

REIMAGINING REPRODUCTION: SHORT INTERSECTIONAL
FICTION AS A METHOD OF EVALUATING REPRODUCTIVE
CARE IN THE UNITED STATES

by

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This thesis engages in a formal literary analysis of three contemporary short stories written by women of color, to examine how works of fiction engage with the Reproductive Justice Movement and expose pitfalls in the United States reproductive healthcare system. This project demonstrates the value of fiction in social movements, by applying theoretical lenses like Reproductive Justice, Black Feminist thought, and Women & Gender Studies to each short story. By applying these theories to contemporary short stories, this thesis showcases how the short story form functions as a mode of reflection and reimagining of how reproductive health is situated in the United States. The thesis examines the use of enumeration in tandem with juxtaposition to highlight a proliferation of consumerism in the United States capitalist system that is inextricably tied to the reproductive choices of individual characters. It also highlights the ability of science fiction and the abject to reimagine the hierarchical structures that influence reproductive health in the United States and challenge the capitalist approach to reproductive care that our system deems normal. The comparison of all three texts questions what we consider abject and irregular when it comes to reproductive health, and how we can reshape our approach

to care given the limitations of the pro-choice framework and the fragile state of US reproductive rights following the overturning of *Roe v. Wade*.

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Introduction and Theoretical Overview

Introduction

“Storytelling is a crucial part of reproductive justice theory, an act of reclamation and resistance,” writes reproductive justice scholar, Loretta J. Ross (“Conceptualizing Reproductive Justice” 203). The power of storytelling to resist and change our material conditions lies at the heart of this thesis inquiry. As an avid reader and English student, I often find myself wondering, why do we write fiction and what role does it play in creating social change?

To begin to answer these questions, this thesis focuses on an issue important to me as an American woman: access to reproductive healthcare. It is a tumultuous time for reproductive rights in the United States, following the 2022 Supreme Court decision in *Dobbs v. Jackson Women’s Health Organization* to overturn *Roe v. Wade* and eliminate the constitutional right to abortion. While this legal action is a step backwards, many reproductive justice activists have pointed out that a legal protection like *Roe v. Wade* has never been enough to ensure equal access to reproductive care for all people. The United States system, driven by individualism and capitalism, forces women¹ to fend for themselves when it comes to reproductive health, meaning the right to choose is only accessible to those who can afford it (A. Smith 160). *Roe v. Wade* was not an all-encompassing protection of reproductive rights, but rather a small steppingstone that only those served with financial privilege could reach. Now that this protection has collapsed, we are in a position to build from the ground-up, forcing us to reconsider what an equitable economy of reproduction looks like. This point in time offers a chance to reflect on how

¹ Though each of the stories in this thesis follow cisgender characters, terms such as women will be used more capaciously to recognize that reproductive health does not apply to one specific gender identity and the reproductive justice framework applies to all people with uteruses.

reproductive health is situated in the current American system and how to bring about change moving forward.

Here is where the importance of storytelling comes in. It is in stories that theories and ideas become tangible, and it is in fiction that new worlds of change can be imagined. This thesis highlights the power of storytelling, by examining three contemporary short stories by women of color that address the state of reproductive health services in the United States and reimagine what reproductive care may look like. This thesis will explore two short stories set in the United States: Danielle Evans' "Harvest" and Ling Ma's "Tomorrow." Published in 2010 and 2022 respectively, both stories make arguments about the racist exclusionism of the reproductive capitalist care model in the United States. They each utilize enumeration, repetition, and juxtaposition to critique the relationship between reproduction and US capitalism. The form of the short story allows the proliferation of goods and consumption to constantly be felt throughout both stories, as lists of products and repeated mentions of money make their way into every corner of the texts. The final story, written by Octavia Butler, is a science fiction piece in which reproductive politics are set on another planet. In "Bloodchild," published in 1984, repetition comes in the form of the abject,² and reproduction is separated from consumerism. When examining the first two stories alongside Butler's abject world, we are forced to reconsider what systems we deem as alien and what systems we deem as familiar, and how our own model works against forms of care that we consider necessary and natural. Together, these three stories reveal the limitations of reproductive healthcare in the United States and suggest methods of resistance to the laissez-faire, monetized system that restricts equal access to reproductive health services.

² As established by Julia Kristeva, the term "abject" as it applies to literary analysis is used to describe images and language which provoke feelings such as unsettlement or disgust.

Just as Ross suggests, the critical examinations these stories present underscore the crucial role of storytelling in the Reproductive Justice Movement as a form of resistance and reimagining.

The History of Reproductive Justice

In June 1994, the Reproductive Justice Movement began with a group of twelve Black women activists at a national pro-choice conference in Chicago, who presented a framework for addressing pitfalls in US reproductive health policy. This framework came out of a response to the mainstream pro-choice movement that primarily focused on legal rights to abortion and tended to only center the voices and needs of white women. The founding mothers of the RJ movement recognized the limiting nature of the reproductive rights framework and moved to create a framework that centered Black women in the discussion. This started the Women of African Descent for Reproductive Justice (WADRJ) collective, which expanded reproductive care to look beyond abortion access and focus on a system of total support for all women. After attending the International Conference on Population and Development in Egypt, the WADRJ recognized the limitations of the US constitution and its privacy-driven approach to reproductive rights. Rather than shaping reproductive rights under a right to privacy, the reproductive justice movement utilizes a human rights framework to shape their claims for reproductive health (Leonard 43-44). Pulling inspiration from the United Nations' Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the RJ framework establishes three main guidelines that should apply to all women and people with uteruses: "the right to have children; the right to not have children and, the right to nurture the children we have in a safe and healthy environment" ("In Our Own Voice"). By framing each of these factors as a human right, RJ directly challenges the free-market, hands-off system that the United States approaches reproductive care with. As one of the RJ birth mothers, Loretta J. Ross states, the reproductive justice framework recognizes that "health care, including

reproductive health care, is properly a human right, not a commodity for purchase,” placing emphasis on access, rather than just privacy (Ross & Solinger 2017). Three years after the creation of the reproductive justice framework, the SisterSong Women of Color Reproductive Justice Collective was created in 1997 to enforce the goals of the reproductive justice framework and center Black women and other marginalized communities in discussions of reproductive health in the United States. Today, SisterSong continues to foster community and further awareness on reproductive health and access.

By centering both reproductive rights and social justice, the reproductive justice framework also recognizes that access to care is an intersectional issue. “RJ posits that intersecting forces produce differing reproductive experiences that shape each individual’s life. While every human being has the same human rights, our intersectional identities require different considerations to achieve reproductive justice” the editors of *Radical Reproductive Justice* write (Introduction 15). Rather than simply applying universal laws to reproductive health, such as the privacy right to abortion, reproductive justice recognizes that access to care is not universal. Reproductive justice examines the role of intersectionality, a term coined by Kimberle Crenshaw. Originating as a term to describe the legal mistreatment of Black women, intersectionality refers to the ways in which identities intersect, and discrimination can’t be thought of on a single axis. In Crenshaw’s example, an employer can hire white women and Black men and claim to not be racist or sexist yet still discriminate towards Black women. Intersectionality recognizes that each person’s identity has multiple facets that all must be recognized simultaneously in discussions of privilege and oppression in a system (Crenshaw 142). To examine the influence of intersectional identity on reproductive health access, this thesis will focus on short stories written by women of color. Each of the three stories explore

how race, class, and gender affect access to reproductive care. The stories critique the relationship between reproductive healthcare, capitalism, and individualism in the United States and how this impacts individual decision-making on reproductive health.

Literature Review

The basis of my literary analysis relies primarily on literature in reproductive justice theory. A foundational starting point for reproductive justice literature is *Radical Reproductive Justice*. Edited by women's rights activists, lawyers, and scholars, this book outlines the history and framework of reproductive justice. It expands the "reproductive rights" idea to address issues of racism, poverty, disability, and other intersectional facets that affect access to reproductive care. This theoretical framework provides a basis for English scholars to apply to literary work. My thesis engages with the theoretical work from reproductive activists, Loretta J. Ross and Andrea Smith, pulling from their essays in *Radical Reproductive Justice*, as well as Ross's work with Ricki Solinger, titled *Reproductive Justice: An Introduction*. In one of her essays, Ross applies the African philosophy of Ubuntu to reproduction, critiquing individualist Western philosophy and reframing reproduction from a community lens. I use this philosophy to examine the role of care and community in each of the short stories.

This thesis also engages with literature on the topic of surrogacy to further my analysis of "Bloodchild," as the short story explores surrogacy in a science fiction setting. The book *Labor of Love: Gestational Surrogacy and the Work of Making Babies* contains the first ethnographic study of surrogacy in the United States. It utilizes interviews and personal stories of surrogate mothers to develop an understanding of attitudes towards surrogacy and the role it plays in the United States. The book also explores literature on the history of surrogacy and the development of new reproductive technology. I also engage with a theoretical piece on surrogacy from global

health scholar, Vora Kalindi. Her piece “After the housewife: Surrogacy, labour, and human reproduction” examines the role of household labor as a method of resistance to the medicalized surrogacy market, which I use in my discussion of “Bloodchild.”

