

# A Feminist View on Social Issues in The Walking Dead

---

**Zidarević, Maja**

**Undergraduate thesis / Završni rad**

**2018**

*Degree Grantor / Ustanova koja je dodijelila akademski / stručni stupanj:* **University of Zadar / Sveučilište u Zadru**

*Permanent link / Trajna poveznica:* <https://um.nsk.hr/um:nbn:hr:162:373974>

*Rights / Prava:* [In copyright](#)/[Zaštićeno autorskim pravom.](#)

*Download date / Datum preuzimanja:* **2024-11-24**



**Sveučilište u Zadru**  
Universitas Studiorum  
Jadertina | 1396 | 2002 |

*Repository / Repozitorij:*

[University of Zadar Institutional Repository](#)



zir.nsk.hr



DIGITALNI AKADEMSKI ARHIVI I REPOZITORIJ

Sveučilište u Zadru

Odjel za anglistiku

Preddiplomski sveučilišni studij engleskog jezika i književnosti (dvopredmetni)

**Maja Zidarević**

**A Feminist View on Social Issues in The Walking  
Dead**

**Završni rad**

Zadar, 2018.

Sveučilište u Zadru

Odjel za anglistiku

Preddiplomski sveučilišni studij engleskog jezika i književnosti (dvopredmetni)

A Feminist View on Social Issues in The Walking Dead

Završni rad

Student/ica:

Maja Zidarević

Mentor/ica:

Izv. prof. dr. sc. Marko Lukić

Zadar, 2018.



## Izjava o akademskoj čestitosti

Ja, **Maja Zidarević**, ovime izjavljujem da je moj **završni** rad pod naslovom **A Feminist View on Social Issues in The Walking Dead** rezultat mojega vlastitog rada, da se temelji na mojim istraživanjima te da se oslanja na izvore i radove navedene u bilješkama i popisu literature. Ni jedan dio mojega rada nije napisan na nedopušten način, odnosno nije prepisan iz necitiranih radova i ne krši bilo čija autorska prava.

Izjavljujem da ni jedan dio ovoga rada nije iskorišten u kojem drugom radu pri bilo kojoj drugoj visokoškolskoj, znanstvenoj, obrazovnoj ili inoj ustanovi.

Sadržaj mojega rada u potpunosti odgovara sadržaju obranjenoga i nakon obrane uređenoga rada.

Zadar, 24. rujna 2018.

## Table of Contents

1. Introduction.....	5
2. The Walking Dead .....	6
3. Gender Inequality.....	7
3.1. Gender Roles .....	7
3.2. Power and Leadership .....	12
4. Michonne: Angry Black Woman or Strong Survivor? .....	17
5. Conclusion .....	22
6. Works Cited .....	24
7. A FEMINIST VIEW ON SOCIAL ISSUES IN <i>THE WALKING DEAD</i> : Summary and key words .....	26
8. FEMINISTIČKI POGLED NA DRUŠTVENE PROBLEME U SERIJI I STRIPOVIMA <i>THE WALKING DEAD</i> : Sažetak i ključne riječi .....	27

## 1. Introduction

Since it can be very difficult to change various rules and notions, or dispel stereotypes in our modern society, a post-apocalyptic world seems like a great chance for changing that while building a new society. However, the question is if the creators of such fictional worlds manage to do that or their characters simply stick to rebuilding the old society. Therefore, this paper will deal with, in my opinion, some of the most problematic social issues in the comic book series and TV series *The Walking Dead*. I will be analyzing them from a feminist approach, meaning that I will focus on the representation of women, their status, gender roles and gender inequality. As bell hooks defines it, “feminism is a movement to end sexism, sexist exploitation, and oppression” and my aim is, as she states, “not about being anti-male” (viii).

After introduction, I will begin with the topic of this paper, so the second chapter will shortly summarize the plot of *The Walking Dead* and explain the importance of the influence that both the comic books and TV series have on the public. In the third chapter, I will be dealing with gender inequality which is very common, especially in the first couple of seasons and volumes. As a part of this chapter, I will analyze separately gender roles and power and leadership which are the most noticeable issues in the attempt of rebuilding the society. Furthermore, in the fourth chapter the angry black woman stereotype will be dealt with and as an example, a character named Michonne will be analyzed. I will compare the character in the comic books and TV series and explain why this stereotype can be very problematic. Finally, I will summarize what I have analyzed in the paper and give conclusions to this topic while suggesting some further research.

## 2. The Walking Dead

In 2003, the first issue of the comic book series *The Walking Dead* was published by Image Comics. The series was created by writer Robert Kirkman with art by Tony Moore and later Charlie Adlard. In 2010, an American TV series, made by Frank Darabont for AMC, premiered with the same name since it is based on the comic books. The plot in both of them begins with the main character, sheriff's deputy Rick Grimes, who was shot and now awakes from a coma to find out that the world is filled with zombies, which are usually referred to as "walkers", "roamers" or "lurkers." Rick has to find his wife and son, and when he eventually does, he becomes the leader of a group his family is with. The main task of the group is finding a way to survive, but while doing it various issues occur, including the social ones I will be analyzing.

