

NEOLIBERALISM AND REPRODUCTIVE (IN)JUSTICE

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Introduction

Drone technology and abortion are disassociated concepts at first glance. The former, a modern tool of intricate technology and the latter the termination of a pregnancy. However, when zooming into the conditions of feminism and the politics of reproductive justice under neoliberalism, it becomes apparent that this modern tool can aid the fight for justice in an androcentric, neoliberal society.

The 1970s brought economic and political reform in the West, infiltrating a global reorganization of the financial system through the redistribution of wealth from the global South to the global North through a system of re-entrenched class power (Harvey, 1990, p. 160). A new mode of regulation emerged through a new mode of accumulation that involved the privatization of the public and the financialization everything (Ibid, p. 284). As such, the accessibility to healthcare, education, and housing shifted to those who could afford it or to those who were granted it by their welfare infrastructures. Through the commercialization and commodification of everything from health to home, there was no limit to how and what was possessed by an institution. Hereby, the commodification of the natural resources from our water, oxygen, and ultimately, the freedom over our bodies fell into neoliberal hands. The body subjected through neoliberalism becomes a “body of interiorised rules and social processes” (Ibid, p. 122). Indeed, the daily life of a neoliberal subject is encompassed by a reality of “simply whatever you can sell (Roy & Thompson, 1992, p. 8). What happens to these bodies is in one way or another influenced by the coercive hegemony of neoliberal discourse which has permeated into a common sense of how we should think and live (Harvey, 2005, p.40). If we take the example of a woman’s body, there are numerous implications when inspecting her choice over her body through a neoliberal lens. Specifically, a woman’s intimate choice over the potential termination of her pregnancy is subject to regulation through doctors, eugenicists, economists, and politicians (Kennedy, 2001, p.8). As this essay will suggest through analysis of the neoliberal condition, lived experience, and technological fixes for a feminist crisis, the right to

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abortion is something intertwined in the potential for accumulation of capital through modern coercive social order (Harvey, 2005, p. 40-41).

The Neoliberal Condition and Reproductive (In)Justice

The principle of free choice for the individual is conditioned as a principle of neoliberalism in the West as a by-product of the exploitative freedom under which neoliberalism thrives (Harvey, 2005, p. 36). It is a 'by-product' as having the freedom to choose as a woman is only free insofar the regulation and control is steered toward private advantages for the market economy (Harvey, 2005, p. 36), making it expedient to legalize abortion under this rhetoric of freedom of individual agency (Kennedy, 2001, p.165). It remains a fluid matter based on the neoliberal fetish of control of bodies where abortion rights are manipulated as a form of population management and economic regulation. To proceed with the former, the intervention of doctors and eugenicists in the struggle for abortion is mediated according to their views and preferences within a population in such a way as to support the an abortion when evading babies who are disabled or non-white (Ibid, p. 163). Moreover, in the case of the latter, economists and politicians can manipulate legislation in times of economic crisis where there is an encouragement of abortion for women in the workforce to maintain stability in employment and decrease costs of maternity leave. This benefits the private healthcare sector as they can minimise welfare spending as due to the deviation from the nuclear family, women who are not supported by a male breadwinner will have an increased need for financial support as domestic labour work remains unpaid (Ibid, p.166). In short, providing free abortion in times of economic recession is more cost-effective than providing financial support to the woman and her born child. Hereby, there is effective use of manipulation over the abstract notion of freedom of choice over a woman's body by prioritisation of wealth retention of the state and private institutions (Ibid, p. 165). On the other hand, the decision to abstain abortions to 2-parent families seeks to promote the nuclear family who have more potential rates of consumption of goods and services aimed at this social construct (Kennedy, 2001, p. 166)

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The propagation of neoliberal ideals is extended into the “developing” nations through the economic restructuring by the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (Harvey, 2005, p.8). While offering attractive deferral of debt to financially burdened countries, they impose neoliberal orthodoxy of institutional reform such as cuts to welfare expenditure, more flexible labour market laws, and privatization (Harvey, 2005, p.29). As a by-product of these conditions comes the imposition of the abovementioned principles on how populations can be managed (Kennedy, 2001, p.167). In collapsing welfare provisions in these countries through the standard prescription of restructuring, a large number of people are pushed into precarious living conditions under which they suffer from inadequate financial support (Roy & Thompson, 1992, p.5). The issue of precarity is, on Lauren Berlant’s account, five-fold. Is at once an existential problem, an ongoing economic problem, a problem of the reproduction of life, austerity through privatization of wealth, and a way to highlight explicit distortion of political arrangement (Berlant et. al, 2012, p.164). Focussing on the state of economic precarity and the problem of the reproduction of life can reveal an interdependency of the two in the following example. Women who are biologically unable to bear children biologically may seek a birthing ‘host’ alternative known as surrogate. As, under neoliberal ideology, “life is comprised of whatever you can sell” (Roy & Thompson, 1992, p. 8), in extreme cases of economic precarity a woman may opt to rent her womb to become an “interchangeable foetal carrier” and provide a woman with a child genetically related to them (Roy & Thompson, p.5). This option gives a woman living in economic stress a higher income than a normal non-skilled job could while still having the time to attend to her own unpaid domestic work. Here, not only is the surrogate sustaining human life biologically for someone other than herself, but she is also sustaining the capacity to sustain economic production of labour (Aruzza, Bhattacharya & Fraser, 2018, p. 121).