Beyond reproductive justice theory, this thesis will also pull from Black feminist literature. One scholar I engage with is Jennifer C. Nash and her piece, “Love in the Time of Death” from *Black Feminisim Reimagined*. Nash reimagines the United States system to be built on mutual vulnerability and love politics, which this thesis connects to the situation of reproductive care in each of the stories.

This thesis also engages with Literary and Women and Gender Studies scholars who have engaged in readings of the primary texts. One piece of critical work that my thesis is in conversation with is Zsuzsanna Lénárt-Muszka’s essay, “Reproductive Racism in Danielle Evans’s ‘Harvest:’ Black, Chicana, And White Motherhoods in the Context of Reproductive Rights Discourses.” Lénárt-Muszka close reads Evan’s “Harvest,” and applies concepts of reproductive justice and feminist history. She argues that “the current practices of egg donation depicted in the story are imbricated in the wider system of racial capitalism that values women’s childbearing capacities differentially in terms of their race” (32). I aim to expand on this analysis of “racial capitalism” through examining the ways juxtaposition is used to differentiate between the reproductive health experiences of the white character in the story and the women of color in the story. Lénárt-Muszka’s essay falls into the Gender Studies discipline, and it largely focuses on the history of Western patriarchy and reproductive discrimination. I add to this analysis by offering more of a literary approach. My approach to “Harvest,” will further close read Evan's use of language and formal literary elements to expand on Lénárt-Muszka’s gender studies analysis.

My reading of “Bloodchild” is situated in a large literary debate among Octavia Butler scholars. Readings of “Bloodchild” range from viewing the story as a form of slavery, while others engage with Butler’s argument that she intended for it to be a love story. Literary scholar, Marquita R. Smith examines the relationship between aliens and reproduction in her essay “Bearing the Burden of Posthuman Reproduction in Octavia E. Butler’s ‘Bloodchild’ and Wild Seed.” She argues that “Bloodchild” treats reproduction as a symbiotic relationship, rather than a hierarchical relationship, which is a concept I expand on in my own close reading of the story, along with a discussion of gender subversions from Patricia Melzer. I also engage with critiques of the story from Amanda Thibodeau on the role of heteronormativity in “Bloodchild,” along with other literary critiques that view the “Bloodchild” relationship as a form of exploitation.

One short story that has not gained a lot of attention from literary scholars is Ling Ma’s “Tomorrow.” Featured in Ma’s short story collection *Bliss Montage*, “Tomorrow” follows a middle-aged, immigrant woman who becomes pregnant and undergoes medical complications with her baby. While Ma’s debut novel, *Severance*, has gained attention from literary and gender studies scholars, *Bliss Montage* remains largely untouched. This thesis aims to provide an original analysis of Ma’s “Tomorrow,” through a close reading guided by reproductive justice theory.

This previous literature provides a theoretical framework for my arguments and literary analysis. Critiques from English, Gender Studies, and Black Feminist scholars present literary analyses for my thesis to be in conversation with, along with gaps that my thesis aims to fill.

Methods

In this thesis, I use common methodologies in the English field, including close reading, theory, and historical context. First, I use close reading as a method. Close reading involves examining specific language and structure to interpret meaning and intention in a given text. I've focused on a select group of short stories that I close read and compare throughout the thesis.

I also utilize theory as a methodology. I provide specific theoretical frameworks to guide my close reading and enrich my interpretation of literary texts. My close reading is primarily guided by Reproductive Justice Theory, Black Feminist Theory, and Women & Gender Studies. Through examining fiction through these theoretical lenses, I identify themes and arguments in the short stories that reflect theoretical thought from the reproductive justice movement. By utilizing multiple primary texts, I compare the use of literary elements across authors and fictional stories to examine the similarities and differences in how each story translates reproductive justice thought into fiction writing.

All of my chosen primary texts are contemporary stories, meaning my contextualization is focused on the end of the twentieth century and beyond. Each story was written in a different decade, so I briefly address the state of reproductive healthcare in America at each of these times, beginning in the 1990s and ending in the 2020s. Through examining the current and past status of reproductive healthcare, I provide context into the situation in which these stories were written.

“Harvest:” A Racialized Reproductive Market in the US

Part of her short story collection *Before You Suffocate Your Own Fool Self*, Danielle Evans’ “Harvest” follows a group of young female roommates at Columbia University. The story centers around Angel, a Black woman who finds out she is pregnant during her Junior year of college. Simultaneously the story follows the group’s white roommate, Laura, who becomes estranged from the roommates after starting to sell her eggs to fertility clinics. As Angel considers raising a child in her financial situation while Laura gains a new income by selling her eggs, the story explores the state of reproduction in a neoliberal³ United States driven by consumerism. The story does this by a frequent use of repetition as a literary device, to illustrate the incessant presence of capitalist systems in Angel’s thought processes as she makes life-changing decisions. Evans also exposes the reproductive racism intertwined in systems of reproductive technology and the persistence of eugenic ideology into United States markets, through the use of juxtaposition. The story’s style paired with the subject matter allow us to see these important issues as part of an exchange economy.

Published in 2010 by Black female author, Danielle Evans, “Harvest” was written in a period of United States history where *Roe v. Wade* was still in effect. While the text itself does not specify the year in which it is set, this timely story reflects characteristics of a contemporary New York setting and Angel sits in a time where abortion is legal but not necessarily accessible.

The Price of Eggs for College Girls

Throughout the story, consumerism reveals itself through the repeated use of enumeration to list items and purchases in relation to Laura and her friends’ egg donations. Through this

³ As defined by the Oxford English Dictionary, neoliberalism refers to “a type of liberalism which favours a global free market without government regulation, with reduction in government spending and businesses and industry controlled and run for profit by private owners.”

proliferation of waste and indulgence, “Harvest” exposes the imbalanced effect of a racialized economy, as those with hierarchical privilege are free to overconsume while others struggle for basic resources. The first list comes in a sample of egg donation prices that Angel provides: “Five, ten, fifteen thousand you could get for doing it just once” (Evans 65). Already the first paragraph of the story has assigned women’s eggs a market value, turning reproductive health into a commodity that can be bought for the right price. The valuation of eggs continues to be reinforced through the lists of items that the college girls use their egg money on. Eggs become “cashmere sweaters crumpled on the bathroom floor, new stilettos clicking across the kitchen linoleum” and “endless overpriced trinkets collected on excursions to the East Side” (Evans 65). The lengthy list of items produces a feeling of overconsumption, describing itself as “endless” and creating a never-ending cycle of eggs being turned into stuff. This overconsumption is reinforced through Evans’ careful selection of diction. The girls’ egg money does not just purchase a sweater, but one that lays “crumpled” on their bathroom floors, creating a sense of carelessness that comes from a consumer who continues to purchase more and more things; why care for a nice item when there is always more that can be purchased? The use of the word “trinkets” also reveals that these items are not necessary but rather objects of privilege that are only consumed by someone confident in a continued means of access to disposable income. However, the listing does not end here. Angel emphasizes that the girls she knew would also buy “more practical” items. She provides two examples: “new computers” and a “savings account for grad school” (Evans 65). While these items do appear “more practical” on the surface, both still fall under the umbrella of relative privilege. The purchase of a “new” computer implies that the owner has at least one already, and grad school is an academic luxury that few may access. Even the “practical” items Angel provides are wrought with privilege, highlighting a constant need for

more; old computers and undergraduate degrees are no longer enough. Within only the first paragraph of the story, "Harvest" presents the interwoven nature of female eggs and capitalist consumption. Reproductive health becomes a product with supply and demand like all the other "trinkets" a consumer may purchase, allowing some people to overconsume while others are left with nothing.

After the introduction of the egg market, "Harvest" sets up the means for participation in such a market, putting people into groups of those who may participate, those who may not, and those who decide these boundaries. In reference to her and her roommates, Angel states, "it wasn't our eggs they wanted," establishing a group of nonparticipants through the word "our" (Evans 66). Through placing herself into one group, Angel reveals a segregation occurring in the egg market. Angel refers to the "our" once again in her statement "no one was interested in paying us for our genetic material. If they had wanted brown babies, who so obviously didn't belong to them, they would have just adopted." This statement sets up two clear groups: a "they" and an "us." Angel puts herself into the group producing "brown babies," establishing herself and her roommates in a community of women of color. This sentence also reveals who the nebulous "they" that runs the market is. Angel states that brown babies "obviously didn't belong to them," implying that "them" is in reference to white people. The demand for eggs has become a strictly white privilege in this sentence, eliminating women of color from both the demand and supply side of the egg market. "Laura Kelso [...] is whose eggs they wanted," Angel states, once again repeating the "they." The story itself begins with "They wanted eggs," framing it in this consumption market driven by white consumers (Evans 65). Angel's continuous repetition of "they" reminds the reader over and over again that the white market around Angel is inescapably linked to her decisions and her position in society.