According to Comichron (qtd. in Garland, et al. 4), "in July 2012 *The Walking Dead* was the top selling monthly comic book with 335,082 copies sold." The TV series is also very successful and, as Lavin and Lowe emphasize, it "continues to be the number one show on television among 18–49-year-old viewers, and remains the highest-rated series in the history of cable television" (114). Therefore, gaining this kind of popularity must have an influence on the public, especially since these are two important types of mass media. In my opinion, there are many social issues worthy of discussion and even though it could be argued that some of them are maybe present in order to make people aware of them, I do not believe that the franchise manages to do that, but rather unintentionally promotes some of the notions. Thus, I agree with Lavin and Lowe when they say that "the sheer popularity of the series suggests that viewing audiences relate to it, and this alone makes it worth investigating the social themes that predominate in the show" (114). It is evident that later on, as the plot progresses, the creators worked more on the issues I will be addressing, so I will mention how they have dealt with them, but I still feel that the characters often suffer simply because of the narrative.

### 3. Gender Inequality

In order to talk about gender inequality and gender or sex roles, it is important to understand the difference between gender and sex. Leavy and Trier-Bieniek say that “sex is biological; it is physiologically what prompts us to be assigned as male or female” while “gender is socially constructed; it consists of the ideas we have about masculinity and femininity and how we apply these notions to people based on their designated sex assignment” (2). But, it is very often that “gender, (our ideas about masculinity and femininity), becomes stereotyped and overgeneralized” (Leavy and Trier-Bieniek 4) which leads to creating gender roles, defined by Levesque as “a repertoire of emotions, attitudes, behaviors, and perceptions that are commonly associated more with one sex than with the other” (2622). Therefore, not only that classifying people solely on their gender leads to forming various stereotypes, but it also leads to gender inequality. This term refers to “the disparities between women and men based solely on their gender rather than objective differences in skills, abilities, or other characteristics. These inequalities may be obvious (e.g., not receiving the same pay for the same job) or subtle (e.g., not being given the same subjective opportunities for advancement)” (Wienclaw 96). So, the following subsections, 3.1. and 3.2., will be dealing with gender inequalities, the first one focusing on gender roles in *The Walking Dead* franchise, and the second one on power and leadership since mostly men assume the role of a leader.

#### 3.1. Gender Roles

As Reskin emphasizes, “task assignment based on sex category – the sexual division of labor – both prescribes and proscribes assorted tasks to each sex, and modern societies still assign men and women different roles in domestic work, labor-market work, and emotional and interpersonal work” (147). Unfortunately, this very often leads to women experiencing gender inequality and devaluation of their work which is also the case in *The Walking Dead*. Therefore,



this chapter is focusing on women's position and their representation in the show and comic books.

The very first thing that one can notice in *The Walking Dead* when it comes to gender roles is that men are those who go hunting, repair vehicles and are in charge of protecting others, especially women and children, while women are in charge of domestic work, such as washing and ironing clothes, preparing meals and taking care of children. This division of labor is present in both comic books and TV series but there are also characters who fight against it. In the show Jacqui already in the third episode of the first season complains about this inequality just like Donna does in the third issue of the comic books. To Donna's complaint Lori replies that they, the women, do not know how to shoot and men do not know how to wash clothes. So, instead of trying to resolve this issue and gain equality they deserve, most of them decide to simply conform to the roles because they believe that is the way it should be. In the show Carol replies to Jacqui by saying "It's just the way it is" ("Tell It to the Frogs") after she looked at her husband Ed who physically abuses her, so even if she felt like their division of work is unfair, she would be too afraid to say anything. This further escalates when in the same episode Ed tells Carol to focus on her work and Andrea stands up for her saying that if he does not like the way they work, he can do it by himself. Ed tries to drag Carol away from the women but Andrea again defends her and tells her that she does not have to go with him which ends with another man, Shane, beating him up. From this scene and further on in the series we can see that Andrea is a brave, intelligent woman who will fight against inequality and will not depend on men. Later on, when her sister dies she does not want to kill her immediately although she is going to turn into a walker, so men feel that they have to interfere ("Wildfire"). However, Andrea does not let them and as soon as her sister turns, she shoots her and shows the others that she is strong and capable of thinking rationally.

