Reproductive Technologies, Class, and Neoliberal Capitalism in a Selection of Contemporary Feminist Speculative Fiction

Ní Chéirigh, Sadhabh

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By Sadhabh Ní Chéirigh

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Student Number: S3830233

Supervisor: Dr Evert Jan van Leeuwen

Second Reader: Dr Ruth Clemens

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Introduction

Science fiction has long since concerned itself with the possibilities of imagined future worlds, and the seemingly inevitable advancements of technology fundamental to this imagined future. The seminal writers of this genre, "drew on genuine fears apparent in the popular press about futuristic weapons" and used "science fiction to publicize their concerns about the misuse of scientific expertise" (Bowler 123). This can often lead to some of the more traditional iterations of the science fiction genre, imagining space travel, alien warfare, and the total reinvention of life on Earth (think Robert Heinlein's *Beyond This Horizon* (1942), or Isaac Asimov's *Foundation* (1951), for example). Although an interesting area in its own right, this preoccupation of hard science fiction with the advancement of technology, purely for advancements sake, can leave areas of discussion relating to the social, personal and political ramifications of developing technologies lacking. In the 1950s, following what was "indeed an explosion" (Westfahl 194) in the science fiction genre, from new material written and published, new magazines, and increased prominence in media (Westfahl 194), magazine's such as *Galaxy* emerged with the aim to publish stories that were '"too profound or revolutionary in concept for other magazines to risk publishing'" (Gold qtd in Westfahl 196). As a result, social science fiction became popular. This form of the genre was viewed as more literary, was drawn upon as "a way of teaching social theory" (Gerlach & Hamilton 162) and encouraged an analysis of science fiction as "a broader phenomenon of and within the social" which focused on science fiction as "a force involved in the construction of the modern and postmodern world-view" (Gerlach & Hamilton 163). This evolution of the genre would lead to what is now considered speculative fiction.

Speculative fiction, although certainly concerned with developing science and technologies, engages further with political and social analyses and "breaks with the limits of the traditional genre and becomes a self-critical and disturbingly open form that articulates the deep tensions within the political unconscious at the present moment" (Moylan qtd. in Carubia Glorie 148). Reproductive technologies provide a significant area of analysis as reproduction is the fundamental element of any imagined future, and the development of reproductive technologies has ramifications on every aspect of society. This thesis will analyse three works of contemporary feminist speculative fiction: Marge

Piercy's *Woman on the Edge of Time* (1976), Leni Zumas' *Red Clocks* (2018) and Annie Charnock's *Dreams Before the Start of Time* (2017), to examine how the imagined reproductive technologies available in each text exposes existing frailties in the current system of neoliberal capitalism in the West.

This thesis is primarily concerned with the relationship between reproductive technology and socioeconomic class, within the context of the neoliberal capitalist ideology prevalent in the Western world. In order to fully comprehend the extent of this relationship, it is crucial to understand the context of this socioeconomic ideology. The neoliberal capitalist ideology that underpins much of the discussion in this thesis, and its hegemonic economic framework of free trade and inherent growth, was cultivated as a joint effort between two major global superpowers in the post WWII era: the United States and the United Kingdom. During the 1970s, the USA was experiencing a period of social destabilisation as a result of the oil crisis and the final years of the Vietnam War. As a result of a combination of reasons, including increased spending on war efforts without an associated tax increase (Ribuffo 104) and the 1973-1979 OPEC oil embargo, which saw Arab states impose an embargo on the United States in retaliation for its support of Israeli military operations (Ribuffo 110) there was a period of economic decline. This period of "stagflation" saw high levels of inflation, high unemployment and low levels of economic growth all occur at once (Peterson 277). With living conditions becoming increasingly more difficult and confidence in government decision making waning among the lower social classes, the early 1970s saw a continuation of the mass social and civil unrest that characterised much of the preceding decade. The period of unrest in the 1960s, which saw people of colour, indigenous, Latinos, students, women, and the poor become "mobilized and organized in new ways to achieve what they considered to be their appropriate share of the action and rewards" (Crozier et al. 61), did not pose a fundamental threat to the dominant ruling class, who were thriving under a strong and robust economy. However, given the declining economic situation of the 1970's, what was once an "absorbable" threat began to pose too great a threat to the ruling order of the capitalist elite (Volscho 254). As a result, this mobilization of the masses became a precondition for the "long-term organized capitalist counter-mobilization... that orchestrated the imposition of neoliberal policies on American social, state and economic institutions" (Volscho 252). This project saw capitalists mobilize by blocking "legislation

sponsored by labor and liberal groups" on one hand, and by developing and pushing "the enactment of neoliberal economics policies" (Volscho 257) on the other. Under the Ronald Reagan administration, a form of neoliberalism known as "Reaganomics" focused "first and foremost, on reducing marginal tax rates," tacking "deficit spending and existing government regulations" (Steger & Roy 26) and resentful of "government growth, represented by large social entitlement programmes such as Medicaid and Social Security" (Steger & Roy 27) emerged.

Concurrently, in the United Kingdom, under the Margaret Thatcher administration, neoliberal ideology was adopted by Thatcher because of her "deep commitment to enhancing Britain's competitiveness in an increasingly fierce global economy" (Steger & Roy 31). In line with this, Thatcher "slashed commission rates and streamlined trading processes through a host of deregulations across the financial industry" (Steger & Roy 31). "Reaganomics" and "Thatcherism" coalesced to create the socioeconomic ideology that currently dominates much of the global free-trade market. This context is important to note as it underlies much of the class and socioeconomic discussion necessary for this thesis.

Neoliberal capitalism is a competitive market ideology and, as such, cannot be equally beneficial to all who live under it. In her seminal work *Unsettling the Coloniality of Being/Power/Truth/Freedom* (2003), Sylvia Wynter makes the case that "Man," white, Western, abled-bodied, and male (299) is the ideal figure of this ideology. She argues that "Man's overrepresentation of its 'descriptive statement' [Bateson 1969] as if it were that of the human itself" (262) is responsible for all of society's most pressing concerns (race, gender, economic and environmental issues, to name a few). This figure of Man was conceptualised as a result of Enlightenment humanism and the shift away from God as the centre of the universe, to Man (Wynter 299). One of the key problems with this humanist Man is that he is always defined by an Other (Wynter 265), be that another race, gender or species. As a result, a hierarchical system of value emerged, with white Man at the top and all Others' perceived value defined by how far they are from this benchmark. Consequently, many of the inherent binaries that are so central to society can be traced to this fixation with the ideologically constated identity of Western Man vs Other.

This framework can be used to understand the hierarchal positions of power that underlie many power structures, including capitalism, and is crucial in establishing how economic structures, like neoliberal capitalism, come to have such an effect on the lives of those who do not fit this ideal benchmark. This thesis will examine how those who do not adhere to the ideal criteria of Man, specifically brown, black, poor, women, are vulnerable to exploitation and class discrimination as a result of their reproductive bodies, in a range of contemporary feminist speculative fiction texts. It will also explore how these authors imagine that advancements in technology will interact with the already existing class and racial disparities, and what this suggests about the future of reproductive care under neoliberalism in the West. Sharon Hays writes of the needs to "take the familiar and attempt to make it strange" (qtd. in McFarlane 28), analysing pregnancy and reproduction via speculative fiction helps to "highlight the cultural and historical contingency of pregnancy and motherhood in order to properly critique the practices of reproduction in contemporary society" (McFarlane 28). Each text in this thesis attempts just that: to highlight the familiar and known practice of reproduction in the context of each of their contemporary setting. Even when proposing reproductive practices that are technologically advanced, each text underscores that the fundamental conceptualisation and treatment of women, pregnancy and reproduction remains paramount to imagining a vision of reproductive care in the future.

Chapter one of this thesis will examine how Marge Piercy's *Woman on the Edge of Time (WOTEOT)* (1976) imagines the future of reproductive care in the United States, as influenced by the optimistic countercultural ideals of the 1970s. This text makes for an ideal starting place as it was written just prior to the emergence of what is now known to be contemporary neoliberalism; however, many of the early anxieties put forth in this text are echoed in the later texts of contemporary feminist speculative fiction authors, exposing many of the inequities that would come to define the neoliberal structure, including the racial and class disparities implicit in reproductive healthcare. This chapter will give context to how reproductive issues, such as abortion, came to form such an important part of the fabric of society in 1970s America, through the landmark case of Roe v. Wade (1973), and how this apparent freedom was mitigated by racial and class discrimination. This chapter will then examine how Piercy, through an imagined, utopic ideal of reproduction, exposes how poor women of colour were

systematically neglected and degraded by the power structures (the healthcare system, for example) and ideologies that held dominance in 1970s America, and which would later coalesce into neoliberal capitalism.