The choice for women to terminate a pregnancy can be administered through the repressive form of legislation, though it is also tainted by the coercive power of hegemonic pronatalism (Roy & Thompson, 1992, p. 10). The procedure may be politically legal, but the actual process of abortion can be impeded by obstacles such as doctors denying the procedure based on neo-eugenics (favouring specific genetics) where denial and dismissal of abortion is based on race, ethnicity, and sexuality of

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the mother, or the baby is terminated based on foetal tests for disability (Ibid, p. 12). Furthermore, the scarcity of abortion clinics make for long waiting-lists that are longer than the 10-week window in which abortion can take place, some clinics requiring consent from a guardian and/or male partner – both of which may be absent or uninvolved, among other lacking social and physical infrastructures which would make the procedure possible. These are neoconservative ideologies that favour a specific heteronormative, two-parent, white, middle-class social order which reflect the brutality of the neoliberal state (Aruzza, Bhattacharya & Fraser, 2018, p. 126). This process can be illustrated in a song called *La Femme Fetal* by the Digable Planets (Bulter, I., Vieira, M. & Irving, C., 1993) (For full lyrics, see Appendix A). The lyrics tell the lived experience of Nikki, a newly pregnant woman who sees an abortion fit based on her age, economic state, and the future of her unborn baby. The song is based in the US where abortion has been legal since the *Roe v. Wade* case of 1973. Despite this, the American Federal Government restrict her from doing carrying out her procedure: “*But the feds have dissed me, They ignore and dismiss me*”. This is something exemplary of trails such as the *Hyde Amendment* that ensured there would be no universal access to abortion, the Webster trial on Reproductive Health Services of 1989, the Planned Parenthood trial on Casey of 1992, and the Targeted Regulation of Abortion Providers (TRAP) Law’s which act as opposition to the legal resistance to women and their right to abortion. In the case of Nikki, she is subject to shame from the pro-life activists who stigmatize her as a “*murderer*” to which the lyrics respond: “*Life doesn’t stop after birth, and a child born to the unprepared, it might even just get worse*”: as to say, there should be the option to abort a child in preventing its emergence into a quality of life deemed poor based on the state of precarity that the mother finds herself in. The denial of abortion for precarious women is especially problematic when they are later deemed incapable of mothering due to their economic situation, made worse in racialized communities where there is unequal support to racialized women (Roy & Thompson, 1992, p.11). Cases of ‘bad motherhood’ can have an outcome of post-natal termination of the child from their home by social services, secured by the infrastructures of foster care. In this lies the paradox of the state denying pre-natal termination but creating a private, agency-based foundation to sustain the consequences which consolidate wealth inequalities between

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racialized, ‘bad mothers’ unable to sustain her children, and the often white, ‘good mothers’ who can afford the added economic weight of childcare (Ibid, p. 21). The lyrics continue to say that the:

“Fascists are some heavy dudes, they don’t really give a damn about life, they just don’t want a woman to control her body or have the right to choose [...] they just want their male finger on the button”.

Here they refer to the androcentric characteristic of state-organized capitalism in which the political culture envisions an ideal, male citizen to reinforce authority (Fraser, 2009, p. 101-2). “The fascists”, as Karl Polanyi warns, are a product of a doomed neoliberal utopianism where “the good freedoms are lost, [and] the bad ones take over” (Harvey, 2005, p.37). Through the presence of good freedom of speech and the illusion of free choice over the woman’s body there exists the capacity to regulate exactly that. These are concerns that the “Fascists” in power “*will never understand without having gone through the same struggle*”. Indeed, judges like David Scouter and Clarence Thomas of the US Supreme Court or Donald Trump in his portrayal of the Holet Baby are examples of neo-conservative thinking over the protection of human right (not) to parent (Roy & Thompson, p.11).