Keeler notably noticed that since people need weapons to defend themselves from the walkers, “guns are the new currency in this post-law, post civilization world. And yet, from the beginning of the show, guns are also carefully coded as paternalistic objects that belong primarily in the hands of male characters” (5, 6). This is important because throughout the beginning of the show men act as only they are capable of using guns and for a long time do not even consider teaching women how to shoot. The situation in the comic books is not much different. In the fourth issue Rick tells Shane: “You think those girls know how to fight?” and then continues saying that everybody should have a gun because if Donna had had a gun, she would have been able to defend herself. Although at first it seems as Rick simply wants equality for everyone, this shows that women need men’s permission to have guns. It is true that there are not enough of them for everyone, but men have a right to them before women which is not fair since not all of them, besides Rick and Shane who were police officers, knew how to shoot before either. For example, Andrea in the comic books becomes one of the best shots as soon as she learns how to shoot and becomes more useful than most of the men. So, the only thing that is more equitable in the comic books in comparison to the show is that men teach others how to shoot as soon as they get more guns. This is because they realized that then they can more easily defend themselves. On the other hand, the men in the show refuse to give the women the guns although that would help them survive. The best example is the first episode of the second season (“What Lies Ahead”) when the group has to defend themselves against the walkers and Carol’s daughter, Sophia, goes missing. At the beginning of the episode we can see Shane teaching Andrea how to reassemble her gun but he does not manage to show her the whole procedure because they had to fight against a herd of walkers they encountered. Andrea finds it hard to defend herself against one of them because she did not know how to put her gun back together so Dale saves her by giving her a screwdriver. After that, Dale takes Andrea’s gun and refuses to give it back. When they explain the situation to Shane, he agrees with Dale

and says that everybody should give their guns to Dale because he believes that the group will be safer since shooting from a gun attracts walkers. However, Shane does not turn over his gun because he knows how to use it and only Rick, Daryl and he have a gun while searching for Sophia. Although, as Keeler emphasizes, Andrea did not misuse her gun but simply abandoned it (9), men found it as a good reason to take it away from her. Furthermore, later in the same episode people from the group want to separate while looking for Sophia, and Rick wants to give his gun to his wife, Lori. She does not want to leave him without a gun, but Daryl has two so he gives her one of his. Not only that this is unfair and disrespectful to Andrea who directly asked for her gun, but it also shows that men can make and change rules however they want, especially without asking for women's opinion. Although after some time Andrea did get a gun, "the narrative suggests that firearms belong in the hands of male characters" (Keeler 11). As an example, Keeler mentions a scene when Andrea practices shooting with Shane and he yells at her, insults her and tells her that she is too emotional ("Secrets"), showing us that "his tactics resonate with traditional notions of masculinity and femininity" (11). Women are once again depicted as they show their emotions too much as expressing how they feel is something negative and they should be ashamed of it. But men's emotions are not questioned which we can see when Rick and Lori's twelve-year-old son, Carl, steals a gun but gets to keep it because Rick thinks they need to treat him as an adult. They did not argue with him like they did with Andrea, but rather agreed that he needs a gun for protection (Keeler 11-12).

On the other hand, women in the comic books are much more passive when it comes to fighting against gender roles and inequality. There are no characters like Andrea in the TV show who would fight so strongly for their independence. The only one who actually says something is Donna when she complains about labor division. However, she dies pretty early leaving other women under the leadership of men which they do not protest against. It is very often in the comic books, too, that women take care of children and look out for them while men go hunting

or when they go to make sure that a particular area is clear and safe from walkers. However, when it comes to guns, as I have already mentioned, women in the comic books are more equal to men than in the TV series. For example, when Rick and his group come to Hershel's farm and they practice shooting, Rick tells Hershel that his people are welcome to join to which Hershel replies that he can ask Patricia, Otis' girlfriend, because she would feel safer without depending on Otis for protection (Kirkman "Miles Behind Us", Issue 11). To add on, when the group arrives at the prison, Rick wants to kill the walkers with Tyreese's help but Andrea stands up for herself and says that she is the best shot and should go with them. Rick does not argue with her but actually agrees because he is aware of her great skill and that she can provide a lot of help (Kirkman "Safety Behind Bars", Issue 13). Nevertheless, many stereotypes about gender roles are still present. For instance, when men find a library in the prison they instantly think of female characters Lori and Carol who will like all those books (Kirkman "The Heart's Desire", Issue 20). Although it could be argued that it is only because they knew with certainty that Lori and Carol like reading, the narrative later does not show any male characters wanting to read. Furthermore, women are depicted as more vulnerable and unable to cope with the "new world" which is best proved by the fact that they are more likely to commit suicide. For example, Carol tries to commit suicide by slitting her wrists after she saw Tyreese cheating on her (Kirkman "The Heart's Desire", Issue 22), but they manage to save her. However, later she lets a walker bite her which caused her death because she obviously could not cope with everything that was happening (Kirkman "The Calm Before", Issue 41). Another example is Maggie who tries to hang herself but fortunately Glenn finds her and saves her despite Abraham insisting they kill her because she will turn into a walker (Kirkman "What We Become", Issues 55, 56).

