / 42:32-44:24). With this remark, Serena makes it clear that when faced with the danger or fear of terrorism, the police cannot be trusted, as they are part of the system. Therefore, the following scene shows how Fred and the Gilead security system kill the person who shot Serena. In short, it is implied that with the previous system, when an adversary was pointed out, the system was not be able to arrest the culprit, but with Gilead, the criminal is detained and punished.

It has been noted that the two most commonly used techniques are the following: the *us* and *them* polarisation strategy; and offering oneself as the solution to the threat. Both techniques are used in all except one of the scenes analysed.

Examples of the *us* and *them* polarisation technique:

They were depraved whores (...) but you girls are special (Aunt Lydia, S1, E1, minute 17:11).

The Earth is a gift that was given to us by God in his love and benevolence, but we haven't appreciated its blessings for a long time –we have polluted our ground water, air, and even our bodies. We have poisoned all our treasures, and we have been surprised when the world has begun to die, but through our works, through the work of the penitents, we will be able to heal. Stone by stone, we will regain the favour of our Lord. We will create a world where the seeds are not to be planted among thorns or in poisoned, infertile soil, but in sweetly fragrant soil, and He will surely bless us with His abundance (Aunt Lydia, S2, E3, minute 32:34-33:50).

This polarisation technique is intended to make those who are opposite to "us", or the "others", be seen as fearful and evil, thereby maintaining the image of Gilead as a system that spreads the idea of "us" being the good people. This idea can be clearly seen in the two examples above. In the first, Lydia tries to spread the idea of good and bad womanhood to the maids, branding women who are akin to the former system as degenerates. With the second example, we can also see that Gilead creates an "us" by taking care of the Earth and the manufacturing system in order to counteract the effects of pollution.

The other technique most often used is that of presenting themselves as the solution, or that Gilead is the solution to peoples' fears:

You are spoiled brats (...) Don't you remember how things used to be? Now, you're safe (...) Now you have been given freedom. It's a gift from God. Don't underestimate it (Aunt Lydia, S2, E1, minute 12:43-14:58).

You are a fallen woman. I try to give you the best possible conditions (...) Gilead has been merciful. You will be able to lead a better life (Aunt Lydia, S2, E4, minute 36:17).

The technique of highlighting the existence of a threatened group is also common, appearing in nine scenes. Creating victims to be protected from threats helps Gilead to reinforce its discourse, whether it is children or humanity in general:

Today, we will purge the most grievous of sins, which is putting a sacred child in grave danger. To be precise, it was one the Marthas. She conspired against a child whose protection had been entrusted to her. There is no sin more despicable (S3, E7, minute 36:43-37:44).

Births have fallen by 71% in the last twelve months. Without a doubt, that is the problem we need to focus on right now. The future of humanity depends on what we do today –what we do now. Humanity is in danger (Serena, S2, E6, minute 29:51-31-28).

The technique of creating the enemy has been identified with three variables: mention of the adversary (seven times), defamation (five) and atrocity propaganda (three). To begin with, they do not point to a specific enemy, but instead focus on highlighting past eras, the previous system, and its supporters as the adversary. The enemy is ambiguous. Regarding the first category of creating the enemy, mention of the adversary is highly relevant in two scenes. The first occurs in season three, episode eight (04:15-09:51). The maids are in a circle with June at the centre, and Aunt Lydia is asking questions of those present:

"That Martha was subjected to salvaging for planning a vicious crime –she kidnapped a child. Who drove her to conceive such wickedness? [...] And whose fault was it that the Martha died?"

The answers to these questions are given by the other maids, pointing to June: "*It was her, it was her...*" The enemy that Gilead tries to point out is everyone who fights against the system, or the traitors who are seen as representatives of the former system, and therefore, of danger.

The other scene occurs in season two, episode six (42:32-44:24). This scene is where Serena and Fred write a speech:

We will not allow a fanatic to... (Fred).

A terrorist is a terrorist (Serena).

We will not be silenced by a terrorist. Sometimes it's hard to accept the truth. But only the truth can save our country (Fred).

Through this dialogue, we can see how Gilead's political discourse mentions the adversary by using the word "terrorist". This is the most symbolic scene of enemy creation and Gilead's use of propaganda, as well as the "lessons" given by Aunt Lydia to the maids in the Red Centre.

Finally, the use of defamation has been observed:

I hope you are able to appreciate the opportunity you have been given in this house. God is merciful, offering redemption even to His most perverse, degenerate creations (Aunt Lydia, S2, E13, minute 27:42-28:50).

The use of atrocity propaganda for enemy creation has also been used:

When the birth rate fell, things got worse with birth control pills, morning after pills, and baby killings, so they could have their orgies and use their hair dyes (Aunt Lydia, S1, E1, minute 16:06-16:48).

Finally, we also see in the fear-inducing scenes how the adversary, or enemy, is portrayed as the cause of danger:

The greatest miracle of all is the miracle of life. The miracle of children. And there is no greater sin than to harm a child, to put them in danger (...) OfDaniel [Janine] has been condemned for endangering a child (Aunt Lydia, S01E10, minute 43:00-45:59).