Enumeration is again used to list off all the traits that make Laura desirable, such as her “1600 SAT score” and her “4.1 GPA.” However, Angel quickly disregards this list and highlights “the important stuff.” It is not Laura’s mind that is important, but her identity as a “blonde, blue-eyed” white woman. Laura becomes the epitome of the young, beautiful white woman that a white market has deemed desirable. While Laura and Angel live in the same flat and both come from low socio-economic backgrounds, Laura’s identity as white separates her from the “us” that Angel uses to refer to herself and the rest of her roommates. As a white woman, Laura may advance her economic position, while Angel cannot. This exposes the link between race and class in the United States, reinforcing the reproductive justice argument that reproduction must be approached through an intersectional lens. The market-driven separations around the girls have made their way into their personal lives, illustrating that individual choices are inextricably linked to the structures around them.

This separation of identities and who is deemed desirable reflects a history of race eugenics in the United States, which continues to translate into the current capitalist system that drives reproductive technology. Gender studies scholar, Zsuzsanna Lénárt-Muszka explores the history of modern “reproductive racism” in the United States through the context of “Harvest.” She states that the practice of egg selling in the story reflects a “wider system of racial capitalism that values women’s childbearing capacities differentially in terms of their race” (Lénárt-Muszka 32). Lénárt-Muszka details the history of racial capitalism in the 20th century, in which the modern eugenics movement emerged to justify white supremacist goals and categorize Black women as genetically inferior to white women. As Loretta J. Ross explains, eugenics movements were backed by the idea that people could “improve humanity through ‘scientifically’ selective breeding.” This became a rationale for controlling and limiting the births of those found

“undesirable,” which most often referred to categories of race and class, and specifically targeted Black women. The eugenics movement of the 20th century became increasingly driven by medical technologies. Forms of contraception arose as a driver for “population control,” used to limit the birth rates of Black women (“Trust Black Women” 64). Concealed under racialized scientific veils, eugenics became a white supremacist movement backed by political leaders and government policy, revealed in actions such as the federally funded mass sterilization of women of color, without informed consent (“Trust Black Women” 65). This structural mistreatment of Black women continues to persist into the 21st century, as racial disparities in reproductive healthcare remain deeply embedded in the US system.

The details in “Harvest” reveal the ways in which this history of eugenics in the United States has translated into what Ross defines as “laissez-faire eugenics.” New reproductive technologies, like artificial insemination and egg harvesting, allow people to pick and choose the genetics of their child if they have the monetary means to do so. Rather than focusing policy on the disproportionate number of Black babies in adoption agencies, the new system of reproductive technology allows people to pick their ““designer babies,”” as Ross puts it (“Trust Black Women” 68). Hidden under veils of reproductive choice and free markets, new reproductive technology continues to promote racial inequality, as it tailors itself to wealthy white people looking to produce more white babies. As Lénárt-Muszka points out, the people who can afford these forms of assisted reproduction are only those who do not suffer from systemic socio-economic barriers that are also tied to race (Lénárt-Muszka 35). As the demand side of wealthy white people continues to want a supply of white babies, the whole system of assisted reproductive technology excludes women of color. The market demand for Laura Kelso’s “blonde” and “blue-eyed” qualities reflects the ways in which eugenics ideology

conceals itself in current reproductive technology and policy, as Angel and her friends are left out of the egg donation practice. ““You know what Laura has,”” Angel is asked later in the story, and her first thought is “*Value*” (Evans 78). As a white woman in a white market, Laura has a genetic “value” that translates into a monetary number through her inclusion in the egg donation business. The story continues to explore the ways in which the US assigns women value based on their racial identity.

As “Harvest” separates Angel and Laura into different groups, the story goes on to further explore how society has defined each group. “They’re *mother* material,” Angel’s roommate, Nicole, says of Laura and the other white girls selling their eggs. “[B]ut who wants to fuck them? If we were hookers, we’d be making twice what they were” (Evans 37). Here, “Harvest” acknowledges that society has turned both groups of women into different kinds of commodities. As Nicole’s statement suggests, the value of Black women is only defined by their body. As the women in the story discuss the topic of sex work, the image of “*The Village Voice*” is laid open in front of them, a magazine that depicts “round brown asses staring” up at them (Evans 37). Lénárt-Muszka points out that the ad serves as a concrete example of the commodification and consumption of Black women’s bodies (37). White supremacy restricts Laura’s identity to motherhood, while Angel’s is defined solely by her fetishized body, turning her into a product that is not valued for any maternal qualities. Society has constrained both women to a certain value, but Angel’s value is more dehumanizing and objectified as a Black woman. Once again, themes of consumption repeat in the story, as the women explore the ways in which society values and consumes their bodies differently based on their race.

After presenting the racism intertwined with the egg donation side of the reproductive market, “Harvest” then uses Angel’s pregnancy to illustrate the impact of this exclusion and how

it leads to disparities in reproductive healthcare. Her pregnancy revelation is another aspect of reproductive health that is influenced by consumerism. In a moment of dark humor, Angel connects her pregnancy to the bad romance novels she read in high school. “Women always know the moment they are pregnant,” Angel says of these books, leading her to expect “some motherly feeling of omniscience” that never comes (Evans 69). Angel feels the weight of motherly expectation that society has created, through consuming narratives that push confining, socially desirable stereotypes onto women; a mother must know and welcome pregnancy, leaving no room for accidents. Motherhood scholar, Adrienne Rich, exposes the harm in this narrative, stating that “Institutionalized motherhood demands of women maternal ‘instinct’ rather than intelligence” (Rich 25); Angel must instinctually know she is pregnant, and gain an all-knowing “motherly feeling of omniscience.” This narrative places the burden of pregnancy entirely onto Angel’s shoulders and alienates her from any resources. She is not allowed to demand help or education, because she should just know what to do. Those who do not follow this narrative are “stupid girls [...] careless girls, girls who didn’t worry about their futures,” Angel thinks to herself (Evans 71). The repetition of the word “girl” emphasizes a narrative that punishes and patronizes women who do not have access to proper care and education. Even Angel’s seemingly harmless romance novels promote a print culture that force women into a harmful narrative and define motherhood in a restricted and resourceless manner.

Breaking Down the Pro-Choice Narrative

As Laura accompanies Angel to the abortion clinic, the story continues to juxtapose the two characters, revealing the different ways society values their bodies, but also reinforcing that neither are exempt from external valuation. This is first seen through two contrasted images of Angel’s waiting room and the waiting room she pictures for Laura’s egg donations. Angel sits in

a Planned Parenthood with “puke-pink plastic chairs” that she describes as a “tacky not-quite-tragedy” of a waiting room (Evans 81). This is juxtaposed by Laura’s waiting room “with soft music in the background and fresh flowers on the waiting-room table, next to the *New Yorker*” (Evans 81). Angel’s room invokes a sense of cheap unease and discomfort, with “puke” colors and “plastic” chairs. Conversely, Laura’s room is tailored to comfort and cleanliness; her flowers are “fresh”, and she’s given amenities like “the *New Yorker*” to help her pass the time. This paragraph ends with the fantasy of the intended egg recipients in Laura’s waiting room, looking at her with jealousy until they realize “they could afford to buy her” (Evans 81). Once again, the story reminds us of Laura’s monetary value. These contrasting images showcase the ways in which American society chooses where to invest in reproductive health, only focusing on the comfort of those whose reproductive capacity has a marketable value. Thus, Laura continues to go deeper into providing babies for the wealthy, while Angel is not given the means to care for her own child. Angel sums up this juxtaposition in the phrase “They paid for her potential babies, and they were about to vacuum mine out of me” (Evans 82). Once again, the unnamed “they” is presented as a reminder that Angel and Laura’s reproductive choices will never entirely be their own as they are influenced and controlled by a market designed to function on eugenics and strict ideas of motherhood.

By centering these contrasting situations, the story ends by highlighting the ways in which money influences Angel’s decision to keep the baby, dispelling the illusion of free choice in a country so driven by money and capitalist ideologies. When Angel asks what she’s supposed to do with a baby, Laura’s only response is to ““Love it”” (Evans 83). As someone whose babies are valued by society, Laura’s decision to have a child comes down to whether or not she has the capacity to want or “love it.” Laura’s choice is unrestricted and free. In contrast, Angel’s first

thought is “loving something never paid anyone’s rent” (Evans 84). Money is integral to Angel’s “choice” about having a child in a way that it does not have to be for Laura, who will always have access to greater income opportunities. Over and over again, Angel’s choice to have a baby circles back to money. She imagines the choice as a row of baby dolls “all with price tags that she can’t afford,” making the baby itself into a commodity that consumers can choose to purchase. Laura and Angel are turned into sellers and buyers as Angel thinks, “[I]t seemed wrong to me, that money should be the difference between a baby and not-a-baby. I had a thing inside of me that I could not afford, and Laura had a thing inside of her that she couldn’t afford to sell” (Evans 84). Babies are turned into “things” that can only be sold and afforded by groups that the market uplifts. The choice to have a baby disappears from the primary equation as Angel thinks, “Any way you looked at it, where there should have been a child, there was a math problem” (Evans 84). Angel’s decision to have a baby is no longer a choice, but a complicated numbers game to be solved.