The Idiot As The Modern Day Heretic

“Aborting mission should be your volition”: A line which signals toward the utopia of autonomous women and their ability to “mine [their] own bio-capital to extract value” (Roy & Thompson, p.7). To do so, there must be a reconfiguration of the politics of reproduction to emerge a life of immanence (Han, 2017, p.66). A life of immanence can be reached, according to Byung-Chul Han, through the deviance from the neoliberal power of domination in the form of Idiotism (2017, p.100). “The Idiot is the modern-day heretic” (Ibid, p.99) – the heretic is one who demands *free choice*, which is especially necessary in cases of reproductive justice: one who can emerge from androcentric, pronatal-hegemonic power, deviating from neoconservative orthodoxy. “An urgent need to heighten heretical consciousness” is an urgent call for an intervention to modern coercive consensus (Ibid, p.100). A contemporary intervention of such measures can be represented by the modern drone which, among its benefits to humanity, has stimulated an ethical question (Berkowitz, 2014, p.164).

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Drones as a Killing Machine

Drones have been speculated in philosophy by Plato, a drone at that time being defined as the disease of the city: a man who had fallen out of an oligarchy who desires riches but disdains work (Berkowitz, 2014, p. 161). In modern conception, Plato's notion gets traction by accumulating riches provided through the work done by an unmanned, aerial vehicle drone in ways no human could. The modern drone is built on a long-standing practice of technological advancement aimed to reach technical perfection in its dependability and calculability (Ibid, p.162). It is capable of thoughtless automatism of algorithmic behavior and is not susceptible to fatigue, distraction, or error making it attractive for utilization in military forces (Ibid, p.160). As a result of its military instrumentalization, the modern drone is given an increasingly violent association of an emotionless killing machine, which, through aid of the following example, can be reimagined as an emancipatory version of the like when conceptualized as a mode to give choice to a woman over her body.

Drones as a Killing Machine, Reimagined

The use of drones in providing women with safe abortion treatments necessary for reproductive justice challenges normal forms of protest through use of non-violent, technology-driven delivery of medication. The use of technology has served as a means to sustain intervention of modern coercive consensus over abortion rights as drones do not require the physical human body in the delivery, something that has proven to be essential when faced with health and environment crisis such as that of a natural disaster or a pandemic when their implications halt cross-border travel (Tucker, 2017). The movement that this technological innovation supports goes beyond Second-Wave Feminists pro-abortion agenda of resistance to the pro-life arguments (Roy & Thompson, 1992, p. 13). By scrutinizing abortion more critically and fighting for abortion rights "for the 99%" which are inclusive to all women by decentering middle-class and white norms of informing traditional campaigns for birth control and abortion access (Roy & Thompson, 1992, p. 13). This movement is foregrounded by the work of the non-governmental organization *Women On Waves*, founded in 1999 to "prevent unsafe abortions and empower women to exercise their human rights to physical and mental autonomy" (Gomperts, 2021). The prevention of unsafe abortions has been made

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possible through the use of drones as a solution to repressive anti-abortion laws and regulation, being used to deliver medication unmanned to ensure a safe medical abortion nonetheless. Prior to this, the organization made use of a boat that brought groups of women beyond the land-territory in which they were unable to perform a safe abortion. Farther than 12 miles off the coast of their country of origin, the women follow the laws of the vessel's country of origin of The Netherlands. Here they could be provided with legal abortion services, contraceptives, information, training, and workshops regarding pregnancy and abortion, after which they were brought back to land. With successful trips along the coasts of Ireland, Morocco, Spain, and Portugal, this method of working becomes restricted for landlocked territories and is jeopardized in times of health crisis such as that of the COVID-19 pandemic. In adopting new ways to react to crisis, the organization works with local pro-abortion initiatives to make the missions possible and easy for women in need to apply for. They are transparent about their services to the public and pay close attention to their rights, adhere to the correct aviation provisions and eliminate the breach of commercial laws – all as to avoid intervention of the law as this is precisely the obstacle that they are escaping in the first place.

