

# Reproducing Whiteness:

## Feminist Genres, Legal Subjectivity and the Post-Racial Dystopia of The Handmaid's Tale (2017-)

Karen Crawley, *Griffith Law School*

---

**WEDNESDAY 26 SEPTEMBER: 4.30PM - 6.30PM**  
**(MOOT COURT | 67.202)**

---

### **ABSTRACT**

The Handmaid's Tale (2017-), a U.S. television series adapted from a widely popular novel by Canadian author Margaret Atwood (1985), is widely understood as a feminist intervention that speaks to ongoing and worldwide struggles over gender oppression and, in particular, reproductive rights. In this talk, however, I consider the invitations that the show offers its viewers in treating race the way that it does, and what it means to refuse these invitations. The Handmaid's Tale post-racial aesthetic means that its thematic engagement with gender, sexuality and resistance elides race, politics and history. The dystopic address of the show promises wakefulness, but actually invites viewers to keep their eyes shut to the ongoing reproduction of whiteness in contemporary liberal configurations of legal subjectivity and state authority. Its problematic feminism is thus uniquely instructive for critical feminist understandings of how rights, legal subjectivity, and violence operate in the context of historical and contemporary structures of racism and white supremacy. In this talk, I pursue a resistant reading of the handmaid's tale(s) from an antipodean position that resituates its dramatization of reproductive violence in the context of the relationship between gender, race, and the nation's investment in the reproduction of whiteness.

### **BIOGRAPHY:**

Karen Crawley researches and teaches at the intersection of law, justice and aesthetics. Her research is interdisciplinary and draws on literary theory, critical theory, and feminist legal philosophy to inquire into how legal subjects enact, embody and resist law and envision justice. She is co-editor of *Envisioning Legality: Law, Culture and Representation* (Routledge 2018).

She has published on the censorship of theatre and the theatricality of censorship, the role of controversial photographs in reframing questions of sexual citizenship, the regulation of street art and the right to expression in urban spaces, the challenge that the aesthetics of graphic novels pose to legal notions of harm.

She is Managing Editor of the *Australian Feminist Law Journal*, Editorial Board member of the *Griffith Law Review*, and Vice-President of the Law, Literature and Humanities Association of Australasia ([lawlithum.org](http://lawlithum.org)).

---

**ENQUIRIES: SCHOOL OF LAW**  
**T: 02 4221 3382**



UNIVERSITY  
OF WOLLONGONG  
AUSTRALIA