Chapter two will discuss how Leni Zumas' *Red Clocks* (2018) takes an entirely different stance on the future of reproductive care in the United States. Rather than the idealised utopia of Piercy, Zumas, influenced by the increasingly conservative attacks on reproduction enacted under Donald Trump's presidency in America, imagines a turn to restrictive, conservative reproduction care, more in line with Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985). This text makes for a fruitful comparison to the previous chapter as it is concerned with many of the same issues of race, class and reproductive rights; however, its contemporary context exposes how deeply entrenched class and racial disparities are in reproductive care under neoliberalism. This chapter will discuss race and class in relation to the current attack on reproductive care in contemporary America, in relation to the hegemonic ideology of neoliberalism. It will examine how the ideals of this economic structure, particularly competition, come to colour "not merely market behaviour, but *all* behaviour and human action" (Peters 135) and the influence this has on the choices that individuals make for their own reproductive futures. It will also analyse how the text portrays an idealised vision of motherhood used to perpetuate neoliberal ideals and police the working class. Finally, this chapter will discuss how Zumas' imagines these neoliberal ideals will come to influence access to abortion and reproductive care, particularly across racial distinctions, and what this says about government interference in the bodies of black, brown and poor women.

Chapter three will discuss how Annie Charnock's *Dreams Before the Start of Time (DBTSOT)* (2017) imagines reproductive futures in the context of the United Kingdom. The UK, although just as involved in the creation of the neoliberal structure existent in the West (through Thatcher's government's socioeconomic policies of the 1980s), has still retained some of its public services, namely the National Health Service (NHS). This chapter will examine Charnock's speculated vision of reproductive care in the UK, through the anxiety of a failing healthcare system. It will also discuss how advancements in genetic modification and reproductive practices interact with existing social structures, and the imagined effect that this will have on existing and emerging class disparities.

Chapter 1: Marge Piercy's *Women on The Edge of Time*

Marge Piercy's *Woman on the Edge of Time (WOTEOT)* is a classic work of feminist speculative fiction. Written in 1976, the text examines women's psychological, economic, and social oppression within the patriarchal society of 1970s America, from the perspective of a poor, Latina woman living in New York. In contrast to this material reality, it presents a vision of an imagined egalitarian future which embodies the feminist and countercultural ideals of the 60s and 70s, and the relationship between the imagined future of reproductive possibility in relation to the contemporary system of capitalism. Although Piercy's text was written prior to the emergence of what is now considered to be contemporary neoliberal politics, the influence of capitalism on the role and identity of women in 1970s America is a crucial element of the text. The material conditions of life in 1970s America, for a working-class woman of colour, are crafted in this text to expound the reality of the gender, class, and racial relations of the environment. Although racial politics certainly play a considerable role and deserves rigorous scrutiny of its own, this research is more concerned with the interplay of race with class and gendered politics. In any intersectional discussion of such issues, it is always essential to identify the complex and entangled relationship between race, class, and gender, and the difficulty in extrapolating any one issue from the other.

Also pertinent to the context of this text was the landmark decision in the case of Roe v. Wade (1973), in which the U.S. Supreme Court recognized the right of the individual to determine whether to terminate or continue their pregnancy ("Roe V. Wade"). This case affirmed the essential liberty of women to self-determination regarding their own reproductive and bodily autonomy. However, it is important to note, particularly in the context of this chapter, that the access to abortion services enshrined by the ruling of Roe v. Wade was not fully extended to all individuals. In the case of Maher v. Roe (1977), an Indigenous woman sought legal action against a Commissioner in Connecticut in response to the state's limit on Medicaid benefits for first trimester abortions to those that are "medically necessary", which required a certificate from the patient's attending physician stating the abortion as such. The Court ruled that the Connecticut law placed no obstacles in the pregnant woman's path to abortion and did not "impinge upon the fundamental right recognized in Roe" (Maher v. Roe); however,

as Medicaid is a service that helps cover medical costs for people with low income, it is difficult to view this state law as anything but an obstacle in the way of poor, pregnant women who want to avail of the same services as their wealthier compatriots, for whom the luxury of private health insurance grants full access to the abortion care enshrined in Roe v. Wade. Beginning in 1976, after the American Congress established the Medicaid program in 1965, a number of versions of the "Hyde Amendment" were enacted which limited the use of federal funds to reimburse the cost of abortions under the Medicaid program. In the case of Harris v. McRae (1980), a pregnant Medicaid recipient challenged the Secretary of Health and Human Services, arguing that the Hyde Amendment violated several Amendments in the Constitution (Harris v. McRae). Similarly to Maher v. Roe, the Court ruled against the Medicaid recipient, maintaining that "the states participating in the Medicaid program were not obligated to fund medically necessary abortions" as a woman's freedom of choice did not carry with it "a constitutional entitlement to the financial resources to avail herself of the full range of protected choices" (Harris v. McRae). The Court further determined that "poverty did not qualify as a 'suspect classification'" (Harris v. McRae) and so does not meet the criteria suggesting that individuals within this group are likely subjects of discrimination. The irony of the Court ruling that those experiencing poverty are not vulnerable to discrimination, whilst simultaneously ruling that lower income women do not have the same freedom to access abortion care as those who can afford private healthcare, sets the tone for this chapter, and the thesis more generally, as it is precisely this contentious relationship between class and female reproduction that is explored throughout the three texts discussed in this research. Given the context in which it emerged, *WOTEOT* is a logical starting point for this thesis as it was written at a pivotal point for both capitalism and female reproductive rights in America, both of which would have resounding effects on the rest of the world for years to come.

That this was a pivotal point for both capitalism and reproductive rights is keenly felt in Piercy's *WOTEOT,* and the interconnected relationship between these two issues is explored in various ways throughout the novel. One such way is through the concept of self-determination. A core tenant of capitalist ideology, self-determination proposes that an individual's right to prioritise their own self-interest is paramount above all else. Although capitalism is first and foremost an economic ideology,

this individualist thinking permeates the fundamental structuring of American society and creates a tension that is identified and explored in *WOTEOT*. One of the ways it does this is by examining how reproduction and abortion can be used as tools wielded against vulnerable women. Self-determination, and its associated freedoms, only exist for those who have already attained a certain level of societal success. As discussed in the introduction to this thesis, there is a hierarchy of value in Western societies which sees white, middle-class Man as the zenith of successful humanity. This version of human has greater access to the structures and ideals of capitalism, as they were created by, and for, western Man. For those who do not meet these criteria, the freedom to avail of these ideals is often tempered by broader societal structures that do not so easily lend themselves to their success. The challenges and barriers to freedom through self-determination are often influenced by social, economic and class distinctions. The text explores this feature of society in the USA through Dolly and Connie's pregnancies and resulting abortions.

Both Dolly and Connie fall pregnant for cruel men: Dolly for her abusive "pimp" and Connie for her violent and disinterested partner. Despite the freedom to terminate their pregnancies, as enshrined in Roe v. Wade, the text challenges the reality of the choice that both women face. In both cases, there is a broader sense of coercion which suggests that there is a tension between the freedom to access abortion services and the mitigating circumstances that drive some women to these services. As a sex-worker, Dolly is financially controlled by her "pimp" Geraldo. To try and escape her situation, she intentionally does not take her birth control pills which results in her becoming pregnant with Geraldo's child. Any hope she has of him sympathising with her situation and allowing her to give up sex-work is dashed when he launches an attack on both her and Connie, demanding that she gets an abortion immediately, as she will no longer be able to engage in sex-work and financially support them both. Both Dolly's pregnancy, and her abortion, are influenced by the work she is forced to do to support herself financially. Similarly, Connie's choice to abort her pregnancy comes as a result of the baby's father walking out of her life, leaving her with "no man, no job, no money, pregnant with the baby she must abort" (Piercy 43). The text positions both women as particularly vulnerable, by virtue of their status as poor, uneducated, women of colour, to coercion as a result of economic pressure. Although

both men are presented as also being disadvantaged by the system of capitalism (both are black, have limited education and are financially disadvantaged), the text juxtaposes the freedom to self-determination that both men exhibit against the mitigated options that both Dolly and Connie must choose from. In doing so it contends that freedom is not only defined in relation to socioeconomic frameworks, but that this is inextricably linked with women's experience during this period.

The relationship between self-determination and the lived reality of those who were vulnerable to exploitation in 1970s America is explored beyond just reproduction. The degradation, and subsequent privatisation, of the healthcare system in the US is at the very forefront of the neoliberal, capitalist project (Pasquale 172). This is an anxiety that was in its nascent stage in the 1970s, but which would have lasting implications on the development of neoliberal healthcare systems in the future. Chapter 3 will discuss this anxiety in relation to contemporary anxieties in a UK setting, suggesting that Piercy keenly observed a vital area of concern for contemporary feminist speculative fiction. However, it is important to understand the antecedents in the USA. The creep of neoliberal healthcare, which relies on a model of perpetual sickness rather than health (Dumit qtd in McFarlane 25), prioritises those with vested economic interest in the system over those who it is charged to protect. This model of perpetual sickness, or risk model, treats illness as something that must constantly be protected against, rather than a rare and exceptional condition, which is in the direct interest of the pharmaceutical companies that hold so much power over US politics (McFarlane 25). This perpetual sickness, and the prioritisation of the system of power and capital over the good of the individual, is apparent in *WOTEOT*. As in many systems of unequal power relations, those at the 'bottom' of the socio-economic hierarchy are disproportionately affected by the privatisation and risk model of the US healthcare system.