With this scene, the traitors of Gilead are portrayed as the cause of danger, which is resulting in harm to the most precious commodity of all: children. Janine is considered a traitor for breaking the rules and trying to be reunited with her daughter. Another example that points to the previous system as the adversary and the cause of threats and danger, or in short, as the generator of fear, is the previously analysed scene with Aunt Lydia on the topic of contamination in season 2, episode 3.

Finally, the data collected with regard to the threatened groups is displayed in Chart 3 below.

Chart 3. Groups threatened by the fear generated by Gilead
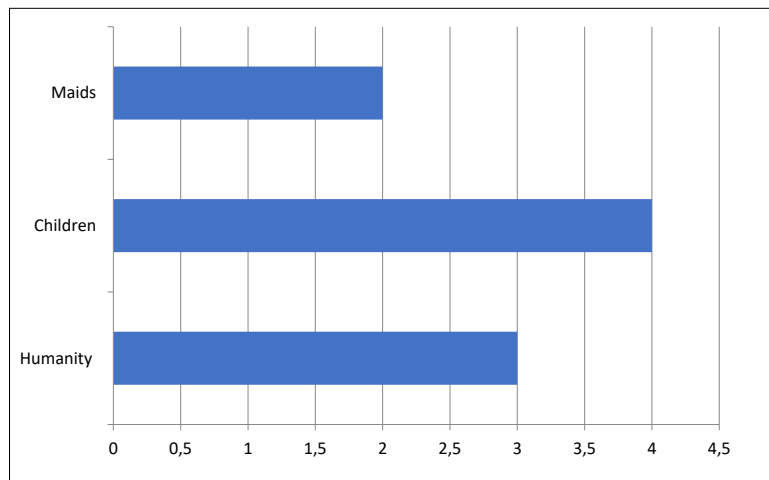
By observing Chart 3, one can see that the fear-generating scenes that include a threatened group refer to children with four appearances: humanity (three) and the maids (two). Aunt Lydia uses the maids as a threatened group in order to reassure them that Gilead offers a chance in this new reality, and that their situation could be worse: for example, being sent to the labour camps.

4. Discussion

The Handmaid's Tale is an audio-visual dystopia. Moreover, it is a reflection of present fears of a catastrophic future (Uribes Monte, 2015). As argued by Muñoz González (2019), this series portrays the fear of a rise of the extreme right, just as in Atwood's literary novel. The narrative describes how Gilead, a totalitarian political system, takes over the political and social power of the United States (Cambra Badii, Mastandrea and Paragis, 2018). In short, Gilead is characterised by fear and violence (Hernández Ruiz, 2019), which are features that are typical of dystopias (Salvador, 2015), thus achieving the first secondary objective set out in this study.

In order to achieve, maintain, and reinforce power, political propaganda is highly useful (Pineda, 2006), which is why Gilead employs such discourses defined by the use of fear as a political tool. This study has found indications of fear-inducing political propaganda. However, the sample encountered is small (12 scenes in the three seasons released), and in general, the viewer does not know much about the Gilead uprising, yet the ideas disseminated have been identified thanks to the chosen methodology. In the first place, with regard to the attainment of power, the discourse of propaganda used by Gilead focuses on Serena Joy and Fred Waterford, who star in two scenes related to the creation of a fear-evoking, propagandistic discourse prior to the establishment of the system. On the other hand, Aunt Lydia is in charge of maintaining power, as she is the one who gives "lessons" to the dominated classes, such as the maids, to make them understand their position in society. In fact, we

must return to the work of Pratkanis and Aronson (1994), who argued that fear is a highly effective political strategy that makes people more willing to accept control measures, which can even go to the extreme, as in the case of Gilead. Bauman (2003) argued that freedom and security are not compatible. Therefore, instilling fear in people will make them accept measures and positions which, as reflected in *The Handmaid's Tale*, end up taking away people's freedom.

Focusing on the second of the secondary objectives, the fear-generating themes most often used by Gilead are harm to children and the low birth rate, followed by the social position of the maids, pollution, and terrorism. In the coding sheet, "the time before" was included, but this is believed to refer to all the topics mentioned. Given the themes that Gilead uses in the scenes where its political propaganda can be seen, one should re-examine the annotations of Salvador (2015) regarding the rejection of techno-scientific progress in dystopias, which is blamed by Gilead for disease and the low birth rate. In fact, Aunt Lydia claims that inventions such as contraceptive or morning-after pills are to blame (S1, E1). Likewise, pollution is also one of the dystopian features mentioned by Salvador (2015), as the ecological issue is usually involved, and Gilead sees it as a positive component, stating that pollution is the factor that has made the population and Mother Nature sick. All the topics exposed as evoking fear by Gilead comply not only with the theory proposed by Salvador (2015), but also with the use of ideas that have already been conceived, or at least those concepts that are latent in society, which can be used as the basis for political propaganda, in reference to the transfusion rule by Domenach (1962).