Garland, et al. also did an interesting research in which they analyzed 101 comic book covers and came to the conclusion that "the post-apocalyptic landscape in *The Walking Dead*

is essentially male-dominated; over half (51.1%) of the covers depicted only males (among humans), whereas less than 10% included women not in the company of men” (8). So, “females were featured on only 36.6% of the covers” which means they “were far more likely to be pictured alongside men than alone” (Garland, et al. 8). This is another great example of women’s representation in the comic book series since it shows that women need men for protection and could not survive on their own.

There are many situations in both comic books and TV series when women are not taken seriously or are devalued, but as the storyline progresses they gain more respect from men and their opinions begin to matter. “As our characters spend more time dislocated in the post-apocalyptic, their desperation and disconnection from previous society increases” (Lavin and Lowe 119). This allows women to be more equal to men which will be further discussed in the following subchapter because this especially concerns leadership in the new society.

### 3.2. Power and Leadership

Lavin and Lowe argue that people or groups in the United States “experience inequality based on their social roles, and women, marginal men, and children are more often auxiliary to decision-making since they have less social power” (117, 118). Taking this into consideration, it is not a surprise that one cannot imagine different social structure from the one present today. This is a problem that occurs in both comic books and TV series, especially in the beginning when people still hope to return to their previous lives.

From Rick’s arrival to the group, we can see Rick and Shane being in charge of making decisions and leading others because they were police officers in the pre-apocalyptic world so others believe they are suitable for leadership. However, they soon start competing for “power, control, and even (hetero) sexual conquest, as both men fight for access to Rick’s wife, Lori” (Lavin and Lowe 119) which eventually leads to Shane’s death and Rick becoming the main leader. Just before this happens, Rick and Shane in the comic books argue about whether they

should stay or leave the place where they were at the time. They try to decide what the best thing for the group is without even asking others what they think (Kirkman “Days Gone Bye”, Issue 4). After Shane’s death in the comic series, Dale tells Rick that the group needs someone to make them feel safe, emphasizing “especially the women” (Kirkman “Miles Behind Us”, Issue 7). He also says that he talked to everyone and that they all agree Rick should be the leader because he, Dale, is “an old man”, “Glenn is a kid”, and “Allen is not leadership material” (Kirkman “Miles Behind Us”, Issue 7). Although women had a right to state their opinion, not one of them was considered to be a leader. Furthermore, it seems as they more considered age rather than one’s talent. Dale proved himself as a great protector of the group as he spent a lot of time on his RV looking if any of the walkers is coming towards the group’s camp, but he is “too old.” On the other hand, Glenn is “too young” despite the fact that he provided food and other supplies probably more than anyone else by going to the city and risking his life on daily basis. These problems occur in the TV series, too. Women are also not even considered to be capable enough for a leader. It only seems that a woman can be independent of men if she is on her own like Andrea when she leaves the patriarchal group. Dale even “serves as the group’s benevolent father figure” (Keeler 9) when he takes Andrea’s gun because he thinks that is the best for her and even tells her that he saved her life when they left the Center for Disease Control, but Andrea replies to him that she actually saved his because he did not want to leave without her and she did not want to be responsible for his death (“What Lies Ahead”). Therefore, she blames him for taking her right to choose which he does not understand because he wants to have a role of a patriarch.

After Rick becomes the group’s leader in the comic book series, he often finds himself in a situation when he has to make an important decision but does not consider asking others for advice. This eventually leads him to abusing his power as he thinks that others are incapable of making such decisions. The best example is when the group arrives at the prison where they

meet four inmates. Lori tries to tell Rick that it is not safe to live with criminals but Rick assumes the best about them and ignores Lori's warning blaming her hormones for the way she behaves because she is pregnant (Kirkman "Safety Behind Bars", Issue 14). Furthermore, when somebody starts killing others in the prison and they find out it is Thomas, one of the inmates, Rick immediately wants to kill him but Lori protests by saying "So that's how things are? You say what we're going to do and we do it? You're the king now?" (Kirkman "Safety Behind Bars", Issue 17). She even provides other solutions which could work, such as locking him up or kicking him out of the prison because if they kill him, they are, as she says, no better than him. This is when Rick devalues her opinion and says: "I'm a cop – I've been trained to make decisions like this. I'm the only one here in a position of authority" (Kirkman "Safety Behind Bars", Issue 17). He uses his power to do what he thinks is the best and practically states that others are not capable of making important decisions. Lori replies to him that he is her husband and not her father which is also a proof that their group is very patriarchal. Rick has nothing to say to this so he just orders her in a very rude and disrespectful way to "shut the fuck up." After that, he makes up the rule "you kill, you die" despite the fact that he is about to hang somebody (Kirkman "Safety Behind Bars", Issue 17). Not long after this scene Lori questions her ability to "think straight" which is, according to her, either because she is too exhausted or because she is pregnant, and admits to Rick that he is right and they should kill Thomas (Kirkman "Safety Behind Bars", Issue 18). This shows us that she easily backs up and is not confident in herself because she believes her husband is more competent and lets him do what he thinks they should do. Thus, women are depicted as incapable simply because they express their emotions, actually talk about what bothers them, and are tired or pregnant. For example, Michonne in the comic books talks to herself because that is the way she copes with the deaths of her loved ones but is almost considered as crazy. Only when Rick loses Lori, the reader can fully understand what happened to Michonne and it becomes acceptable because Rick now does the same thing.