This is made clear in Connie's involuntary confinement in the mental health facility. Here, where Connie is held against her will, having been committed by her brother, there is a dire sense that these 'undesirable' patients have been forgotten by society. Her involuntary admission by her brother references the historically patriarchal ideology within medicine, whereby women could be institutionalised by male family members for arbitrary reasons. This is reflected in literary works, such as Gilman's *The Yellow Wallpaper* (1892), but also the real-life case of writer Rosina Bulwer Lytton,

who was institutionalised by her husband after she publicly denounced his mistreatment of her (Blain 211). In *WOTEOT*, these individuals are subject to horrendous scientific experimentation, with all agency taken from them and given to the guardians who have committed them to this care. The implants put into their heads, to 'regulate' their emotions and allow them to re-enter society as 'functional' individuals, are inserted without any consent from the individuals themselves and are entirely experimental.

The attitude of this institution, and to those who avail of its care, is immediately evident when Connie is first admitted. She is humiliated and degraded by the attendants who, after she soils herself and is left to fester in this filth, comment "she'll smell better when she gets out. You wonder how they can live with themselves, never washing. But that's part of being sick" (Piercy 17). The immediate assumption that mental illness equates to filth and decay, by those whose sole charge it is to care for those with mental illness, speaks volumes of a system that is predicated on capital rather than care. There is a definite sense here of another one of the prevailing ideologies of capitalism/neoliberalism which invokes "traditional values of individual initiative" (Vorlander 487) to perpetuate the idea that it is those at the bottom of the social hierarchy that are responsible for their own degradation, rather than the structure (and those who perpetuate it). This idea stems from the individualist premise of both capitalism and neoliberalism. If an individual is responsible for their own life path and, as such, can raise themselves up economically and socially through hard work and resilience, then those who remain at the bottom do so through choice. A capitalist/neoliberal ideology posits that everyone has the same tools to achieve success, some just have the mindset to achieve it, and some do not. This is reiterated in Connie's response, "she wanted to scream that she washed as often as they did, that they had made her smell, made her dirty herself. But she did not dare. First, they would not listen, and second, they might hurt her. Who would care?" (Piercy 17). This raises questions not only about the freedom and power that these private healthcare providers were (and are) given over those within their care, but also about what it means to be a 'functional and productive' member of this society.

Although she attempts to engage in the system and works many jobs to provide for herself and her daughter, Connie is unable to transcend the class restrictions placed upon her by her

status as non-white, particularly non-white and female. The experience of poor women of colour in *WOTEOT* makes a definite claim about the state of American policy on female reproductive health. The system's failure of poor women of colour, particularly in reproductive care, is troubling. After receiving an abortion, Connie is subjected to a non-consensual hysterectomy, "she too, she was spayed. They had taken out her womb at Metropolitan when she had come in bleeding after the abortion and the beating from Eddie. Unnecessarily they had done a complete hysterectomy because the residents wanted practice" (Piercy 44). The image of Connie being "spayed", like an animal, speaks volumes of how the healthcare system treats real human-beings as stray animals, who need to be prevented from reproducing by those wiser and more intelligent than they. She is not the only victim of this treatment, she also witnesses another young, woman of colour who is subjected to the same: "In the bed next to her was a nineteen-year-old black woman on welfare who had been admitted for an abortion in the fourteenth week and been given a hysterectomy instead of a saline abortion" (Piercy 171). The specific mention of this young woman's status as a welfare recipient indicates that there is a very definite class element to this treatment. The determination of who is, and is not, allowed to reproduce is a method of control that is gifted only to those lucky-few at the top of the social ladder, namely white, Western, middle-class men.

There is a considerable link to a wider project of forced sterilisation that was happening around the time that this text was written. In the 1970s, as women in America were celebrating the success of Roe v. Wade, the US government was accused of involuntarily sterilising at least 25 percent of Native American women between the ages of 15 and 45 (Lawrence 400), but that figure may be as high as up to 50 percent (Norris 67). This programme of forced sterilisation was not confined to the Native American community. According to a National Fertility Study, conducted in 1970 by Princeton University's Office of Population Control, "twenty percent of all married Black women have been permanently sterilised. Approximately the same percentage of Chicana women had been rendered surgically infertile. Moreover, forty-three percent of women sterilised through federally subsidised programmes were Black" (Davis 197). The program to control who could and could not reproduce in

America during this time is well documented and there are many examples of disproportionate control over the reproduction of POC, immigrants, mentally and physically disabled (Ko).

Like many speculative fictions exploring such a topic, the text posits a vision of reproduction that takes place wholly *outside* the body. Interestingly, not only does *WOTEOT* propose an alternative method of reproduction, but it also undermines the fundamental family dynamic that is so familiar to contemporary, Western, understanding. In this future, babies are no longer born from the body through sexual intercourse; rather, they are made and grown in external, embryonic-like sacs: "He pressed a panel and a door slid aside, revealing seven human babies joggling slowly upside down, each in a sac of its own inside a larger fluid receptacle" (Piercy 107). Connie's reaction to this process, known as ectogenesis, perhaps as any contemporary individual's would be, is shock and revulsion. This seemingly 'unnatural' image of foetal infants independent of a mother's body is uncomfortable, even alarming; however, similarly to the question of who is truly sick in a capitalist society, it leads the reader to confront their own assumptions about motherhood and the family.

The family unit in Mattapoisett society is very different from Connie's society, or even contemporary Western society. Rather than a traditional, nuclear family structure, parenting in Mattapoisett revolves around a three-parent unit of "mothers". As Mattapoisett society does not recognise gender in the traditional, binary sense this trio of "mothers" is made up of any combination of biological sex. This structuring of parenthood is interesting as it is predicated on a shared desire to raise a child and privileges equality between parents. Those that are biologically male are treated with hormones to induce breast growth and milk production, in order to feed the infant: "The way we do it, no one has enough alone, but two or three together share breast-feeding" (Piercy 143). This concept of shared and equal distribution of childcare is at odds with Connie's (and Western society's) ideas of parenthood and child-raising, which generally sees the majority of the parental labour fall on the woman. This rearrangement of the traditional heteronormative configuration allows Piercy to dismantle and explore the "tyranny of biological family" (Firestone 11) in favour of a queer, hetero-nonconforming vision of family that does not assume that the mother must bear the burden of most of the domestic labour. The nuclear family unit and its interaction with neoliberal capitalism will be further explored in chapter two of this thesis but, for now it is interesting to examine how Piercy juxtaposes the

family unit of Connie's time with that of Mattapoisett. Neither Connie nor Dolly is the full-time carer of their children. Although this is certainly a symptom of their status as economically underprivileged single mothers, it can also be viewed as a statement on the current version of reproduction which allows indiscriminate reproduction to anyone who is biologically able. In contrast, the children of Mattapoisett are surrounded by parental figures. Beyond their three parents, there is also a wider, communal sense of child-raising which encourages independence and freedom in the children themselves. Although certainly presented as victims of their environment, Connie and Dolly nevertheless present a vision of contemporary motherhood that fails, and has been failed, in its quest to raise happy and healthy children.

The text's argument for a widened, inclusive conception of motherhood (or parenthood) raises a complicated and contentious question, and it is one that Connie grapples with in the text: to what extent should motherhood be reserved for those that are biologically female? Is there a biologically mandated prioritisation of the place of women in child-rearing? Although these questions fall firmly within the rhetoric of biological essentialism, they are nonetheless present in *WOTEOT* and are suggestive of the tension around women's changing role in 1970s America. Connie's reaction to this arrangement certainly indicates her firmly essentialist stance, saying: "How could anyone know what being a mother means who has never carried a child nine months heavy under her heart, who has never borne a baby in blood and pain, who has never suckled a child" (Piercy 111). Not only does she reduce womanhood and childbirth purely to its biological component, even within this context she adheres to a very traditional view of motherhood. Beyond claiming that motherhood is reserved solely for those who have the capability to carry a baby, by her logic only those that birth the child vaginally "in blood and pain" and then breast feed can truly call themselves mothers. This conflation between pain, blood, and women's bodies reduce women to the sum of their bodily parts and asserts that there is a typical female experience predicated on this pain and suffering. This suggests a concept of 'female' as that in which "the social construction of gender operates as a unifying determinant or as that which unifies the effects of this process as a univocal, coherent, stable experience of identity" (DiQuinzio 7). *WOTEOT* challenges this assertion, instead offering a vision of motherhood that is predicated on a sense of intentional care and sharing of responsibility. This concept of motherhood (or parenthood) is foundational to all three texts in this thesis and suggests that this is a considerable concern for many

authors of contemporary, feminist speculative fiction.

This universalisation of the concept of 'woman' underlies the anxiety about the widening conception of women's place in society at the time. In *WOTEOT*, Piercy contends with the expanding parameters of women's place and questions whether the dissolution of traditional gender roles hinders or helps this. The dissolution of the link between gender identity and consequent role is presented as a positive influence on the society of Mattapoisett. Beyond the shared and equal raising of children, the town thrives peacefully and democratically, with each individual free to explore their creative and intellectual passions in any way they choose. They are wholly collectivist, everyone participates in the more difficult or laborious tasks that are required for a functioning society and their democratic system of representation encourages open and free discussion, with mediated conflict resolution. This is apparent in the conflict that arises between Luciente and Bolivar, who are encouraged to sit with each other and openly discuss their issues in the presence of mediators. In this scene, the text offers a succinct interpretation on the state of affairs contemporary to the time of writing. Reflecting on the past (Piercy's present), Bolivar states "I guess I see the original division of labor, that first dichotomy, as enabling later divvies into haves and have-nots, powerful and powerless, enjoyers and workers, rapists and victims. The patriarchal mind/body split turned the body to a machine and the rest of the universe into booty on which the will could run rampant, using, discarding, destroying" (Piercy 229). In response to this oppressive dichotomy, Piercy offers a society in which gender no longer dictates societal and familial roles and posits that only in this way can equality be achieved.