With regard to confirming the third secondary objective, it can be affirmed that all the fear-inducing political propaganda techniques and strategies mentioned by the authors in the theoretical framework have been observed. The most commonly used techniques include the polarisation between "us" and "them" and that of presenting the sender of the propagandistic message as the only possible solution. The first of these was expounded in the works of Huici (2017) and Hernández-Santaolalla (2011), which emphasise the need to point out the morality of "us" and the wickedness of "them". Regarding this technique, Useche Aldana (2008) and Zepeda (2012) had already suggested that the receiver must have the idea that only by supporting the sender will he or she be able to alleviate emotions and feelings such as vulnerability, insecurity, etc. In short, fear. This strategy is directly related to another, which is to point out the limited ability of the adversary to cope with the threat. As stated by Zepeda (2012), in order to present oneself as the solution, the sender must make it clear that the adversary is not capable of solving the fear-generating problem. This is the technique that is used the least by Gilead. The reason for this, as will be discussed later, may be due to the fact that the enemy pointed out by Gilead is ambiguous, as it is the previous system, which is given a recognisable face when they refer to Gilead's traitors. This is a resource that is capable of generating even more fear (Hernández-Santaolalla, 2011).

The technique of pointing out the existence of a threatened group has also been detected. Indeed, as argued by Cortés (2012), one of the basic needs of individuals is security, and when that need is not satisfied, they feel threatened. Above all, Gilead places emphasis on children as a highly vulnerable group, and Humanity as a group that is threatened in general, representing the continuity of society. In the background are the maids, who belong to the group that is intimidated into a passive position through fear (Korstanje, 2010). Another technique observed is the creation of an enemy with the three variables stated earlier: mention of the enemy, use of denigration, and atrocity propaganda. Eminent propaganda researchers, such as Morelli (2002) and Domenach (1962), affirm the importance of identifying an enemy with the aim of creating a villain in the eyes of the receiver. In the case of Gilead, this refers to the former system, and consequently, to the traitors. Thus, as previously mentioned,

this is an abstract adversary. Likewise, it is Morelli (2002) who speaks of linking the political adversary to atrocities, as carried out by Aunt Lydia in claiming that women in the previous system murdered children. Finally, the use of denigration mentioned by Pineda (2006) for the creation of the enemy is used by Gilead against traitors such as Emily and Janine. In this way, as explained by Pineda (2006), a negative image is placed on the adversaries.

The last technique is to portray the adversary as the cause of the threat or danger. Zepeda (2012) argues that the one who issues the propaganda discourse must make the receivers believe that the source of the threat is the adversary. In Gilead, it is made clear that pollution, the low birth rate, terrorism, etc., were caused by the previous political system, and furthermore, the harm suffered by children comes from the traitors. What is striking is the absence of an adversary as such, which was previously mentioned. In fact, as expounded by Hernández-Santaolalla (2011), the generators of fear in the current real-life context are abstract, which is reflected in these types of series such as *The Handmaid's Tale*. As explained by the author, this causes the climate of fear to grow, so that "anyone who is not like me is bad, or at the group level, the others are bad because they are different from us" (2011: 766).

A response will now be given to the research question posed, which is restated here as follows: Does the narrative of The Handmaid's Tale use the same fear-inducing propaganda strategies and techniques that are used in real-life political propaganda? The answer is yes. In fact, fear-inducing propaganda strategies and techniques set forth by propaganda researchers such as Domenach (1962), Brown (1995), Morelli (2002), and Pratkanis and Aronson (1994), among others, have been observed in the scenes analysed in *The Handmaid's Tale*.

5. Conclusions

Following the analysis provided in the discussion section, the conclusions are now presented herein. There is no doubt that *The Handmaid's Tale* is a dystopia that fulfils the essential features of this narrative genre, including the use of fear. In fact, it represents current fears of a catastrophic future.

The total number of scenes is small, which is due to the fact that the viewer has limited knowledge of the rise to power and how such control is maintained. However, Gilead's acts of communicative propaganda are characterised by the inducement of fear.

The fear-based political propaganda used by Gilead reflects all the strategies and techniques outlined by the aforementioned authors (Brown, Domenach, Morelli, etc.). However, the techniques most commonly used by Gilead include polarisation by referring to "us" and "them", as well as presenting the message sender as the solution to fear-generating threats. It should be noted that there is no political adversary as such, but that the "adversary" is actually the former political system itself and its supporters, who are consequently the traitors of Gilead. This implies an adversary, or enemy, that is obscure for the receiver.

In closing, fear undoubtedly plays an important role in *The Handmaid's Tale*. This study has analysed fear that emanates from a political system, which has been instilled through propagandistic messages that use propaganda theory as a tool. Likewise, as revealed by this study, this television series reflects how the use of fear can lead to social and political control.

6. Acknowledgements

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