Another example of gender inequality in the comic books is when the group realizes that Rick is not able to make decisions on his own and they decide that they should form a committee. Dale informs Rick about this and tells him that the two of them, Hershel and Tyreese are in that committee which makes Rick wonder how come that there are no women. Dale explains that is the way the women think is the best and they agreed to it (Kirkman, "The Heart's Desire", Issue 24). We can again see that women are not represented as equally powerful and competent as men but rather let men make the decisions. This, in my opinion, also shows that Kirkman believes that only men are capable for leadership since he is aware that the committee is formed only of men but refuses to include women. As a proof of this is also Johnson's emphasis (qtd. in Garland et al.) on Kirkman's statement that women are biologically weaker than men and physical strength is what they lack to become a leader (22).

In the TV series the best example of gender inequality when it comes to leadership is attitude towards Andrea as I have explained in the previous subchapter. She also proves herself as a strong and competent woman but is neglected and not even considered to be capable for a leader. As the show progresses we can see more of female characters as leaders, but they often still cannot do something on their own without men's permission. Such an example is Carol who has transformed to a strong woman and becomes fully capable of living without depending on men. But when she tries to make a decision on her own, she suffers from a punishment imposed by a man. This situation happened when a deadly disease occurred at the prison and Carol decided to kill two prison newcomers, Karen and David, in order to prevent the disease from spreading. However, when Rick found out it was Carol who did that, he exiled her and told her that she cannot make decisions like that on her own, but he can exile her without talking to others about what they should do ("Indifference"). Nevertheless, Carol proves that she can survive on her own and even later saves the group at Terminus which leads to earning back Rick's trust. Throughout the series we can see that she is always able to think logically and will



do anything to protect her friends which are great characteristics of a leader but it takes a very long time for others to see that in order to appreciate her opinion. Another important female character who proves herself as capable of being a leader, is Michonne. While she does not directly lead a group, as Rick for example, she is very intelligent and her advice always proves to be useful. By providing effective solutions, she gains other people's trust which enables her to contribute when important decisions must be made.

Nevertheless, men are still prevailing as leaders throughout the TV series. The most powerful ones are the Governor and Negan while even communities under Negan's leadership have mostly men as leaders. Even Negan's groups of Savivors have male leaders such as Simon or Gavin. Other communities have, for example, Ezekiel and Gregory while the exceptions are Anne, going also by the name Jadis, who is in charge of the Scavengers, and Natania in charge of Oceanside. After Natania's death, Cyndie becomes the leader but Simon, one of the Savivors, decided to kill all of their men and boys over the age of ten, so we do not know if there would be a female leader if they could have a male one. Deanna was the leader of Alexandria Safe-Zone but even she was not a very good leader and she admitted that Rick's rules and ways of surviving are safer, showing us that men once again make better decisions than women. The only woman who becomes a true leader that actually controls a certain community, is Maggie. She becomes the leader of the Hilltop Colony and proves herself as even more of a brave, strong and intelligent woman as she stands up to Negan and the Savivors. So, taking everything into consideration, we can see that the show tends to progress towards gender equality since there are now four co-leaders of the Militia, a coalition against Negan, and those are Maggie, Cyndie, Rick and Ezekiel making that two female and two male leaders.

#### 4. Michonne: Angry Black Woman or Strong Survivor?

Nowadays, many people still see a black woman expressing her opinion or fighting for her rights and they categorize her as an angry black woman. This stereotype refers to “the physical embodiment of some of the worst negative stereotypes of Black women—she is out of control, disagreeable, overly aggressive, physically threatening, loud (even when she speaks softly), and to be feared. She will not stay in her ‘place’. She is not human.” (Jones and Norwood). It is very problematic that they often cannot be taken seriously just because some believe they are naturally always angry. As Iyanla Vanzant states, it is normal that human beings express their emotions, but when “white women express their emotional state, it is perceived as a ‘bad hair day’ or perhaps, a hormonal imbalance” while “when a black woman does the same [...] she is assumed to be easy to trigger and difficult to control.” Therefore, Michonne is a great example for this analysis since some consider her as an angry black woman while others state that it is a stereotype from which black women cannot escape.

Samaa Abdurraqib argues that “Michonne, portrayed in the television series by Danai Gurira, is able to emerge as a complex character in spite of being portrayed as a recalcitrant and angry black woman” (228). However, I believe it is more up to the reader or viewer how they will perceive her. If one tends to form stereotypes, it is more likely that Michonne will be just another angry black woman to that person. On the other hand, one will find this stereotype offensive because then a black woman cannot be strong and capable of taking care of herself without being judged in a negative way.