The assumption that equality can only be achieved through the dissolution of gender is contentious. In the tradition of Shulamith Firestone, this text makes the case that women will never be free of ingrained social inequality until they are no longer tied to the biological fact of reproduction. This is further underscored by the alternative version of the future that Connie accidentally stumbles upon, in which Gildina, described as "a cartoon of femininity" who could "hardly walk for the extravagance of her breasts and buttocks" (Piercy 314) represents the oversexualised, almost ridiculous, version of the female. She admits to having had "a full series! When I was fifteen, I was selected" (Piercy 315), referring to the complete surgical transformation to conform to the idealised version of the patriarchal expectation of women. Gildina, similar to Dolly, is also employed as a sex-worker and

once again the link between the self-determination of capitalism is juxtaposed with the material reality of women. Gildina lives under sexual contracts that require her to engage in sexual activity for a particular amount of time and, in turn, she is provided with accommodation and just enough money for her cosmetic procedures and the array of drugs she uses. By her own description, she has done well for herself by acquiring this situation, describing where she was born as a place where "you're born coughing and you pass off to Geri coughing… I always thought the sky was yellow till I came here" (Piercy 317) and mentioning the life expectancy of the average person to be in their 40s, compared to the "richies" (317) who live to see two hundred because its "in their genes. Like they say, it's all in the genes" (317). This supposition that there is a biological difference between those who are wealthy and those who are not is reminiscent of the very same ideology espoused by Man, which assumes a 'natural' unbalance based on biological difference.

The text reiterates its claim that there is no real freedom to self-determination while gender binaries exist, as women will always be exploited on the basis of their reproductive body parts. However, the argument that the solution to this is to reject gender altogether does not fully acknowledge the of the oppressive system of Man under capitalism. As Sylvia Wynter argues, in *Unsettling the Coloniality of Being* (2003*)*, an individual always requires an Other by which to define himself (265). Under the current Western system, the dominant ideology defines Man as white, heterosexual, and male and those who do not fit into this category are Othered. Capitalism requires this 'Othering' as this allows some groups to be exploited for labour/resources and some to reap the benefits. It also ensures that those within the system maintain the scarcity mindset required to keep the wheels of commerce turning, fearing that what they have is scarce, precious and under threat by an unknown 'other' who would take it from them. Although Piercy does posit a society in which capitalism has collapsed and a socialist, collectivist system prevails, she holds that the dissolution of gender is primarily responsible for allowing this to happen. This paper contends that in order for gender equality to happen, capitalism must first be dismantled, rather than vice versa. Without this, the capitalist system of Man will merely find an alternative, exploitable 'other' as the system fundamentally requires it.

Chapter 2: Leni Zumas' *Red Clocks*

Although both *WOTEOT* (1976) and Leni Zumas' *Red Clocks* (2018) fall firmly within the tradition of contemporary feminist speculative fiction that features reproduction as its primary concern (Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985), Butler's *Dawn* (1987), Hall's *The Carhullan Army* (2007), etc), their visions for reproductive futures are very different. Like *WOTEOT,* Zumas' text also presents an imagined version of the USA, although her vision is less utopic and more in line with the oppressive dystopia of Atwood's *The Handmaid Tale* (1985). Although *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985) is perhaps the obvious choice for such a topic, this thesis focuses on Zumas' more contemporary text as its concerns appear more pressing and relevant, particularly in light of recent developments in reproductive rights in the United States. Set in contemporary Oregon, *Red Clocks* offers an alternative version of the USA in which abortion has been totally prohibited in all 50 states, as has IVF, and has also seen the implementation of the "Every Child Needs Two" legislation, which mandates that only two parent households are eligible to adopt a child. Although the specific time period is never given, the book takes place in an America reeling from the election of a president two years prior who "thought women who miscarried should pay for the funerals for the fetal tissue and thought a lab technician who accidentally dropped an embryo during in vitro transfer was guilty of manslaughter" (Zumas 31). Given the book was written two years following the election of Donald Trump, it is fair to assume that Zumas is drawing on some of the far-fetched and scientifically inaccurate claims made by Trump during his campaign and presidency. However influenced by real figures, *Red Clocks* is still a work of speculative fiction, but the vision of America that Zumas presents is more terrifying for its prophetic ability to predict what would in fact come to pass a mere couple of years later.

Speculative fiction is a genre that, unsurprisingly given its name, is predicated upon hypothesizing imagined futures. This is the cornerstone of the genre itself. As Vint proposes, speculative fiction is "a way of extrapolating from specific technological capacities through to the changes in social relations that they might entail" (75). In the case of *Red Clocks,* Zumas views the ongoing advancements in reproductive technology as something which is feared by the Christian, conservative right government she creates. Rather than using technology to liberate women's bodies

from traditional reproduction, Zumas conceives of an imagined future in which women's bodies become more problematised and challenging to the powers-that-be and must be controlled more severely. This type of speculation can be viewed in relation to other criticisms of developing reproductive technologies, which foresee these technologies as potentially presenting greater risk to pregnancy and birth. For example, there are concerns that ectogenesis poses a threat to abortion limits as "supporters of ectogenesis often cite how it could reduce the need for abortion by offering woman a way to avoid pregnancy without having to terminate fetal development" (Sander-Staudt 112). This line of thinking, similar to that in *Red Clocks*, views women and pregnancy as somehow separate, as if pregnant women should not have sole dominion over their own pregnancies. However, it is interesting that the events speculated in *Red Clocks* would so quickly come to pass in real-life. Zumas' text clearly responds to pressing and urgent concerns that were escalating at the time of her writing. Like Piercy writing *WOTEOT* at a poignant historical moment in the US, when both reproductive rights and capitalism were reaching a crucial point, as discussed in the previous chapter, so too does the time of Zumas' writing feel like a particularly poignant moment, as hard-fought reproductive rights have been systematically undermined in the US, since the election of Donald Trump (Global Justice Center, Center for American Progress).

Told from the perspective of four interconnected women from the same town, *Red Clocks* responds to the right-wing, conservative Christian politics that has become increasingly vocal in recent years with the election of Donald Trump in 2016, following the comparatively socially progressive terms of Barack Obama. Although published four years before the overturning of Roe V. Wade in 2022, the gradual disintegration of reproductive rights in the USA in the years before are well-documented and provide context for this text. Since the enactment of Roe V. Wade in 1973, a total of 1,338 abortion restrictions have been legislated across the US, 108 enacted in 2021 alone (Guttmacher Institute). These restrictions include implementing strict limits on how far into pregnancy an abortion can be performed, Texas, for example, permits abortion only up to 6 weeks (Guttmacher Institute). This provides a very limited period in which to organise and obtain an abortion. Some states, such as Arkansas and Oklahoma, have banned all abortion unless in the case of life endangerment of the mother or if the foetus is determined to have serious genetic disorder (Guttmacher Institute). Not only are these

limitations on abortion care not in line with the intended freedom to avail of abortion services enshrined in Roe V. Wade, but they also perpetuate inequality as they disproportionately effect individuals across lower socioeconomic and racialised groups. This is important context for examining Zumas' text, as the startling accuracy of the predictions put forth in *Red Clocks* speaks to speculative fiction's ability to act as a warning for readers.

Authors have historically "used science fiction to publicize their concerns about the misuse of scientific expertise" (Bowler 123). Speculative fiction, although certainly containing much discussion of science and technology, goes a step further into political and social analyses and "breaks with the limits of the traditional genre and becomes a self-critical and disturbingly open form that articulates the deep tensions within the political unconscious at the present moment'" (Moylan qtd. in Carubia Glorie 148). The present moment, according to Zumas in *Red Clocks*, is one that teeters on the precipice of reverting back to an essentialist, conservative ideal of reproduction that steers opposite to the vision presented by *WOTEOT*. Of course, the text is first and foremost a work of fiction, not a political agenda. Both *Red Clocks*, and certainly *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985), contain elements of hyperbole that is often utilised in the genre. As Flannery O'Connor (1964) said: "to the hard of hearing you shout, and for the almost-blind you draw large and startling figures" and it is through this method of storytelling that Zumas presents the exaggerated vision of reproductive care. Another reason that *Red Clocks* features in the analysis, rather than the perhaps more obvious *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985), is for its clear questioning of the structures of class and capitalism that underpin the government's ideological and material approach to reproduction, in the text. This chapter will analyse how reproductive care, as imagined in the speculated vision of the United States presented in *Red Clocks*, is inextricably linked from structures of class and capitalism.