This money-driven situation that Angel has been placed in introduces a problem with the hands-off, pro-choice mindset that *Roe v. Wade* has initiated in the United States. Angel may have the “choice” to get an abortion, but society has not given her the means to raise a child, if that is the choice she wants to make. Andrea Smith discusses the problem with the “pro-choice” framework in her essay “Beyond Pro-Choice versus Pro-Life.” Smith states that “the pro-life versus pro-choice paradigm is a model that marginalizes women of color, poor women, and women with disabilities” because it “masks the structures of white supremacy and capitalism that undergird the reproductive choices women make” (A. Smith 152). Smith’s argument is clearly witnessed in “Harvest,” as Angel’s struggle to keep her pregnancy comes from her financial problems that are caused by a racialized market. The hands-off, capitalist approach to

reproduction in the United States leaves Angel completely alone and resourceless in her situation. Angel decides to keep the baby after receiving Laura's egg money, which is money that is only available to Laura through a racially biased egg donation business. The story points out a serious flaw with the reproductive rights framework that *Roe v. Wade* promotes. Born under the right to privacy, *Roe v. Wade* took a hands-off approach to abortion, giving women the right to choose what to do with their bodies. While seemingly progressive on the surface, this hands-off mentality also absolves the government of responsibility to provide access to reproductive healthcare or make any effort to assist an individual's choice. As Smith emphasizes, the "concept of choice is connected to a possession of resources" and "under a capitalist system, those with resources are granted more choices" (160). Consequently, the right to choose becomes a privilege only given to those who can afford it. "Harvest" reveals the deadly cycle that capitalism traps Angel in, as Angel is not given the means to earn money in the way that Laura is, and without this money she is not given the luxury of reproductive choice. The illusion of choice breaks down, as money repeatedly finds its way into Angel's decision-making process. In the concluding paragraph, Angel exposes the world around her for what it truly is: "the universe was a whole series of transactions, checks waiting to be cashed" (Evans 85). As a market plagued with white supremacy excludes her from participating in transactions, Angel has no check to cash and no freedom of choice.

Traditional Knowledge and Communal Support as Reproductive Resistance

As Angel is suffocated by a demanding world of transactions, the story presents small instances in which Angel rejects the products around her, displaying forms of resistance to the racialized healthcare economy that harms her. One rejection of medicalized reproduction comes in the form of familial knowledge. When Angel tells her father that she's pregnant he offers her a

bottle of molasses. ““Take a spoonful of this every day, it’s good for the baby. Your mother took it when she was pregnant, and look how good you turned out,” he tells Angel (Evans 74). While it is a brief moment in the story, the bottle of molasses promotes the unique forms of reproductive care that extend beyond the purchase of medication and medical assistance. Angel may place trust in the reproductive experience of her mother, placing importance on community and generational care in reproductive health. In fact, the importance of community rings throughout the whole of “Harvest’s” narrative, battling the overbearing presence of consumerism that pushes women into specific reproductive narratives. The story takes time to name and describe each of Angel’s roommates in detail, establishing the community she surrounds herself with as a key element of the story (Evans 67). In one instance Angel and her roommates teach Laura how to put a tampon in, pulling from their personal stories and experiences to educate her (Evans 61). These moments of community and knowledge sharing shift power away from the forces that work to isolate and divide the group of women. Whether its Angel and her friends teaching Laura about menstruation or Laura accompanying Angel to the abortion clinic, there is a feeling of support that sustains itself up to the last moment when Laura gives Angel her money to raise the child.

The importance of community in a society so focused on the individual is a key part of Black Feminist theory. Jennifer C. Nash discusses the importance of the collective in her description of what she terms “black feminist love politics.” Nash theorizes a way in which love rather than pain may be at the center of Black theoretical work, and how that love can become a part of the structural system that currently functions through the oppression and mistreatment of Black women. She discusses the importance of “mutual vulnerability” between people and a shift from individual focus to the collective, as a way to shift structural power and hierarchy (Nash

116). “Harvest” explores the importance of love and vulnerability through each of Angel’s relationships. In a moment of extreme vulnerability, Angel asks Laura to accompany her to the abortion clinic, thinking, “I needed her to understand what she couldn’t possibly: how it felt not to be her” (Evans 80). Angel’s thoughts urge Laura to forgo her individuality, in return for a moment of collective support. Despite knowing Laura will never fully understand, Angel takes a leap of faith to ask for help and Laura agrees. In this moment, Nash’s idea of mutual vulnerability rings true. Laura may not fully understand Angel as an individual but shows up with her support anyway.

This shift away from understanding to unconditional support also follows Loretta J. Ross’s application of the African philosophy Ubuntu in her writings on reproductive justice theory. Originating from the Bantu peoples, Ubuntu rose from a revisiting of African history and a communal recognition of post-colonial trauma. Ubuntu challenges the individualistic theories of Western thought and promotes an “unconditional recognition” and support between people that transcends a need for understanding. Ross describes the restrictive nature of understanding, as it connects empathy to a required “knowledge and propinquity, which are by definition limited” (“Conceptualizing Reproductive Justice” 202). Rather than requiring Black women to educate white people on what it means to be them, Ubuntu imagines a system of universal support that recognizes difference but does not require people to fully understand another’s background to offer them help. Angel recognizes the impossibility of Laura knowing “what it felt like to not be her,” reflecting the limitation in understanding that Ross describes. However, Angel still asks for support and Laura still gives it, revealing a moment of support between the women that forgoes understanding. Just like Angel does not judge Laura for her inexperience with a tampon, Laura does not push Angel on her decision to go to the abortion clinic or her

choice to keep the baby. The two offer each other support without demanding an understanding of the other's decisions, reflecting a model of communal support where an individual receives the resources and education they need to make a reproductive choice that is entirely their own. It is in these moments of connection that "Harvest" reveals community and collective support as central to reproductive caring in a society that breeds division and isolation.

“Tomorrow:” The Search for Reproductive Care in a Failing US Economy

Like “Harvest,” Ling Ma’s short story “Tomorrow” follows a woman dealing with an unplanned pregnancy. Rather than being set in the current day, “Tomorrow” imagines a United States on the brink of destruction as it loses its global power and continues down an economic decline. Despite the text presenting itself as a speculative piece, the realities in “Tomorrow” are eerily similar to today. The text describes a situation where the US “is no longer number one” (Ma 198). However, this “number one” rhetoric has already proven to be defunct in our current system, as the US rolls back on progressive policies and our own economy sits in turmoil. As the title suggest, the story is not a far-off reality but something we could wake up in “Tomorrow.”

The story’s main character, Eve, is an immigrant middle-aged woman navigating her pregnancy complication, while also trying to consider how to raise a child given the grim realities around her. The story intentionally withholds what Eve’s country of origin is, instead describing her only as an immigrant who does not appear to be “American” (Ma 202). The vagueness of this description provides a sense of universality to the isolation that Eve experiences, as the US system alienates anyone who does not appear “American,” or white. The use of enumeration and repetition places Eve in a system of overconsumption and waste, and she is continuously juxtaposed with the white men around her to illustrate how differently someone of Eve’s subject position experiences the systemic racism of the American economy. The story also uses repetition and imagery to enhance the abject elements of the story, and Eve’s birth defect becomes a repeated image of America’s failure in reproductive healthcare.

“Tomorrow” is written by Chinese American author, Ling Ma, and it was published in 2022. The story’s publication process occurred during the same time that *Dobbs* was being argued in the courts, and it was released the same month as the Supreme Court’s final decision to

overturn the constitutional right to abortion, situating it in a period of extreme distress for reproductive rights.

Reproduction as a “Local” and “Global” Issue

Throughout “Tomorrow,” the story continuously plays with the relationship between the individual and the society they live in, as Eve faces her own crisis while the economy around her collapses into decay. When Eve first considers how to deal with her unplanned pregnancy, she thinks back to a question repeatedly posed by Ben, her ex-partner and the baby’s father: ““Is this a local or a global issue?”” he asks her (Ma 199). Ben defines a local issue as “a contained problem with an identifiable solution,” while a global issue refers to “a problem created by a complex, undefined causal network, and therefore had no definitive solution.” “For that reason,” Ben says, “a global issue was not one worth worrying about” (199). But what happens when local and global issues overlap? Eve finds herself in the center of Ben’s cut-and-dry framework, as the global problems around her influence the answer to her question: “how to raise a child in this time and place?” Eve is not merely asking how to raise a child but must consider the factors of “time and place” (199). The story’s detailed enumeration of the wasting world around Eve and the contrasting position of her and Ben illustrate that Eve’s “local choices” on reproduction will always be intertwined with the “global issues” surrounding her.