The drone mission started in 2015 when a drone flew over the German/Polish border to deliver the necessary medicines needed for a medical abortion to Polish pregnant women. During this flight, the German Police attempted intervention based on the claim that it violated the German Medical Act. This resistance coming from a place of privatized administration highlights a technocratic and managerial ethos typical of *étatisme* under state-organized capitalism (Fraser, 2009, p.102). Though neoliberalism shifts toward anti-*étatisme* of reduced state action, a feminist agenda of post-neoliberal anti-*étatisme* brings forward the focus necessary to the strengthen public power in steering society toward the interest of justice (Ibid, p. 116). The resistance to drones helping a feminist crisis is also tackled by the post-neoliberal anti-westphalianist framework in the struggle for social justice. Particularly, state-owned capitalism's characteristic of westphalianism is "by definition, a national formation in the name- if not always in the interest- of the national citizenry" (Ibid, p.102), channeling a disinterest toward social justice through the containment of it between borders. Though globalization has promoted a freer flow of finance, knowledge and opportunity, it has also meant

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fixated struggle of injustice within territorial borders as illustrated by the police intervention of the trespassing drone. A post-neoliberal anti-Westphalian approach seeks the task to break the exclusive identification of democracy with the bounded political community, seeking for democracy at every level capable of redressing injustice in every dimension (Ibid, 116).

Reflection

Ultimately, the relation between the modern technology of drones in addressing the justice for abortion rights is just one piece of a large, complex puzzle in the fight for a reformation of reproduction politics. The strength of coercion experienced in neoliberal ideology revolving social reproductive theory at the intersection of struggle of class, race, and sexuality under the views of neoconservative decision-makers embeds the problem as deeply systemic. As seen in the example in Hip-Hop culture's *La Femme Fetal*, the issue of precarity in reproductive justice are urgent for the ability for women to be autonomous changes the course of their life as well as that of her unborn child. Through the juncture with environmental, anti-racial, anti-imperialist, and LGBTQ+ movements in anti-capitalist currents, there is a strengthening association of bodies fighting progressive neoliberalism (Aruzza, Bhattacharya & Fraser, 2018, p. 133) who can flight to find the next piece of the puzzle.

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Appendix A

Song lyrics "La Femme Fetal" by Digable Planets

[Verse: Butterfly]

It was 8:49 on a beautiful 9th day of July

There was not a cloud to speak of, so the orange sun hung

Lonely in the sky

I lay prone in my cavi home

Thinking of fine nappy Jackie and his jazzcat's horn

Sliding in a tape of Bird on Verve, when suddenly rang my phone

"Hey, Butterfly," the voice said

"Slip on some duds, comb out your fro and slide on down to my pad

The vibe here is very pleasant, and I truly request your presence

A problem of great magnitude has arose

And as we speak it grows"

"Damn, what could it be?" I thought

A juice I bought and rolled on down to her spot

Seeing bros I know, slapping fives I arrived and pressed G-5

And there was Nikki

Lookin' some kind of sad with tears fallin' from her eyes

She sat me down, and dug my frown and began to run it down

"You remember my boyfriend Sid, that fly kid who I love

Well our love was often a verb and spontaneity has brought a third

*But due to our **youth** an **economic state**, we wish to **terminate***

About this we don't feel great, but baby, that's how it is

*But **the feds** have **dissed me***

*They **ignore and dismiss me***

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The pro-lifers harass me outside the clinic

*And call me a **murderer**, now that's hate*

So needless to say, we're in a mental state of debate"

"Hey, beautiful bird" I said, digging her somber mood

"The fascists are some heavy dudes

They don't really give a damn about life

They just don't want a woman to control her body

Or have the right to choose

But baby that ain't nothin'

They just want a male finger on the button

Because if you say war, they will send them to die by the score

Aborting mission should be your volition

But if Souter and Thomas have their way

You'll be standing in line unable to get Welfare while they'll be out

Hunting and fishing

It has always been around, it will always have a niche

But they'll make it a privilege, not a right

Accessible only to the rich

Hey, Pro-lifers should dig themselves

Because life doesn't stop after birth

And to a child born to the unprepared

It might even just get worse

The situation would surely change if they were to find themselves in it

Supporters of the H-Bomb, and fire-bombing clinics

What type of shit is that? Orwellian, in fact

*If **Roe v. Wade** was overturned, would not the desire remain intact*

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Leaving young girls to risk their healths

And doctors to botch, and watch as they kill themselves”

Now, I hate to sound macabre

But hey, isn't it my job

To lay it on the masses and get them off their asses

To fight against these fascists

So, whatever you decide, make that move with pride

Sid will be there and so will I

An insect 'til I die

[Outro]

Rhythms and sounds

Spinning around

Confrontations

Across the nation

Your block

My block

Dreadlocks

What a shock

Land of the free

But not me, not me

Not me, not me, not me, not me, not me, not me, not me, not me

Hey, what's happening?

Insects causing fun?

93 million miles away from the Sun

New grooves, show improve

It's the moves (The moves)

Funky songs, but maybe not for long

So, check it out”