Although both set in the United States, *Red Clocks* differs from *WOTEOT* as it occurs at a time when neoliberalism is the dominant ideology prevailing across the US (and much of the world's) economy. *WOTEOT* (1976), preceded both the Reagan (1981-1989) and Thatcher (1979-1990) administrations in the US and UK, respectively, which would collaborate to consolidate the neoliberal ideology that still prevails today. During the 1980s, a particular strand of neoliberal capitalism emerged as the dominant ideology dictating public policy in the West, "citizens were redefined as individual

consumers of newly competitive public services with the consequence that 'welfare rights' have become commodified as consumer rights" (Peters 135). This individualist master narrative had "successfully extended the principle of self-interest into the status of a paradigm for understanding politics itself, and, in fact, not merely market behaviour, but *all* behaviour and human action" (Peters 135). This neoliberal ideology was founded on values such as "competitiveness, self-interest, and decentralization" (Steger & Roy 12). This emphasis on competition is a value that has certainly bled into the psyche at a societal level, of a neoliberal society such as the US, and can be traced in the relationship between Ro and Susan, in *Red Clocks.*

Ro and Susan's relationship is complicated: the women are good friends, but their closeness is undermined by the pervasive jealousy both women feel for the other. Susan feels jealous of Ro's freedom and career, while Ro longs for children and the financial comfort that Susan enjoys. This jealousy experienced by both women suggests that the idea of competition is not merely a neoliberal market ideology, but, as suggested by Peters, bleeds into *"all* behaviour and human action" (135) within a neoliberal society. This is highlighted by the fact that each woman, whose life seems so covetable to the other, is secretly unhappy with her own lot. Susan's introduction to the text opens with her driving with her two young children in the back of the car, as she contemplates "what if she took her hands off the wheel and let them go?" (Zumas 22). This is an impulse that reoccurs to Susan, and clearly exposes her unhappy frame of mind. On this particular drive, she notices what she thinks is a burnt, half-dead animal attempting to cross the road and the image of this "shivering thing, burnt and dead and trying" (Zumas 23) haunts her throughout the text. This half-dead, burnt out creature which nevertheless persists, is reminiscent of how Susan feels: trapped in a marriage to a man she is irritated by, repeating the same monotonous activities of caring for young children. The text frequently highlights these small, mundane tasks, "Spray table. Wipe down table. Rinse cups and bowls" (76), which, although seemingly innocuous, when done constantly begin to weave an oppressive mundanity into the fabric of Susan's life. These are, of course, the mundane tasks that make up everyone's life; however, this mundanity is important to note in the context of the shared competitiveness between Susan and Ro. Ro's covetous longing for a life like Susan's, a life that Susan finds tedious, is influenced by the fact that Susan has birthed two children and does not have to work. She comes from a wealthy family, who built and owned

the house she lives in, leaving her mortgage-less. What appears to Susan as mundane and monotonous is to Ro an idealised vision of mother/wifehood.

This idealised vision of mother and wife is predicated on the image of the wife within the nuclear family, a vision that was central to the Reagan/Thatcher ideal of neoliberalism during the 1980s, and beyond. As a result of liberation movements in the 1960s challenging "the sexual normativity of the family wage as the linchpin and foundation of welfare capitalism" (Cooper 21), neoliberal ideology, under Reagan and Thatcher, deployed "family values rhetoric" to cover for "macroeconomic policies and to seduce the working class into alliances that would ultimately work against them" (Cooper 22). These traditional family values, which reject the gender, sexual and class challenges raised by 1960s liberation movements, hail the nuclear, heteronormative family as "the primary source of economic security and a comprehensive alternative to the welfare state" (Cooper 9). This image of the nuclear family recalls a vision of the family, perpetuated by the media and government in 1950s America, which came to symbolize "the ideal social unit in a free-market enterprise system" (Olson 130) and which was held as the "bedrock of our society, the foundation of capitalism" (Ford qtd in Olson 130). Although conceived in the 1980s, this ideology remains present today and is evident in *Red Clocks.* It is this conceived idea of the ideal family that causes Ro to covet Susan's life, despite wondering "why does she want them? Because Susan has them?" (Zumas 89) and is the ideological underpinning of the "Every Child Needs Two" legislation which asserts that adoption can only be undertaken by a two-parent household in order to "restore dignity, strength, and prosperity to American families" (Zumas 32). The nuclear family structure is not problematic in itself, but when used as a tool to assert governmental control over its people, and to perpetuate competition and jealousy amongst those who have succeeded in attaining this ideal and those who have not, it creates cause for concern. It is also a highly classed and racialised issue.

Despite Susan's husband's modest high-school teacher salary, the family live a relatively comfortable and economically stable life. This is obviously not the case for many, particularly the disproportionately large number of single black mothers who are often the primary or sole earners in their household, compared to their white, Hispanic, or Asian counterparts (U.S. Department of Labor). It is also important to consider how housework and the caring of children fundamentally interacts with

the capitalist system itself, whether the housewife is herself a "secret worker inside the capitalist production process" (Davis 211). While Davis herself contends that no, housework is not an integral component of capitalist production, but rather a "precondition…the capitalist production process presupposes the existence of a body of exploitable workers" (211), the structure of housework and the home reifies a very particular form of womanhood, inextricable from motherhood, which is fundamentally linked to the social organisation of a capitalist society. It is predicated on a social ordering system, like capitalism, which hierarchically organises its members based on its own value system. In the case of the nuclear family, traditionally and in the text, the expectation is for the man to go out and provide for his family, and the wife to remain at home to oversee all child and household care and, historically, would see the man as the head of the household and breadwinners for the family (Olson 130). Susan takes primary care of her children and is still expected to oversee household chores, a responsibility she has very little interest in, to the annoyance of her husband who suggests, "*somebody* needs to start doing some cleaning. It's like a bus station in there" (Zumas 27). The expectation that this role must automatically fall to her echoes her earlier sacrifice when, upon falling pregnant, Susan immediately gave up her place in law school, sacrificing her future career as a lawyer in order to pursue her career as a housewife and mother, a thankless, constant job for which she receives no days off or compensation. Again, there is nothing inherently wrong with the nuclear family structure, or with a mother choosing to take care of the home and children; however, the implication in the text is that the version of family life, idealised and mandated by the government through the "Every Child Needs Two" legislation, is founded on a similar set of principles which saw family values encouraged by Reagan and Thatcher, to the detriment of all who challenged the hegemonic structures of power and which may see women frustrated and unfulfilled, as Susan feels throughout.

The ban on in-vitro fertilisation (IVF), in *Red Clocks*, further problematises the ideology behind government programmes and their impact on the lives of women. By banning IVF, and as with many of the reproductive issues addressed in this thesis, *Red Clocks* highlights the existing class disparities that exist in reproductive healthcare in the US. The justification for the ban on IVF is an extension of the legislation that allowed the ban on abortion in all fifty states: if "the constitutional right to life, liberty and property" (Zumas 30) is given to a fertilized egg at the moment of conception, then it follows

that IVF is also vulnerable to restriction, as "the embryos can't give their consent to be moved" from laboratory to uterus (Zumas 31). This ban on IVF may at one time have seemed a far-fetched speculation; however, as recent events in Alabama show, this imagined future is not as far-off as it may have seemed when the text was first published. In February 2024, an Alabama Supreme Court ruling "decided frozen embryos are children, and those who destroy them can be held liable for wrongful death" (CNN). As with *WOTEOT*, and as will be discussed in the next chapter, the place of technology in reproduction is a contentious and pressing concern for many contemporary authors of speculative fiction. Whereas both *WOTEOT* and *DBTSOT* speculate about how advancements in reproductive technology will impact class relations, in a future vision of reproduction that seems far from the present day, *Red Clocks* presents this disparity in a more concrete way that is almost the antithetical vision to that presented in the other two texts. By rejecting the technologization of reproduction, the legislation in place in *Red Clocks* highlights the fact that technology is itself neutral. The text suggests that, regardless of increased technological interference in reproduction, the existing class disparities will always remain the determining factor that influences women's reproductive choices.

As a result of the ban on IVF, Ro, a forty-something year old single teacher, is unable to conceive the child she desperately longs for. After various failed attempts at intrauterine insemination, her doctor makes the veiled suggestion that she travel to a country where IVF is legal and try her luck there, which for the single, relatively modest, income of a teacher is totally out of reach: "maybe he genuinely, sincerely believes she has the money for 'international travel'" (Zumas 175). The text argues that a blanket ban on reproductive options does not stop the practices from happening; rather, it merely directs the ability to avail of these services into the hands of those who are already economically and socially privileged. This also links to the overarching presence of neoliberal healthcare in the United States, which means that the entire system runs on individuals' private health insurance. By defining a fertilised embryo an unborn child, insurance liabilities increase and premiums skyrocket. As a result, an already expensive treatment becomes exponentially more. This is a current cause for concern for many individuals seeking/in the midst of IVF treatment in Alabama, following the shock rule. This pushes an already financially inaccessible treatment further away from those who are at the bottom of the economic ladder. Ro is faced with the impenetrability of neoliberal healthcare when, buying the

new $157.63 ovary stimulating medication prescribed by her doctor, she is told that she would have to pay out of pocket as her "insurance doesn't cover it" (Zumas 9). The text suggests that such restrictions are indeed aimed directly at policing the lower, economically disadvantaged class, with legislators confirming their own social eugenics motivation: "fewer single mothers, say the congressmen, will mean fewer criminals and addicts and welfare recipients" (Zumas 117). In a country which disproportionately criminalises black men (Brown & Barganier 5), and in which non-white individuals face greater obstacles to employment (Center for American Progress), the unspoken implication in this statement is that it is black and brown bodies that government officials in *Red Clocks* want fewer of.