Like Angel in “Harvest,” the primary “local” issue Eve deals with is how she is going to pay for a baby. “She knew she would keep it. The realization was not met with a celebratory feeling, so much as an obsessive accounting for her financial health,” Eve thinks, with the use of the word “obsessive” setting up the first instance of enumeration in the form of Eve’s financial assets. Eve’s money problem is first presented as a “local” issue, as the question comes down to “her” finances, appearing to give her agency in solving the problem. She lists off a number of

financial solutions, such as “a drawer full of family jewelry, a 401(k), an IRA, and a one-bedroom condo” (Ma 198). The use of enumeration creates the illusion that Eve has the means and individual resources to sustain herself and the power to make her own decision. However, this enumeration is immediately mirrored in the following sentence to present the global state of decay she’s situated in. Rather than a list of Eve’s financial assets it is a list of the trash on the beach around her: “At the beach, a floating island of trash washed ashore, the frothing waves spewing plastic debris, bottles, tampon applicators, dental floss across the sand.” As Eve contemplates her personal financial issues, she sits among the detritus of economic decline. Trash upon trash marks the decaying situation that the United States is in. “The US was no longer number one,” the story explains before exposing the country as a dumping ground for other nations’ trash (98). Eve’s own financial troubles sit in a pool of nation-wide failure, highlighting that the question of raising a child is both a “local” and “global” issue for Eve, and the national crisis around her is in fact “worth worrying about,” despite what Ben may say. The repeated use of enumeration conveys the inescapability of consumption and waste surrounding Eve and her decision-making.

Another “local” issue that is a result of “global” market problems is the pregnancy defect that Eve experiences. Eve goes to the doctor because the baby’s arm starts sticking out of her vagina during her pregnancy. Once again, she asks, “Was this local or global?” while deciding whether to spend money on a clinic visit (Ma 200). Eve then meets with a white, male doctor who explains that Eve’s pregnancy defect may be “from microplastics in the water, from discontinued hygiene products,” or “from asbestos laced talcum powder” (201). Eve is presented with a list of problems she has no control over but has still made an impact on her personal

reproductive health. She becomes an embodiment of global issues and unregulated products, as her own bodily abjection is a result of global environmental problems.

While Eve must deal with both global and local problems, Ben is in a position that allows him to think of the two types of problems as mutually exclusive. Ben is a white American man, placing him at the top of a system that is designed to benefit him. Thus, his local situation is not influenced by global issues. The difference in Ben and Eve's positions is represented through their workplace. Both Ben and Eve started at the same work at the same time, yet Ben "advanced more quickly" than Eve, despite not being a "natural manager" (Ma 209). The ease in which Ben moves to a position of power over Eve, despite not being particularly adept at his job, represents a greater system that lifts white men into positions of power. As an immigrant woman, Eve's value in the United States is inferior to Ben's. Also, through working as her boss, Ben literally has corporate power over Eve's reproductive choices. "I'm not going to let you quit your job," Ben tells her after Eve shows him the pregnancy defect and tells him her plan to leave Virginia. He proceeds by saying, "'here's what we're going to do,'" placing himself and the company in Eve's decision making with the use of the word "we" (Ma 211). Ben has the power to select Eve's vacation days and demand her back in the office, asserting his own agenda over her "local" problems. As a white man in a position of power, "time and place" hold no weight for Ben and the list of global issues truly becomes "not worth worrying about" for him.

The White Privilege in Willful Ignorance

Throughout "Tomorrow," repeated images of the abject are presented in forms of Eve's reproductive health, turning the failing system of waste and monetized markets around her into tangible burdens that Eve must physically carry. In contrast, the white male characters are in a position that allow them to ignore the products of this systemic failure. As Eve searches for

support and acknowledgement of her bodily abjections, she is turned away, exposing a system that creates abjections and then ignores them.

“Tomorrow” starts with a mention of Eve’s IUD, “which had become so deeply embedded in her uterine lining that only the uninsured process of surgical extraction could remove it,” presenting a deeply guttural image of Eve’s contraception (Ma 197). Already, the story has set up a relationship between reproductive healthcare and money that results in a bodily abjection. Ma’s description of Eve’s IUD being “deeply embedded in her uterine lining” invokes an unsettling sensation, as the contraception connects itself further and further into Eve’s biology. The IUD is no longer helpful but serves as an “expired” product that Eve cannot remove from her body, establishing a feeling of inescapability and hopelessness. The only solution for removal is an “uninsured” surgery. The emphasis on insurance reveals the trap that Eve is set in: the only way to remove the product from her is to pay for more services. As it sits there, Eve’s IUD becomes a product of decay just like the trash-filled world around her. “Tomorrow” sets up a loop of consumption, as women must pay for contraception and pay to get it removed, revealing the monetization of healthcare at every step along the reproductive road. The abject nature of Eve’s IUD turns this capitalist healthcare problem into a tangible consequence that embeds itself into the individual woman, making it Eve’s burden to literally carry inside her.

The presence of abjection continues as the result of unregulated products manifests into Eve’s pregnancy defect: the baby arm protruding out of her vagina. “It was an appendage of ruddy flesh,” the story reads, using uncomfortable words like “translucent” and “webbed” to describe the baby’s arm. The story takes its time on the description of the arm, indulging in all its uncomfortable colors and premature features, turning it into something more abnormal than a typical arm. “It was alive,” the text reads, as if the arm is Frankenstein’s monster, rather than a

baby appendage (Ma 200). Throughout the story, the text repeatedly goes back to the baby arm, making the tangible effect of a capitalist system that has failed Eve inescapable. When Eve sneezes, she can feel the arm shake with a “jiggly, vibrational energy,” detailing the uncomfortable sensory experience of the abjection protruding from Eve’s body. When she walks along streets, the abjection may be hidden to pedestrians, but the reader is reminded of the baby arm that “swung lightly” under Eve’s dress (Ma 204). In a particularly visceral moment, a breeze makes the baby arm contract “as if it was trying to pull itself out of her,” turning the abjection into physical pain (Ma 207). The story continuously circles back to the arm, serving as an unforgettable reminder that Eve must carry the abjection wherever she goes.

While the reader is not granted such an option, the white male characters in the story actively ignore these abjections, even as Eve searches for help in her most vulnerable state. When Eve shows Ben the arm and asks if he wants to touch it, he tells her “not right now.” “He was polite in his repulsion,” the story reads, followed up by Ben telling Eve to zip herself back up. The abjection forced upon Eve turns her into a site of “repulsion” that Ben pushes aside (Ma 211). Eve may zip herself up and hide the abjection from Ben, but the arm continues to hang under her skirt fabric, inseparable from Eve.

In another instance, Eve goes to the doctor and shows him the arm. “He did not wish to look at it,” the narration says, as the doctor refuses to lift up Eve’s gown (Ma 201). Even the person paid to examine and treat Eve’s pregnancy refuses to acknowledge the abjection that he knows is there. As white men, both Ben and the doctor have the privilege of ignoring the abject products of the failing world around them. The doctor dismisses Eve’s concerns, telling her “It’s not ideal, but I’ve seen worse,” and waving her off as another small nuisance that he does not need to acknowledge on any deeper level. The doctor shows no alarm at the fact that there is an

increase in birth defects among women and offers little reassurance. Instead, he recommends a WebMD site for Eve to look at pregnancy advice and sends her off to follow up with her obstetrician, not without reminding her of the copay she owes (Ma 203). The doctor has the luxury of picking and choosing what information he may care about, pushing away the abjection and care that Eve actually needs. In contrast, Eve must go through a list of places and steps to receive care; from doctor to obstetrician, Eve's care becomes diluted into a list just like her finances. Eve must physically bear the product of an unregulated, deteriorating capitalist system, while the white men who benefit from such a system look at this abjection with disgust and abandon her. Eve becomes abject herself, as she alone is forced to carry and internalize the global problems that Ben and the doctor wish to ignore. The world around Eve is afraid to look at and acknowledge the monstrosity it has created.

Support Over Understanding in Reproductive Care

Unlike Angel, Eve starts the story without a support community, but rather in a place of isolation. While in the United States, the only two characters that Eve interacts with are Ben and the doctor. It is only when Eve returns to her home country that she finds care through an estranged great-aunt. By juxtaposing the relationship Eve has with Ben and with her aunt, the story emphasizes that knowing someone does not equate to care, and that care can be accomplished without fully understanding someone, once again reflecting Ross's application of Ubuntu into reproductive justice thought.