Michonne first appears in the nineteenth issue and in the final episode of the second season but we see her face only in the first episode of the third season. She is introduced as a mysterious woman who walks with two chained walkers and is armed with katana. But a very important difference between Michonne in the comic books and in the TV series is that in the first one she is raped by the Governor and in the latter one is not. Brooks (qtd. in Abdurraqib)

“argues that Kirkman fails in his attempts to fully deepen Michonne’s character because he uses her to further a rape/revenge trope” (229). However, since rape is omitted in the TV series, Abdurraqib believes that her anger “becomes inexplicable, and it subsumes her character” (229). Furthermore, she states that this lack in the narrative leaves Michonne without an explanation for her anger, so “she must find a different way to emerge from the confines of this stereotypical trope—she must find a way to differentiate herself from the ‘monster’” (229). As soon as she shows up in both comic books and TV series, one can see that she is a strong woman capable of surviving on her own but mysterious because she does not want to talk about her past. However, “Michonne possesses a sense of capability heretofore unseen in any of the (white) women in the series who have been purposely domesticated and typically feminized” (Brooks 470). Both Brooks and Abdurraqib believe that Michonne eventually steps out of this stereotype which, as Brooks argues, happens in the comic books as she expresses her vulnerability (470) while in the TV series “Michonne’s ability to survive among the zombies forces us [...] to interact with her beyond the level of stereotype” (Abdurraqib 230). So, according to them, a black woman must give us some kind of a reason why she feels angry or behaves the way she does in order to break down the stereotype. This is actually what happens in the TV series when Michonne meets Andrea and they join the community ruled by the Governor. Michonne constantly questions their safety but “Andrea negates Michonne’s intuitions [...] with statements that pathologize Michonne’s distrust and anger” (Abdurraqib 239). Later in the third episode of the third season (“Walk With Me”), Andrea asks Michonne why she refused to answer the Governor’s questions, and Michonne tells her that “it was none of his damn business” to which Andrea responds: “I guess it’s none of mine either.” From this scene we can see that Andrea judges Michonne because of her refusal to talk without even considering that maybe this is the way Michonne copes with everything that happened to her and she does not own to anybody explaining herself if she does not want to. Furthermore,

“Andrea adds fuel to the notion that Michonne’s anger has kept her alienated from the people who are closest to her” (Abdurraqib 239). Abdurraqib also states that it is only when we see who the Governor actually is and how he treats his people, that we can appreciate Michonne’s intuition (240). But Abdurraqib’s conclusion of great significance is that “other characters contribute to the characterization of Michonne as an Angry Black Woman” like Andrea who “rather than trying to understand Michonne’s intuition, [...] turns the conversation to her own hurt feelings regarding the personal boundaries Michonne put in place” (241). In my opinion, this is unfair to Michonne because if a white woman behaved like she did, her actions probably would not be questioned as Michonne’s, which is how angry black woman stereotype is formed. Every character has its own history and neither one of them is forced to talk about it. Nobody, for example, who is not familiar with Carol’s past forces her to talk about her daughter or abusive husband, or why she decided to kill those two prison newcomers. This is probably because the viewers are already familiar with it but we can also suppose that something bad happened to Michonne, too, and there is no need to label her as an angry black woman just because of the way she is dealing with it.

Later in the TV series, when Michonne finds Rick and the rest of the group, we can see Rick not trusting her but “his back narrative provides the reasoning the audience needs to see him as reasonable in his reactions. But once again, Michonne, with her lack of backstory, is not afforded this same level of understanding” (Abdurraqib 243). Therefore, although they are actually very similar, they will not be equal when it comes to gaining sympathy from other characters because they know what Rick has been through and Michonne still has to prove herself. Taking this into consideration, it is not a surprise that later on Rick and Michonne form a romantic relationship. But, “the fact that Michonne was a mother humanizes her” (Abdurraqib 246) and when others find out about that, they realize that she is just like them which even helps Michonne with forming a relationship with Carl, Rick’s son, who reminds her of her own son.

Abdurraqib believes that “Michonne succeeds in overcoming the loss of humanity in two ways at once: she regains the humanity she lost to trauma and violence and, at the same time, defeats the dehumanizing stereotype of the Angry Black Woman” (248).