The ban on abortion envisioned in *Red Clocks* perpetuates a similar anxiety about the racialised and classed body in this vision of neoliberal America. The "Personhood Amendment" which "gives the constitutional right to life, liberty and property to a fertilized egg at the moment of conception" (Zumas 30) means that abortion is banned in all fifty states, and anyone providing or seeking one can be charged with second-degree murder or conspiracy to murder, respectively. This amendment starkly echoes the overturning of Roe v. Wade, which occurred four years after the publication of this text. Although not quite resulting in the same blanket ban on abortion across the entire country, the overturning of Roe v. Wade paved the way for many lawmakers to usher in abortion bans prohibiting termination and, in some states, criminalising those who provide or seek abortions. However, both in life and the text, this does not prevent individuals from terminating pregnancies, but rather forces them to pursue dangerous, unregulated, and potentially life-threatening, terminations. It also creates a tiered system of citizenship in the US, as those requiring abortion care are legally subordinated below those to whom this type of healthcare will never be relevant.

Red Clocks offers two different experiences of abortion care in its alternative version of the US. Although both choosing to illegally terminate their pregnancies, the impetus behind the choice of both Mattie and Yasmine reflects each girl's differing position in society. Mattie, white and middle-class, chooses to terminate her pregnancy because being a young mother is diametrically opposed to her goal of being admitted to a top-level university and becoming a marine biologist. Many of the reservations she has about her pregnancy revolve around the implication it would have on the successful and academically challenging future that she has worked so hard to attain. Conversely, Yasmine's self-

administered abortion is fuelled by her refusal to be used as a statistic that further entrenches racist stereotypes, she "didn't intend to be anyone's stereotype. Black teen mother slurping welfare off the backs of hardworking citizens" (Zumas 245). Although Yasmine is also a middle-class child, this does not provide her with greater options, in fact, her position as the daughter of the only woman of colour in the Oregon State Legislature actually compounds the pressure she feels to not "jeopardize her mother's career" (Zumas 245) with her teenage pregnancy. The frailty of people of colours' admission into positions and spaces of influence is something that Yasmine implicitly understands. She herself refuses to give prejudiced onlookers "another reason to think I'm not smart" (Zumas 309). Mattie's inability to comprehend why anyone would conflate teenage pregnancy with intelligence speaks to the insulation provided by the privilege of her ethnicity and upbringing, further made evident by Yasmine's claim that she is a "very ignorant white girl" (Zumas 309). Even under the oppressive limits on reproductive care presented in this text, Mattie's choices are predicated on her own aspirations for her life. She implicitly understands that she is afforded greater privileges, even within this repressive state, because she is white and middle-class. Throughout her contemplation of her situation, never once does she factor in that her teenage pregnancy would be used as a maligning representation of the entire white race, because she is not held to that impossible standard. Yasmine does not have this privilege.

By comparing both young girls' experience of abortion, the text confronts how reproductive care, even within the confines of an oppressive legal state, is another tool used to attack and control black, brown, and working-class bodies. There are many factors that complicate the already difficult and fraught situation of attempting to terminate a pregnancy in a society where it has been criminalised to do so. Such a totalising ban on abortion may appear as something of an equaliser: as surely if it has been blanket banned across the nation then the repercussions are the same for the whole population. However, this is not the case in either *Red Clocks* or in real life. As discussed above, the ban on abortion does not stop either Mattie or Yasmine from terminating their pregnancies. The same is true for those real-life individuals seeking abortions in States with strict limitations or bans on terminations, and it is this double-standard that Zumas plays upon to create this imagined future. Mattie's ability to travel interstate to terminate her pregnancy, and the relative ease she has in doing so, is a real problem for many real women in similar situations. According to a healthcare provider working in a late-stage

abortion clinic in Texas, a state with some of the strictest limits on abortion care, "sixty per cent of people who have abortions are already parents" (The New Yorker). This means that, should an individual wish to terminate a pregnancy but live in Texas, they need to organise to travel out of state in order to receive this care. This may take time, which then means the pregnancy is further along and they may have to travel even further to a state that is willing to provide later stage abortions, "so now it's going to be three times as much money. The cost goes up because the complexity of care goes up. If you travel four or five states over, how many days off is that, how many days of childcare?" (The New Yorker). This invariably affects working class and people of colour disproportionately more than their white, middle-class counterparts. Although this example takes place in Texas, it is pertinent to the context of this research as the Southern States of America are home to the largest population of African Americans of any region in the US (Pew Research Center). Although Zumas' text takes place in Pacific Northwestern Oregon, she is drawing on a larger, government level attitude to black, brown, and economically underprivileged women's healthcare.

Although Yasmine is not a working-class young woman, Zumas nevertheless intentionally positions both girls' experiences very differently. Mattie's termination is a positive thing through which she is free to follow the path she had chosen for herself. Yasmine, although successfully terminating her own pregnancy, does not receive the same happy ending. Following her self-administered abortion, her "uterus was so badly damaged it had to be removed" (Zumas 259). That it is Yasmine who is sterilised as a result, and not Mattie, is not coincidental. Similarly to *WOTEOT, Red Clocks* is drawing on the history of black, brown, and Indigenous women suffering from government run sterilisation projects. The intersection between class and race is abundantly clear in this particular attack on women of colours' bodies. In one historical account, a young woman was pressured into sterilisation by state officials who "had threatened to discontinue her family's welfare payments if she refused to submit to surgical sterilization. Before she assented to the operation, she was assured that her infertility would be temporary" (Davis 195). There is a long tradition of problematising black, brown, and Indigenous women's reproductive systems that is predicated on controlling who in society is allowed to reproduce. This also ties into a broader, more complicated question of abortion itself within these communities. Abortion is a complicated topic that can so often be coopted by various movements. In her history of

intersectionality, *Women, Race and Class* (1981), Angela Davis points out that abortion has long been an issue of some contention among the black population, "it was too frequently assumed that legal abortions provided a viable alternative to the myriad problems posed by poverty. As if having fewer children could create more jobs, higher wages, better schools, etc" (Davis 185). The implication here is that abortion can be used, similarly to sterilisation, as a way to weed out the "undesirable" members of the community. As a result, she notes that in the early days of the abortion rights campaign, black women were understandably reticent to advocate for a tool that could very well be used against them, as "the campaign often failed to provide a voice for women who wanted the *right* to legal abortions while deploring the social conditions that prohibited them from bearing more children" (Davis 185). Again, it is central to understand the context within which reproductive technologies are utilised in order to fully understand their relevance in society, and in the text.

The nuclear family is one of the structures fundamentally opposed by the people of Mattapoisett in *WOTEOT,* who parent as a group of three in order to refute the "tyranny of biological family" (Firestone 11), which sees the majority of the child-rearing labour fall on the mother. Although offering a less utopic vision of the future, *Red Clocks,* similarly to *WOTEOT,* envisions alternative familial structures as an antidote to the current hierarchical, nuclear family. *Red Clocks* presents various forms of maternal love, that is not solely predicated on the mother as housewife. Mattie is the recipient of multiple forms of "mothers": adopted as a baby, she is the apple of her parents' eye. It is also revealed that she is the biological daughter of Gin, another of the texts' four leading female perspectives, and the woman watches her carefully. When Mattie visits Gin, the town "witch" who provides herbal remedies and lives mainly off the land, to ask for help in terminating her pregnancy, Gin notes "the girl's parents have kept her well" and follows her when she leaves her cabin to ensure "no demons touch this girl" (Zumas 158). She also regularly waits outside her high school to catch a glimpse of the young woman she knows to be her daughter. Despite never intending to raise the child herself, it is clear that Gin cares deeply for the wellbeing of her daughter. Ro also provides maternal care to Mattie when she accompanies her to her abortion out of state. Although devastated that Mattie is aborting a baby that she so desperately wants, and longing to ask her to carry it and give it to her, Ro nevertheless drives Mattie, her favourite student, to terminate her pregnancy. Her place as a facsimile mother is concretised

when she identifies herself as “Mom” to the healthcare providers because “they’ll take better care of her if the mother is watching” (Zumas 312). The text suggests that care and parenthood does not need to be a binary mother/child relationship. As in *WOTEOT,* it privileges an interconnected web of relationship between a community as the more effective method of raising a child. This is direct opposition to the nuclear family, and the “Every Family Needs Two” legislation, which is depicted in the failing family life of Susan. This form of interconnected, shared childcare and community is diametrically opposed to the hierarchical, nuclear family structure.