At the start of the story, Ben serves as Eve's closest relationship, yet the story constantly illustrates a divide and lack of care between them. "He was always willfully misinterpreting her," Eve thinks as Ben tells her that there is no need for her to quit her job (Ma 210). Ben's misinterpretation of Eve is not unintentional, but "willful," illustrating that Ben does understand

what Eve wants but chooses to push for his own agenda. Thus, Ben's actions reflect a lack of care towards Eve, through his intentional ignorance of her wants. The divide between the two characters manifests itself visually as Eve explains the nature of their lunch walks together. "He didn't like even his shadow to publicly touch hers," turning Ben's willful lack of understanding and care towards Eve into a tangible image on the pavement. Despite being the person Eve has the most intimacy with in the story, Ben could not be further away from her needs. This disconnect is unmistakably tied to race. When Ben finds a girlfriend that he publicly shows affection to, Eve understands that "they came from the same background, the same type of family," implying that Ben's new girlfriend is white like him (Ma 210). The repetition of "same" establishes where Ben's lack of care towards Eve comes from: Ben's compassion requires a sameness, or complete understanding, among him and the other person.

In contrast, when Eve travels to her home country, she receives reproductive care from her great-aunt without either of them knowing a thing about each other. "This aunt was essentially a stranger," Eve thinks upon meeting her. And yet, this thought is immediately followed by a moment of comfort: "As her aunt stroked her forehead, she thought that, yes, finally she understood what homecoming was supposed to be. It was to be comfortable in a way you couldn't be elsewhere" (Ma 214). Despite being with a "stranger," Eve's feelings of separation and isolation are replaced with a feeling of "homecoming" and comfort, establishing that care does not require knowledge of a person. The two do not even speak the same language but still manage to treat each other as family through semi-accurate translation apps and acts of physical care (Ma 217). Eve does not receive pregnancy care from the person she considers knowing the most but instead receives care from someone who barely understands the language she's speaking.

The juxtaposition between Eve's two situations can be understood through Ross's Ubuntu discussion. Ben's relationship with Eve reinforces the limiting nature of understanding that Ross exposes ("Conceptualizing Reproductive Justice" 202). Ben repositions Eve's needs in terms of his own understanding as a white man at the top of a hierarchy that supports him. It is not enough for Eve to ask him for support because Ben's empathy requires a full understanding of the subject-position she is in. His need for sameness when it comes to public displays of care leaves Eve isolated, as she can never make Ben fully understand her position as an immigrant woman in the United States. In contrast, the relationship between Eve and her great-aunt reflects the Ubuntu framework that guides Ross's thinking. Despite being total strangers, Eve's aunt does not require a full understanding of Eve to care for her needs. Eve describes being "mothered into an oblivious ooze" by her aunt (Ma 214). The ability for strangers to mother each other depicts the shift in human relationships that Ross promotes; the act of being human and recognizing that we are all subject to each other allows strangers to offer mutual care and support without requiring any form of understanding. To be human is enough to receive care.

The Triumph of American Failure

While Eve and her aunt's relationship begins to successfully follow this vision of mutual vulnerability and care, the two ultimately end up separated, highlighting that the work of reframing reproductive care is a difficult process amongst the overpowering domination of Western philosophy that breeds isolation. Eve leaves her aunt's house, after her aunt panics at seeing the baby arm. Upon her aunt seeing the arm, Eve immediately feels the need to start "pleading her own case," falling back into a system of care that demands understanding (Ma 220) "It is very common in America," Eve tells her aunt, framing the arm's abject nature as a representation of American consumption and failure. She leaves and decides to "return to the

US, where she would give birth to her baby, the first to be born an American citizen” (Ma 222). Eve imagines her baby being “free,” following the American capitalist promise of independence. Yet, independence and isolation become muddled, as Eve sits on her own, once again thinking about ways to save money (Ma 223). Eve is anything but “free” to make her own choices, as she is restricted to a limited number of resources, revealing the backwards promise of American independence; in a system without collective caring, Eve’s lack of resources hinders her freedom of choice. As the power of community care crumbles away once again, Eve is left completely alone as she goes into labor at the airport.

“Tomorrow’s” ending showcases the United States’ abandonment of Eve, as the plane back to America literally leaves her behind, and the dream of independence turns into a reality of suffering and isolation. The story ends on an unknown future, as the American system does not offer Eve a sure support for her or her child and leaves her stranded instead. Eve becomes collateral damage in a system that creates “global issues” and abjections and then proceeds to ignore them. It is only when Eve is completely removed from the US that she feels a sense of comfort, raising a deep-rooted concern with consumerism and the American healthcare system. The US system actively resists models of collective care, exposing a need for deep structural changes that center community support, rather than a system that passes off structural burdens to individuals.

“Bloodchild:” Science Fiction as a Site for Reimagining Reproductive Politics

The final story this thesis examines extends beyond the United States and instead imagines an entirely new system of reproductive health on an entirely new planet. Octavia Butler’s “Bloodchild” follows Gan, a young human boy who is preparing to be a surrogate for an alien named T’Gatoi. Gan lives in the Preserve, a community of humans offered protection by the Tlic alien race. In exchange for their protection, humans must serve as surrogates and bear the offspring of the Tlic. Published in 1984, “Bloodchild” is the earliest piece of work in this thesis, yet it offers a radical and futuristic look at the structural possibilities that may reframe how reproductive health is centered in a society. Known for her dystopian and science fiction stories that center around Black experiences and characters, Butler’s work is one of the earliest examples of Afrofuturism, the literary and arts genre that examines Black history and culture through a science fiction lens (Washington 2022). Butler’s work uses science fiction to imagine new possibilities for Black people; ones that decenter white supremacy and rethink the neoliberalist, hierarchical structures that prevail in the United States.

In “Bloodchild,” Butler takes humanity away from the US medical system and places reproduction in an alien setting. The story imagines a situation in which no humans have authority over reproductive hierarchies. On the surface, “Bloodchild” is a horrifying situation, where humans are at the mercy of alien systems and are constantly subject to their authority. Rather than repeated notions of consumerism and decay, the repetition in “Bloodchild” appears through the repeated presence of abject alien features. While the abject hides under clothes and curtains in “Tomorrow,” the repetition of the alien and abject is at the center of “Bloodchild,” making its presence impossible for any character to ignore. However, this abjection also serves

as a resistance to colonial narratives that center an oppressor and an oppressed, as it reimagines reproduction as a symbiotic system, rather than a hierarchical one. The feeling of consumerism driven by enumeration in “Harvest” and “Tomorrow” falls away in “Bloodchild,” as reciprocity and care become the center of reproductive choice, rather than money. When placed against a story so full of alien horrors, “Bloodchild” forces us to consider the horrors of our own system and what we deem normal vs alien.

Reproduction as a Universal Human Burden

In her own discussion of the story, Butler talks about wanting to write a story about humans “paying the rent” to live elsewhere, asking the question “Who knows what we humans have that others might be willing to take in trade for a livable space on a world not our own?” (Butler 32). As Butler illustrates, “Bloodchild” is a story in which humans no longer have the power to create their own structures or hierarchy. Humans have not colonized the new planet they live on but instead must offer up their own power of reproduction to pay rent to the Tlics, subverting a conquest narrative where humans take over a new planet. As Butler scholar Amanda Thibodeau suggests, “the impulse to ‘discover’ and colonize is deeply connected to reproductive and erotic drives,” and Butler’s subversion of this conquest narrative presents a shift away from heteronormativity and white supremacy (Thibodeau 268). The power of human conquest is challenged, forcing humans to consider how to live in a situation where they do not have hierarchical power. On this new planet, reproduction becomes the main source of human authority and power, and pregnancy becomes an experience of all humans. “Bloodchild” redefines reproduction as a universal human condition or burden. Race and gender are stripped away, as human life becomes defined by alien structures. The subversion of gender and race hierarchy is touched on throughout the story, as the relationship between Tlic and human is

explored, creating a new way to define reproductive relationships and challenging the definitions we consider to be concrete.

The word “human” itself loses meaning, as the Tlics rename humanity with the word “Terrans,” establishing a human society that is now defined by a separate term (Butler 3). There is no separation of race or gender, but rather a separation of “Tlic” and “Terran.” In one discussion of birth, Gan tells his brother that when it comes to surrogacy, the Tlics “usually take men to leave the women free to bear their own young” (Butler 21). Thus, the burden of birth falls on both men and women; men must birth more Tlics, and women must birth more Terrans. “Bloodchild” strips away the hierarchy of human reproduction, as pregnancy and birth become a universal part of the Terran experience. Patricia Melzer discusses the importance of such gender subversions, stating that the reconstruction of reproductive capacity works to “destabilize the reproduction process as we know it, and therefore make the ‘natural constructions of categories impossible” (Melzer 85). Butler challenges the idea that categories of race and gender arose “naturally,” and highlights that they are systemically constructed definitions that serve to reinforce structures of oppression. The ability for aliens to strip the word “human” of all meaning exposes the fragility of systems and definitions that appear to be concrete in our own society, opening a door for reimagination and systemic change.