As I have mentioned before, the readers of the comic book series can see that Michonne tends to speak to herself, or as she later explains, to her dead boyfriend, and “this exchange demonstrates that Michonne is not inscrutable: she needs someone to talk to; she needs help to survive like any other character” (Brooks 470) so this is her way of coping with everything that happened to her. Therefore, by showing this kind of vulnerability she has an opportunity to step out of the angry black woman stereotype, but other characters have problems with trusting her and would find it easier to think of her as unstable. For example, when Andrea hears Michonne talking to herself, she confronts her and asks who she has been talking to because there is nobody else (Kirkman “The Heart’s Desire”, Issue 21), instead of trying to understand why she does that and offering to listen to her if she decides that she wants to share her problems with somebody. This again leaves other characters and readers without a reason for Michonne’s anger making her unable to fully break down the angry black woman stereotype. Brooks explains Michonne’s character in the following way:

“Michonne’s character introduction demonstrates the dangers of incorporating black women characters while failing to truly bring their complexities to the fore. Kirkman hints at the existence of multiple facets of her character, yet chooses to sacrifice her individuation to the demands of the narrative. Michonne’s racially gendered construction marks her as rapeable, as a character whose complex potentiality is forfeited. Michonne allows Kirkman to horrify his readers without alienating them—something that could not have occurred with any of Kirkman’s other female characters. Kirkman lazily relies on the creative myth of the strong black woman to show that Michonne is ‘a machine’ for whom sympathy and complexity need not exist.” (471)

Therefore, we can appreciate Michonne's strength and ability to survive, just like other characters, but we only begin to completely understand Michonne's emotional side when she explains to Rick that she talks to her dead boyfriend just like he does with his dead wife, Lori. Although we knew from her conversation with Lori that she had two daughters, a boyfriend and an ex-husband, the narrative did not let us see the way Michonne has been dealing with that. So, one can try to understand her and not blame her for being angry, or one can categorize her as an angry black woman which is unfair and offensive because it is normal that she feels the way she does.

## 5. Conclusion

Taking everything into consideration, we can see that creating a post-apocalyptic world is not as simple as it might seem. While writers have an opportunity to make new rules and create different kind of society, they still have difficulties at it so they usually just keep the rules from today's world. This paper dealt with social issues while comparing the comic book series and TV series *The Walking Dead* but they were analyzed from feminist approach, meaning that I have tried to present how women are treated and what their roles are in comparison to men. Therefore, after providing basic information about *The Walking Dead*, I gave a short introduction about gender inequality and then continued explaining gender roles. While talking about gender roles, I explained the definition of it and then gave examples from both comic books and TV series. From those examples we can see that women are usually treated as incapable of surviving on their own since men are those who go hunting and protect them from any kind of danger. This also leads to another issue that I have analyzed, and that is that men are represented as leaders and the most capable ones of making important decisions while women are the weak ones who need their protection. If a woman proves herself as equally (if not even more) capable, men do not find a problem with oppressing them as we can see from Andrea's example in the TV series, or in the comic books when Rick uses his power to do what he wants to do while refusing to listen to his wife, Lori. This proves that the society created in *The Walking Dead* is very patriarchal and it takes a long time before something changes and women start gaining equal status and opportunities which men have. Finally, in the last part of this paper I have discussed the angry black woman stereotype while analyzing Michonne in both comic books and TV series. I have tried to show that forming stereotypes can be very offensive and one should think carefully before labeling somebody according to them.

All in all, comparative research can be very useful for this type of analysis because we can see how some issues, in this case gender inequality and angry black woman stereotype, are

presented in different types of media. Therefore, further research could be done about other social issues, for example, sexual orientation, ethics, racism, etc. and compare how they are dealt with in the comic books and how in the TV series. Also, the further development of *The Walking Dead* might show us a society that one could hardly imagine or expect which could make another interesting research. One could even compare it with its spin-off *Fear the Walking Dead* since it also shows the very beginning of the post-apocalyptic world and how the society was starting to change.



## 6. Works Cited

- Abdurraqib, Samaa. “‘Just Another Monster’: Michonne and the Trope of the Angry Black Woman.” *Bad Girls and Transgressive Women in Popular Television, Fiction, and Film*, edited by Julie A. Chappell and Mallory Young, Palgrave Macmillan, 2017, pp. 227-251.
- Brooks, Kinitra D. “The Importance of Neglected Intersections: Race and Gender in Contemporary Zombie Texts and Theories.” *African American Review*, vol. 47, no. 4, 2014, pp. 461-475.
- Garland, Tammy S., et al. “Gender Politics and *The Walking Dead*: Gendered Violence and the Reestablishment of Patriarchy.” *Feminist Criminology*, vol. 13, no. 1, 2018, pp. 59-86.
- hooks, bell. *Feminism is for everybody: passionate politics*. South End Press, 2000.
- “Indifference.” *The Walking Dead*, written by Matthew Negrete, directed by Tricia Brock, AMC, 2013.
- Jones, Trina, and Kimberly Jade Norwood. “Aggressive Encounters & White Fragility: Deconstructing the Trope of the Angry Black Woman.” *Iowa Law Review*, vol. 102, no. 5, 2017, par. IV. [ilr.law.uiowa.edu/print/volume-102-issue-5/aggressive-encounters-and-white-fragility-deconstructing-the-trope-of-the-angry-black-woman](http://ilr.law.uiowa.edu/print/volume-102-issue-5/aggressive-encounters-and-white-fragility-deconstructing-the-trope-of-the-angry-black-woman). Accessed 20 August 2018.
- Keeler, Amanda. “Gender, Guns, and Survival: The Women of *The Walking Dead*.” *Dangerous Discourses: Gender, Women, and Gun Violence*, edited by Catherine Squires, Peter Lang, 2016.
- Kirkman, Robert (w), Tony Moore (i). “Days Gone Bye.” *The Walking Dead*, vol. 1 #1-6, Image Comics, 2004.
- Kirkman, Robert (w), Charlie Adlard (p, i), Cliff Rathburn (c). “Miles Behind Us.” *The Walking Dead*, vol. 2 #7-12, Image Comics, 2004.
- . “Safety Behind Bars.” *The Walking Dead*, vol. 3 #13-18, Image Comics, 2005.
- . “The Heart's Desire.” *The Walking Dead*, vol. 4 #19-24, Image Comics, 2005.
- . “The Calm Before.” *The Walking Dead*, vol. 7 #37-42, Image Comics, 2007.