In the similar way that ectogenesis is used to liberate women from reproduction in both *WOTEOT,* in chapter one, and *DBTSOT,* in chapter three, abortion is a reproductive technology that is used to control and police women’s reproduction further in *Red Clocks*. A deeper comparative analysis of the three texts will be discussed later in the conclusion; however, for now it is important to note that *Red Clocks* relies on a similar tradition of many contemporary feminist speculative fictions, which use reproductive technologies as the basis of their imagined utopic or dystopic future. The vision presented in *Red Clocks* is firmly dystopic. As explored with ectogenesis in the previous chapter, reproductive technologies are never acontextual and, although utilised in different ways, remain a pervasive tool by which to police black, brown, Indigenous, and working-class women’s bodies. *Red Clocks* serves as a warning of what could be if conservative right-wing governement and neoliberal policy continue to fuse, and it is a warning that must be heeded, now more than ever.

Chapter 3: Annie Charnock's *Dreams Before the Start of Time*

The analysis of the previous texts focused on the interaction of capitalism and class with reproductive rights within the context of speculative fiction set in the United States. This is pertinent as the United States has been so deeply involved in the development and perpetuation of capitalism as a guiding principle of society (Weaver 93). It also, often, acts as something of a beacon to the rest of the world, particularly its close neighbours in the West. This is true of many things, fashion, music, film, but also in its adoption of capitalism and, later, neoliberalism. However, it is also useful to analyse how anxieties about reproductive rights, and the access to care dictated by those rights, also manifests in contexts that have not quite reached the same zenith of neoliberal policy as the United States. Neoliberalism has as many roots in the United Kingdom as it does in the US, thanks to the shared vision of Ronald Regan and Margaret Thatcher (Steger & Roy 20); however, the UK still maintains a public (although, some would say, failing) health service, the National Health Service (NHS). The NHS, once considered to be the best health service in the world, is a hugely important part of the fabric of UK society: it remains one of the key features of concern during elections, one survey discovering that it almost matched concern over leaving the European Union during the 2019 elections (McFarlane 26). Concern over the precarity of the NHS is valid, given the number of structural reforms towards privatisation by several governments since the 1970s, guided by the neoliberal principles introduced by the Thatcher government.

This anxiety around the privatisation of a service that has been a foundational pillar of British society is reflected in many works of contemporary speculative fiction, which is often used as a "powerful tool for critiquing social systems", and through which analysis of a particular technology, in this case reproductive technologies, "as it appears across a number of texts, can be a useful window into anxieties around a given topic" (McFarlane 21). There are a number of contemporary texts which speculate on the fate of reproductive rights in the United Kingdom. Sarah Hall's *The Carhullan Army* (2007) is one example, which presents a world in which overpopulation has resulted in increased governmental agency into the reproductive lives of women, with intrauterine devices (IUDs) made compulsory to all women of child-bearing age until they are given specific permission to

procreate. Rebecca Ann Smith's *Baby X* (2016) portrays the first baby born via In Vitro Gestation (IVG), in conjunction with a private company, who is medically tampered with in the hopes of harvesting placental blood for stem cell research. Viewing the many speculated iterations of the future of reproduction in contemporary UK speculative fiction shows "how concerns about the commodification of medicine and reproductive materials are filtered through anxieties about the current and future availability of the [NHS]" (McFarlane 25).

This chapter will discuss Annie Charnock's *Dreams Before the Start of Time (DBTSOT)*, published in 2017, which examines the various reproductive options it imagines will be available in the changing medical landscape of the UK, and depicts "the future of reproductive parenting as a range of alternatives to nuclear family norms" (Buran 65). This chapter will focus on this text, in a plethora of similar contemporary texts, as *DBTSOT* more acutely examines the relationship between reproductive technology and society more generally. This thesis aims to examine the relationship between reproductive technology and social class, and *DBTSOT* provides ample relevant material for analysis. Central to this text is the technology of ectogenesis, by which reproduction is wholly removed from the body and takes place remotely in man-made embryo-like sacs which are controlled and monitored by doctors. This technology, although seemingly alien to contemporary reproduction, is well on its way to becoming a reality. Eindhoven University of Technology is currently developing high-tech artificial wombs to grow premature babies in liquid-filled giant balloons (Buran 46), suggesting that this speculative fiction will soon be scientific fact. Similarly to *WOTEOT*, this advancement in technology removes the responsibility and onus of procreation and birth from the female body. This chapter will explore the various ways that this new technology impacts the landscape of reproduction, for better and for worse, to explore the way in which class and neoliberalism have infiltrated Charnock's imagined vision of the United Kingdom.

DBTSOT presents various forms of alternative family structures which challenge the traditional nuclear family unit. Charnock uses real-life advancements in reproductive science to explore what forms of collective and non-traditional child rearing would be possible, given freedom from the constraints of biology. As previously mentioned, artificial womb machines are currently in development in Eindhoven. Similarly, microbiologists at Newcastle University in Britain have also taken a step

forward by developing artificial sperm cells from bone marrow, so women in same-sex couples can produce female sperm cells and bear a daughter as two mothers (Buran 46). Parthenogenesis has also long been in development since the successful cloning of Dolly the sheep in 1996 (Buran 46). The vision of reproduction presented by Charnock, although seemingly far-fetched, is actually far less extreme than may be imagined and explores the social and political ramifications of such scientific developments, situating the text firmly within the tradition of speculative fiction rather than traditional science fiction, as it 'breaks with the limits of the traditional genre and becomes a self-critical and disturbingly open form that articulates the deep tensions within the political unconscious at the present moment.'" (Moylan qtd. in Carubia Glorie 148). There are various iterations of non-traditional family units presented in the text. Millie chooses to use a sperm donor, despite being in a relationship with a man at the time, because she wants a child and is unsure if her partner is truly ready to commit to parenthood, and instead raises her son alongside her non-binary sibling.

Similarly, when her son Rudy is old enough to want children of his own, he and his partner Simone decide to use parthenogenesis (a form of asexual reproduction) to create the child that they will raise together. This decision frees Simone from her concern over passing-down the unfavourable characteristics of her family, allowing her to be a mother without carrying, birthing, or subjecting the child to what she perceives as the failures of her own genetics. Interestingly, Rudy does not choose the same method as his mother, an anonymous donor, as he is disgusted by the thought of his unknown, anonymous father, telling his mother "You didn't have to have a baby. The fact that I'm here in the world doesn't justify your decision" (Charnock 114). He also resents that the love interests of both his mother and her sibling were "ultimately, disposable. Drove him to fucking distraction" (81). His criticism of his mother, not on the basis of genetically solo-parenting, but rather for what he views as a dangerous, or neglectful decision to reproduce with a stranger's sperm and her inability to value the love interest in her life, actually leads him towards a traditional family unit, with his wife Simone offering him "a true lifelong marriage. He saw himself as a devoted one-woman man" (80). Another character, Marco, uses parthenogenesis to create his daughter Julia, initially intending to raise her with his male partner, but ultimately raising her alone as a single father.

These many forms of non-traditional reproduction allow the reader to speculate on a world that has broken the "tyranny of biological family" (Firestone 11). These methods, and the process of ectogenesis which allows them to function, offers women the "freedom from reproductive slavery" (De Beauvoir, 139 qtd in Buran 56), that contributes to women's inferior social status and can result in the monotonous drudgery of underappreciated care for family and home, as exemplified by Susan in *Red Clocks.* Instead, the text offers a transformed concept of motherhood, akin to that in *WOTEOT,* in which motherhood becomes "a gender-neutral activity signified by the conscious activity of nurturing, not a physical process contingent upon biological destiny" (Sander-Staudt 114). Both previous texts have also queried the hegemony of the nuclear family, clearly positioning it as a considerable concern of contemporary feminist speculative fiction. Like *WOTEOT,* this text suggests that the biological onus of reproduction on women is something that should, and will be, dismantled through advancing technology.

Its challenge to traditional family forms is furthered by the relationship between Toni and Atticus who, after falling pregnant through traditional heterosexual intercourse, sign a contract agreeing to live under separate roofs, with Atticus becoming a "part-time" father to his own biological son. Even given the context of a heteronormative relationship, the text undermines the traditional nuclear unit. Instead, it offers a vision of reproduction that once again favours the concept of shared care over the forced responsibility of traditional parenthood. Charnock proposes a future where, thanks to advancements in technology, reproduction is a choice thoughtfully and intentionally undertaken by all parties involved. The text even offers solutions to the death of a parent during the gestation of their child, in Baby Bertrand House. Baby Bertrand House is an optimistic place where would-be parents can adopt orphaned children who benefit from genetic enhancements. It is in Baby Bertrand House that the mechanics of the ectogenesis system is revealed. The various rooms for each trimester of gestation mimic the conditions of a womb: minimally lit with the recorded voices of the parents played in a loop that follows a "natural daily rhythm- no voices during the night, just the sound of the parental heartbeat" (80). The system attempts to replicate the conditions of a natural womb, except that would-be parents can freely see the shape of the foetuses throughout their gestation. These babies are not used by government or authority research, as is the case for some contemporary speculative fiction (*Baby X*

(2016), for example); instead, the text portrays these genetically enhanced children as having a higher intellect and economic position later in life. This suggests that the possibility of alternative reproduction offers benefits to the children, as well as the parents. Feminist theorist Tuija Takala proposes that "if and when ectogenesis becomes a safe option, it will finally make true equality between humans possible" (qtd in Buran 51). Although the text portrays the many benefits of these alternative methods of reproduction, and certainly the potential for extending family forms, as something to celebrate it does not offer ectogenesis as a solution to inequality amongst humans. Rather, it proposes novel concerns that may have even deeper implications on inequality.