The Alien Concept of Mutual Care in Reproductive Systems

The question of how Butler redefines these terms is a complicated one; is the Tlic/Terran relationship just another form of an oppressor and an oppressed or is it something else? The position of the Tlic/Terran reproductive relationship in “Bloodchild” has been a constant debate among Butler scholars, raising the question as to whether Gan’s situation is a story of enslavement and “exploitation,” or if it can be defined as something else (Donawerth 40). The

relationship between Tlic and Terran is sometimes described as “parasitic,” as Thibodeau suggests, stating that the story could be read as “a mere reverse-metaphor for patriarchal oppression,” as the female Tlics assert a political and physical dominance over the Terrans (Thibodeau 271). Indeed, the text sometimes treats T’Gatoi’s body as a “cage” and enclosed spaces seem to place Gan and the other humans in a prison that Tlics may pull from at their whim, potentially modeling a form of reproductive slavery. The scene of Bram Lomas being cut open describes what appears to be a brutally painful process, that Gan himself feels is a form of “torture” (Butler 15). Throughout the story, the human characters are subject to bodily abjections at the hands of the Tlic.

Yet Butler insists that “Bloodchild” is a “love story” (Butler 30). “It amazes me that some people have seen ‘Bloodchild’ as a story of slavery. It isn’t. It’s a number of other things though,” Butler states in her Afterword to “Bloodchild.” So how else may “Bloodchild” be defined as a story? Butler discusses her experience in Peru as an inspiration for the story after she discovered the Botfly, an insect species whose maggot-laying habits particularly disturbed her. She does not point to slavery as the source of the story’s brutality but rather the horrific ways that we may be subject to nature. “When I have to deal with something that disturbs me as much as the botfly did, I write about” Butler says, reinforcing the importance of sitting with and dissecting meaning from the things that appear alien and abject. Existing as both a disturbing and transformative story, “Bloodchild” requires this same level of dissection. Butler imagines a story where people are a “lifetime away” from Earth, pushing us to think beyond the confines of US structures and history (Butler 31). While it’s fair to acknowledge the ways in which “Bloodchild” reflects a history of reproductive slavery, the relationship between Gan and

T’Gatoi in this story also positions reproduction in a place that challenges hierarchy and resists being an American system in space.

Marquita R. Smith discusses the ways in which posthuman reproduction redefines reproductive relationships in “Bloodchild.” She argues that humans and Tlics live in an interdependent coexistence, in which Tlics need humans to surrogate their offspring and humans rely on Tlics for a home and protection. T’Gatoi explains the long history of the Tlic and Terran relationship, stating, “Because your people arrived, we are relearning what it means to be a healthy and thriving people. And your ancestors, fleeing from their home world, from their own kind who would have killed or enslaved them — they survived because of us.” (Butler 25). Within this history, “Bloodchild” both rejects a system of white supremacy and enslavement and sets up a new framework for relationships. The Tlic and Terran situation presents a compromise between the two parties, rather than a system of ownership or hierarchy. As Smith states, this need for mutual survival allows both groups to “think of reproduction in terms of symbiosis instead of hierarchy” (M. Smith 52). The humans hold power in their ability to reproduce but that power does not give them the authority to overtake the Tlics. Instead, both parties hold power, and both have come to a mutual understanding of need.

This mutual understanding represents itself in Gan and T’Gatoi’s relationship throughout the story. ““There is risk [...] in dealing with a partner,”” Gan tells T’Gatoi (Butler 26). Indeed, their relationship is built on mutual trust that both of their needs will be fulfilled by the other. Neither individual is working to overpower the other but has instead recognized that their shared interests make them “partners,” rather than opponents. Gan and T’Gatoi’s partnership is further emphasized by Gan consenting to the egg insertion. When Gan tells T’Gatoi he does not want to be her surrogate, she says she will go to his sister who wants it instead (Butler 25). It is only after

Gan tells T’Gatoi “do it to me,” that she proceeds with implanting the eggs (Butler 27). Throughout the story, the two frequently define and question their relationship. ““You know me as no other does”” T’Gatoi tells Gan, ““You must decide,” displaying a moment of vulnerability and shared decision making among the two as they discuss reproduction (Butler 24). As Elyce Rae Helford suggests, Gan’s negotiation for his own autonomy in decision-making “challenges the misleading nature of categories such as ‘slave’ and ‘master,’” extending “Bloodchild’s” meaning beyond being a “story about slavery” (Helford 268). The decision the two make come back to a place of caring and mutual vulnerability, and a consistent reassurance of their relationship, reflecting visions of the “love story” that Butler claims to have constructed. Even if it is not a typical relationship, Butler presents the act of reproduction and compromise as something that must be shrouded in trust and assurance.

Kristin Lillvis offers a similar reading of “Bloodchild,” focusing on the presence of maternal love and care that challenges a patriarchal system of reproduction (Lillvis 7). She asserts that the universal ability of Terrans to birth allows Gan to access a “motherline” from both his mother and father, that he then offers to T’Gatoi through his own promises of care (Lillvis 17). Through embracing and offering maternal care, Gan gains authority in the relationship and teaches T’Gatoi his own familial lessons on relationships. This presence of care and shared teaching among T’Gatoi and Gan complicate the notion that “Bloodchild” is merely a gender reversal of hierarchy. As Gan points out at the beginning of the story, there was a time where Terran were treated as caged animals for breeding (Butler 9). Yet, this system shifts to a structure of compromise and care among Terran and Tlic, presenting a system where exertions of power are replaced with symbiosis and the two groups receive knowledge from each other.

In its own peculiar way, “Bloodchild,” is an application of Ross’s discussion of Ubuntu in reproductive care. Gan and T’Gatoi’s system of compromise in the end represents a consideration of how people can “live ethically with difference,” as Smith suggests (47). The abject is fully embraced by the human in this story, allowing for a system of compromise that transcends the boundaries of human and alien, and transcends a need for understanding. Ross’s vision of “collective mothering” in a community also shines through in “Bloodchild” (“Conceptualizing Reproductive Justice” 201). Gan’s mother meets T’Gatoi when she is a small grub and the two grow up together. Now both Gan’s mother and T’Gatoi provide care for the children and care for one another. Amongst the repetition of the abject, the word “care” is constantly repeated throughout the story by different characters in reference to different relationships. In fact, the final line of the story is “I’ll take care of you” (Butler 29). While Gan’s situation appears entirely terrifying, the abject horrors he faces do not leave him in a state of abandonment like Angel or Eve. It is the only story among the three that concludes with some sense of security, raising a daunting question: if an abject alien system offers more concrete support to its subjects, what does that say about the state of care in our own system?

The Abject as a Resistance to Medicalized Markets

Beyond its resistance of hierarchy, “Bloodchild” also uses the abject to push back on the increased medicalization of surrogacy. The alien body allows for a reimagining of surrogacy as private, household work with no monetary involvement. This pushback against monetized medical procedures is most visible in the scene where T’Gatoi extracts the grubs from Bram’s body. The language used in this scene is reminiscent of a cesarean section, as the story describes Bram getting opened up with a “first cut” and eventually being “sewed up,” like a typical surgery (Butler 15, 22). Yet, this procedure is set away from hospitals and medical markets.

Unlike “Bloodchild,” the state of surrogacy in the United States is an extremely unregulated and medicalized space. Kalindi Vora and Heather Jacobsen both consider the relationship between neoliberalism and surrogacy in the United States and transnational surrogate systems, pulling from their own ethnographic studies that interview surrogates and the intended parents (IPs) of surrogate babies. In *Labor of Love*, Jacobsen examines the unregulated nature of domestic surrogate relationships in the United States. Following a laissez-faire approach, the United States government has been largely hands-off in surrogacy services, turning it into an unregulated market space that relies on private contractual agreements (Jacobsen 16). Like the practice of egg donations, surrogacy tends to be an option that is only accessible to middle- and upper-class families.⁴ She describes the spread of this unregulated surrogacy market into “reproductive tourism,” as some international IPs rely on the unregulated US market, while many Americans take advantage of cheap international surrogate markets (Jacobsen 17). Vora explores this international structure in “After the Housewife,” illuminating the presence of hierarchy and commodification in transnational surrogacy between Indian surrogates, and white American IPs. Capitalist logic has turned both domestic and transnational surrogacy into unregulated spaces where surrogates are often undervalued and objectified. Vora identifies a pattern in which “advances in biotechnology make the bodies [...] of workers more sellable and mobile than their labour,” treating surrogates as a means to output product. Surrogates are only valued for their bodily product and not their labor, supporting “the logic of capitalist accumulations via women’s bodies and reproductivity” (Vora 45). Vora points to the domestic and household work that is undervalued in a capitalist system and suggests that shifting focus to

⁴ Jacobsen’s study offers a lot of interesting insight into the racialized selection of surrogate participants as well. Surrogates in the United States tend to be white middle-class women to avoid claims of exploitation, while the opposite is true for transnational surrogacy. This thesis barely scratches the surface of complicated relationship between domestic and international surrogacy, which could be a whole discussion on its own.

this domestic labor can turn surrogacy into “a site of resistance,” where surrogates are valued and supported beyond the output of the baby (Vora 45). She imagines a process of decolonizing reproduction, in which resources among surrogates are shared, and domestic labor is recognized as a vital form of work that extends beyond what is represented in a surrogacy contract. The process of surrogacy becomes equally valued to the product, resisting a capitalist system that treats surrogates as a womb up for rent.