---. "What We Become." *The Walking Dead*, vol. 10 #55-60, Image Comics, 2009.

Lavin, Melissa F., and Brian M. Lowe. "Cops and Zombies: Hierarchy and Social Location in *The Walking Dead*." *Race, Gender, and Sexuality in Post-Apocalyptic TV and Film*, edited by Barbara Gurr, Palgrave Macmillan, 2015, pp. 113-124.

Leavy Patricia, and Adrienne Trier-Bieniek. "Introduction to *Gender & Pop Culture*." *Gender & Pop Culture*. Sense Publishers, 2014, pp. 1-25.

Levesque, Roger J. R. "Sex Roles and Gender Roles." *Encyclopedia of Adolescence*. Springer, 2011.

Reskin, Barbara F. "Bringing the Men Back In: Sex Differentiation and the Devaluation of Women's Work." *The Social Construction of Gender*, edited by Judith Lorber and Susan A. Farrell, Sage Publications, 1991, pp. 141-161.

"Secrets." *The Walking Dead*, written by Angela Kang, directed by David Boyd, AMC, 2011.

"Tell It to the Frogs." *The Walking Dead*, written by Frank Darabont, Charles H. Eglee, and Jack LoGiudice, directed by Gwyneth Horder-Payton, AMC, 2010.

Vanzant, Iyanla. "The Myth Of The Angry Black Woman." *The Huffington Post*, 9 August 2016, [www.huffingtonpost.com/ianla-vanzant/the-myth-of-the-angry-black-woman\\_b\\_11897252.html?guccounter=1](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/ianla-vanzant/the-myth-of-the-angry-black-woman_b_11897252.html?guccounter=1). Accessed 20 August 2018.

"Walk With Me." *The Walking Dead*, written by Evan T. Reilly, directed by Guy Ferland, AMC, 2012.

"What Lies Ahead." *The Walking Dead*, written by Ardeth Bey, and Robert Kirkman, directed by Ernest Dickerson, and Gwyneth Horder-Payton, AMC, 2011.

Wienclaw, Ruth A. "Feminist Theories of Gender Inequality." *Sociology Reference Guide: Gender Roles & Equality*. 1<sup>st</sup> ed., Salem Press, 2011, pp. 95-102.

"Wildfire." *The Walking Dead*, written by Glen Mazzara, directed by Ernest Dickerson, AMC, 2010.

7. A FEMINIST VIEW ON SOCIAL ISSUES IN *THE WALKING DEAD*: Summary and key words

A post-apocalyptic world seems as a great opportunity for people to change social rules since they can rebuild society the way they want to. However, many social issues are still present, so, this paper deals with the ones that occur in both comic book series and TV series *The Walking Dead*. They are analyzed from a feminist approach which means that the main focus is on the representation of women and their status. Therefore, the main issues that this paper deals with are gender inequality, gender roles, representation of men as the most capable ones for leadership, and angry black woman stereotype.

Key words: The Walking Dead, social issues, gender inequality, gender roles, leadership, angry black woman stereotype

## 8. FEMINISTIČKI POGLED NA DRUŠTVENE PROBLEME U SERIJI I

### STRIPOVIMA *THE WALKING DEAD*: Sažetak i ključne riječi

Postapokaliptični svijet se čini kao izvrsna prilika da ljudi promijene društvena pravila jer mogu ponovno izgraditi društvo onako kako žele. Međutim, mnogi društveni problemi su još uvijek prisutni pa se ovaj rad bavi onima koji su prisutni i u stripovima i u seriji *The Walking Dead*. Analizirani su s feminističkog pristupa što znači da je glavni naglasak na reprezentaciji žena i njihovom položaju. Stoga, glavni problemi kojima se ovaj radi bavi su rodna nejednakost, rodne uloge, reprezentacija muškaraca kao najsposobnijih za vodstvo te stereotip „ljute crnkinje”.

Ključne riječi: *The Walking Dead*, društveni problemi, rodna nejednakost, rodne uloge, vodstvo, stereotip „ljute crnkinje”