

IS THIS NOVEL THE NEW HANDMAID'S TALE?

Stylist talks to American author Leni Zumas about *Red Clocks*, her new feminist dystopia that's hitting a timely nerve

When influential author Lidia Yuknavitch comments, "Move over Atwood, *Red Clocks* is a gender roaring tour de force," *Stylist* sits up and takes notice. Set in a near-future USA, the all-too-plausible *Red Clocks* tells the story of four women living under the newly ratified Personhood Amendment, in which abortion is illegal, IVF is banned and a 'Pink Wall' prevents any woman fleeing to Canada for treatment. At a time when pro-life-supporting US Vice President Mike Pence recently announced, "This will be the generation that restores life in America", and Ireland is still yet to repeal the eighth amendment, Zumas talks to *Stylist* about fertility and those Margaret Atwood comparisons...

What inspired this book?

I was actually setting out to respond to my own anxieties around motherhood and infertility. I'm a slow writer so I started it in 2010 under Obama. I wasn't trying to address politics; it's strange for me that it's coming out now.

In her *New York Times* review of the book, Naomi Alderman alluded to Pence, writing, "Those repressive days [have] been rising like a whiff of nightmare." Do you agree?

Mike Pence is a very frightening

figure. His name is the one that came up when I was researching the book because in 2016, when he was governor of Indiana, he passed a law (later overturned by a judge) that said any woman who has a miscarriage or an abortion must seek a burial service or a cremation for the foetal material. There's no reason why he wouldn't do that at a federal level too.

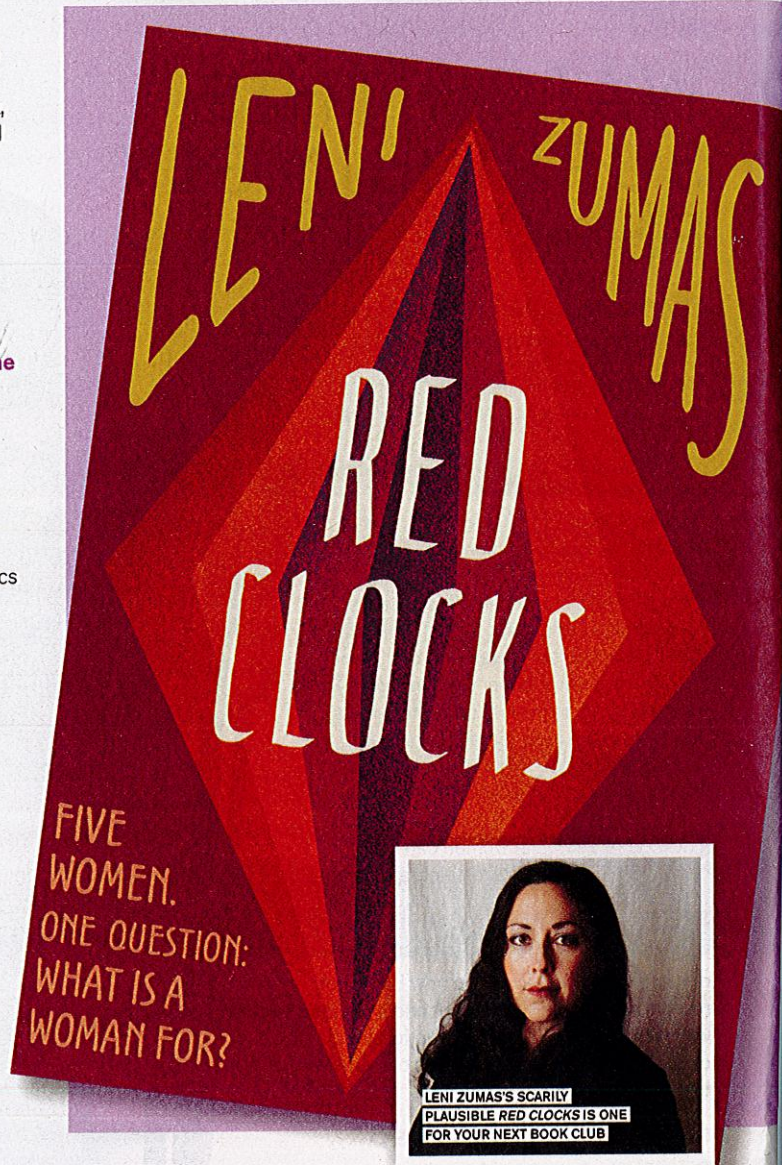
So you think the premise of the book could really happen?

I think, 'Oh my god, that would never happen'. But then I didn't think Trump would be elected either. There are a lot of women who don't have the money for a 400-mile bus trip to the one clinic in their state. Because clinics are being closed – in a very deliberate measure by the government – and for those women, abortion is banned because they can't access one.

How do you feel about being compared to Margaret Atwood?

She's someone I've read my whole life. But, to be honest, I wasn't thinking about *The Handmaid's Tale* when I was writing. When the TV series came out last spring, I was like, "Oh yes, of course". But I do believe in books speaking to each other.

Red Clocks by Leni Zumas (£16.99, The Borough Press) is out now



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