Through the abject, “Bloodchild” imagines a world in which the process of surrogacy becomes entirely household labor, creating a site of resistance like Vora suggests, and eliminating the role of markets and products in reproduction. The entire process is done by the Tlic, replacing the repetition of technology and medical services with the repetition of abject images. T’Gatoi uses her “claw” to cut the man open and her “saliva” to slow his bleeding; she bites away the egg cases and Bram is given eggs from the Tlics to soothe his pain (Butler 14, 15). While this process may appear violent and gruesome, it is extremely reminiscent of our own surgical procedures. Scalpels, stitches and pain killers are turned into alien body parts that serve the same purpose. The alien replaces medical markets, and reproduction no longer has any monetary value.

The process of surrogacy also appears as a centralized system, rather than a free-for-all exchange of contracts like Jacobsen examines in the United States. As a government official, T’Gatoi oversees the surrogacy process and aids in the joining of all Tlic and Terran families, creating a surrogacy system of unified and central support (Butler 5). Unlike Eve in “Tomorrow,” Gan does not have to finance a long list of medical visits and procedures. Instead, he receives all his reproductive care in the household. There is no company to match surrogates

or doctors to birth the baby, it is a centrally secured process that is entirely removed from financial markets.

“Bloodchild” also emphasizes community support by creating a connected network of surrogates and families. Vora discusses the importance of such forms of community. Through embracing the social support and relations of their communities, she argues that surrogate women may refuse “the alienation of the commercialization of their surrogacy” (Vora 45). In the context of “Bloodchild,” Gan may exist both with his family and as a surrogate of T’Gatoi, and he knows the community of Terrans around him that also serve as surrogates. This allows him his own social support throughout his surrogate process. Another moment in the story also offers the possibility of a knowledge-sharing future for surrogacy. Gan insists that Terrans should be “shown” the process of surrogacy and offers himself up as the first public display (Butler 28-29). This offer of display pushes back on the alienation and isolation of surrogacy, by enforcing a system of education and support. The expressions of care in the story also resist the commercialized surrogate model that turns surrogates into isolated objects of reproduction. T’Gatoi expresses physical and emotional care towards Gan, illustrating a form of surrogacy in which both the child and the surrogate deserve care from the intended mother and the whole process is an act of giving and receiving care from both parties. Surrogacy becomes an act of collaboration, rather than separation, pushing back on the isolating nature of laissez-faire surrogacy markets.

While the act of alien reproduction is an uncomfortable and foreign concept, Butler’s ability to place reproduction in an entirely new world highlights that science fiction can be used as a method of reimagining the structures around us and expanding beyond the ideas we have grown so accustomed to. If a system that appears entirely horrific and abject on the surface can

overcome the challenges that the US presents with reproductive care, we are forced to examine our own system and reconsider what abject concepts we have made familiar. “It wouldn’t be the British empire in space,” Butler writes in her afterword to the story. Indeed, “Bloodchild” imagines a system where reproduction escapes white supremacy and neoliberalism and is placed in a model of symbiosis and household care instead. Living in “Bloodchild” is an unsettling thought, but the repetition of care amongst the abject flourishes in a way that the other two stories lack, as unregulated free markets push the characters into abandonment. “Bloodchild” offers a structured form of reproductive care that ensures support that neither Angel nor Eve are granted, encouraging a reevaluation of the US approach to reproductive healthcare.

Conclusion

Together, these three stories follow reproductive health through a dominating capitalist system in the United States, to its eventual downfall, and to the abandonment of the United States entirely. Through exposing the structural effects of our system on individual reproductive choices, these short stories critique the interwoven nature of reproductive healthcare and capitalism.

Through their use of enumeration, Danielle Evans' "Harvest" and Ling Ma's "Tomorrow" both illustrate the proliferation of consumption, waste, and money in the United States, criticizing the system that their characters are entrapped in. In tandem with this, both stories follow a woman of color whose situation is juxtaposed with another white character; Angel and Laura become synonymous with Eve and Ben. This juxtaposition reinforces the reproductive justice argument that reproductive health will always be an intersectional issue in our system, as factors such as race, class, and gender all impact access to care. The combined use of enumeration and juxtaposition exposes the racialized economy that we live in that constantly hinders reproductive healthcare access for women of color. This dispels the pro-choice narrative at the heart of reproductive rights policies, as the United States places responsibilities on the individual while simultaneously creating an array of structural barriers to proper healthcare. Both Angel and Eve's stories are left in a state of unknown, as the United States has not offered either individual any support or investment in the wellbeing of their future or their child. In the words of "Tomorrow," the characters are asked to deal with their "local issues" independently, despite their problems being inextricably tied to "global issues" caused by racialized markets.

Within this cycle of overconsumption and increased medicalization of care, both stories offer a site of resistance that manifests further in "Bloodchild." This resistance comes in the form

of community care and mutual vulnerability, as imagined in Loretta J. Ross's discussion of Ubuntu philosophy, and Jennifer Nash's vision of love politics. In "Harvest," Angel receives community and support from her family and roommates; she also receives support from Laura, despite the strained relationship between the two of them. While Laura may not fully understand the position Angel is in, she offers her care, nonetheless, allowing her support to transcend understanding. Angel also receives reproductive care and advice from her family, shifting focus away from medicalized reproduction to ancestral care. In "Tomorrow," Eve's great aunt nurses her and provides her care, despite the two barely understanding the other's language. Community care becomes a small resistance to the largescale structures that isolate and abandon the main characters. However, neither character is fully able to overcome the problems around them as they are both left in isolation by the end of the stories, exposing the empty promise of American independence as a reality of abandonment.

"Bloodchild" takes these ideas of community care and mutual vulnerability and places them in an alien setting, replacing capitalism and consumerism with a proliferation of the abject. While these abjections appear quite terrifying on the surface, "Bloodchild" removes reproduction from the boundaries of white supremacy and capitalism and allows for a system that supports reproductive care through symbiosis. Despite his situation appearing much stranger than the others, Gan is the only character who receives a promise of care and support at the end of the story. The urgency for the characters to "care" for one another, replaces isolation with community, and hierarchy with symbiosis. "Bloodchild" is by no means a utopia for reproductive care, but when the only world promising universal care among these stories is the alien one, we are forced to reconsider the abjections in our own system that are presented as unchangeable. "Bloodchild's" ability to redefine humans in terms of alien definitions also

illustrates the fragility of constructed categories that define race and gender, encouraging possibilities of rewriting the structural boundaries in our own system.

The ability of these three stories to critique and reimagine reproductive care underscores the importance of intersectionality in authorship. Butler's power to reimagine a world entirely different from the one we know is a vision that can only be imagined by a Black woman who has historically been positioned at the bottom of a white supremacist led hierarchy. Evans' and Ma's identities as a Black woman and a Chinese immigrant respectively allow them to offer an extremely nuanced and intersectional critique of a US system that continuously disregards their needs. In the famous words of Audre Lorde, "In a world of possibility for us all, our personal visions help lay the groundwork for political action" (100). By reading from a diverse authorship, each of these stories help define the flaws in our current system and empower a new vision for change. Literature repositions and challenges what we deem to be normal and unchanging in our system, acting as a site of awareness and reimagination.

In a time where the state of reproductive healthcare is fragile, these works of fiction may guide us on ways of resistance and reinvention. None of these stories offer a perfect vision of reproductive care but instead examine the impact of individual resistance to oppressive structures that can be applied to our own system. Rather than relying on governmental structures to protect rights to reproductive choice, we must rely on the support of each other. As each of these stories highlight, sites of resistance and change begin with the willingness to trust one another at a community level and embrace all that is abject and different head on. Whether it's asking for support at an abortion like Angel or educating others on surrogacy like Gan, resistance comes from fostering community support and knowledge in a system that thrives off of isolation. Storytelling itself is a method of encouraging connection through spreading individual

experience and knowledge. By writing our own stories and accepting others, the words we write become an embrace of the mutual vulnerability and care that lays at the heart of the reproductive justice movement.

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