There are several implications of ectogenesis, alluded to in *DBTSOT,* that suggest that it is not a wholly appropriate solution to inequality and may, in fact, create and further entrench inequality. As a work of speculative fiction, this text is one in a line of texts that feature genetic modification as an unavoidable element of their predicted reproductive future (*Gattaca* (1997), *Oryx and Crake* (2003), for example). In this text, Charnock presents genetic modification as a natural progression of the anxiety around childbirth and rearing that many parents experience. All parents wish to do the best for their children, and it follows that, in a world with greater opportunity to protect children through technological advancements, parents would be eager to avail of these services. This in itself is not necessarily a problem; however, it becomes a problem when these enhancements come with the implication that to choose *not* to avail of them is akin to depriving or neglecting a child. It also raises the issue of a novel and emerging opportunity for inequality based on genetic distinction. Beyond the already disparate groups of "GenRich" (machine-born) and GenPoor (natural-born) babies, *DBTSOT* adds another layer of potential inequality through genetically modified babies, going beyond mere economic inequality as "Charnock foresees shift from economic inequality to 'tomorrow's genetic inequality'" (Buran 61-62). The inevitable outcome of the novel's reproductive genetic technology is depicted as creating a wholly new system of class inequality on the basis of genetics. The technological ability to delete negative (and enhance positive) characteristics is a seemingly inevitable progression of current scientific practice, according to many speculative fiction texts.

Charnock presents a vision of reproduction that not only outsources the process of gestation but goes further to tweak and alter the infants before their lives begin. One example of this is Amelia

who, after an apparent delay in her first son's development which soon rectified itself with time, opts for genome editing and DNA correction in order to prevent any delays with her second child. However, "going too far-they paid for aesthetic tweaks" (Charnock 179) and Amelia is plagued with concern over the obvious dissimilarity between her children, haunted by the sense that "she came away from the gestation unit with someone else's baby" (180). Her second son, Theo, hit all developmental milestones early and the differences between the two boys make for stark comparison: the orderly room of their eldest son compared to that of Theo is notable, perhaps because his "mind is in constant flux, and as a result, he shifts restlessly from one activity to another" (181). The differences between the two children, and the expectation on Theo to be more focused and organised, as a result of his enhancement, suggests that given a world in which this type of reproductive enhancement is available, a whole new system of value may emerge.

This is a common anxiety that pervades much contemporary speculative fiction. Andrew Niccol's *Gattaca* (1997) explores similar concerns about the emergence of a new techno-class and how those who are born without genetic enhancements are considered inferior, and of a lower class. It is also similarly suggested in *WOTEOT,* when the genetically modified Gildina compares her new, seemingly improved, situation to that in which she came, where "you're born coughing and you pass off to Geri coughing" (Piercy 317). There is a real concern in many works of speculative fiction around how the already prevailing class disparities will be further entrenched by emerging technologies, and *DBTSOT* falls firmly within that tradition. This practice raises problems in its own right, but these are enhanced when read within the context of the privatisation of medical services. As mentioned earlier, the privatisation of the NHS is a major concern of much UK speculative fiction, and that fear is evident in this text. Amelia's choice to take it too far, go beyond the "standard" genome editing and DNA correction and pay "for aesthetic tweaks" (179) suggests that this process did not take place in a standard, NHS hospital in which services are free. She further appoints blame for her decision to the "clinicians" who "preyed on their guilty feelings. Why take the risk of having two children with learning difficulties?" (Charnock 179). By portraying medical professionals as insidiously preying upon the fear of a new family, Charnock's concern about the increased presence of medical practice-for-profit organisations within an increasingly privatised health care system is evident. This is a similar anxiety

that weaves throughout *WOTEOT* and *Red Clocks* which, as discussed previously in this research, is predicated on very real and pressing concerns about the historically precarious position of women's bodies within a capitalist, neoliberal healthcare system. Once again, healthcare is shown to be extremely vulnerable to exploitation by private interests and can be used as a tool that is wielded against those at the bottom of the socio-economic ladder.

As the narrative progresses, and makes several large jumps through time, it becomes increasingly clear that traditional methods of reproduction are seen as outdated by the generation to come after. As previously mentioned, Rudy is appalled by his mother's choice of anonymous sperm donor; but as his mother Millie herself says, "I only used a donor because I'd no other option" (114). Later, Nancy discusses how her mother seemingly disapproves of her decision to remotely gestate her baby, believing that her mother assigns her son's sleeping issues to her not carrying him and bonding as mother and child should. However, it is revealed that her mother had decided not to have another baby as she was unwilling to go through the pregnancy and birth again, but on seeing how successful her daughter's remote gestation was many years later, was filled with remorse. The text suggests that each generation views the newest iteration of new reproductive technology as an improvement to the previous, leaving the previous generation to wonder at their perceived neglection of duty to their unborn child.

The constant evolution of technology, across all aspects of society, means that technology is becoming obsolete at an increasingly fast pace, and this is inevitably the case with reproductive technology too. However, it becomes problematic when natural pregnancy becomes synonymous with offering an inferior beginning of life to the child. This attitude is found several times throughout the text, such as in the opinion of Amelie's husband Nathan, and Gerard, the man born in Baby Bertrand House. As mentioned previously, the private clinic offering reproductive care clearly skew in favour of medical interference in the gestation process, suggesting that it is a socially and medically sanctioned practice. It also becomes a prominent feature in the personal opinion of several of the characters as the plot progresses. When one of the Baby Bertrand House children, Gerard, later finds out that he is the father to a child conceived many years ago in a drunken tryst, he laments for the child that his mother had "*carried* the pregnancy. No interventions at all, a raw birth" (152) and wonders that "he can't reach

his full potential. Whatever that might be…Poor little blighter" (152). There is a clear presumption that the child must be disadvantaged merely by the circumstance of his "raw" gestation. This idea is echoed in Amelia's experience when, reflecting on her two pregnancies, she feels "nostalgia for traditional, corporeal gestation motherhood" (200); however, this is quickly undermined by the memory of "the withering glances that get her down", with one women going so far as to tell her "'if you can afford that bracelet, you can afford to look after your child better" (201). Ectogenesis becomes not only a mechanism used to make reproduction available to all, but also as a metric of social and economic standing.

This is also illuminated through Nancy, for whom the option of ectogenesis provides her with professional convenience as a teacher. Her lamentation that "it's bloody awful being pregnant in my job" as she is "on my feet in class for six hours a day some days" (Charnock 119) suggests that current employment practices do not account for the experience of pregnant individuals and again encourages a model whereby, as Sander-Staudt argues, "the public presence of pregnant women" becomes a "social anomaly" (114) that negatively impacts the health of the mother and, by extension, the baby. Even Amelie's husband falls victim to this type of thinking, explaining that he "didn't like seeing her pregnant. Turned his stomach. Embarrassing at times too; people assumed they'd hit hard times" (Charnock 182). The text suggests that a risk of ectogenesis is that natural pregnancy may become a social anomaly, as if "it were a kind of primitive way of risking the health of the baby and women" (Sander-Staudt 114), where natural pregnancy becomes a choice of only the poor. Given that this opinion features in several characters' personal view, is the stance of the medical facilities mentioned in the text and is never challenged by any character in the text, it appears that this is the ideology that Charnock speculates will be dominant in this imagined future. In this way, the new "techno-class" that emerges through ectogenesis and genetic modification both entrenches existing class disparities and goes a step further by creating a whole new level of social class.

This demonisation of natural pregnancy, and the women who choose to avail of it, speaks to an anxiety that can be traced throughout each of the texts in this thesis. A central anxiety throughout each of the texts discussed in this thesis is the place of women within new and emerging forms of communities, and the reproductive capacity of individuals in these communities is a core issue.

DBTSOT, like *WOTEOT,* reimagines a vision of the world in which women are not chained by the current biological requirement of reproduction; however, the ultimate vision that each text proposes differs greatly. Reproduction remains such a central and pervasive issue in contemporary feminist speculative fiction because the conceptualisation of women is so inextricably linked to her reproductive capacity. When this is removed from the physical body of women, it is only fair to assume that there will be a vacuum in how society conceptualises what girl, woman, mother means. This text examines this through the process of ectogenesis, made possible by artificial wombs. These machines provide all the necessary nutrients, monitor the temperature and vital signs, and provide the closest possible simulacrum of a womb that could be created by a human. The room they are kept in is dimly lit, "as it's dark in a mother's womb" (Charnock 79), and the voice and heartbeats of the parents are recorded to "feed the sounds into the fetus flasks during gestation" (80). This attempt to replicate the conditions of the womb shows that it is not simply enough to provide a container in which the infants can grow, but it must be interactive in some sense. Gestation cannot be made totally sterile, but rather must attempt to interact with the infant, as a human mother's body would. What is most interesting is whether the texts posit that this artificial reproduction frees women from oppression in any real sense. Some feminist theorists contend that the basis for sexist oppression against women is rooted in the biological fact of reproduction. One of the most famous of these proponents, Shulamith Firestone, argues that artificial reproductive technologies such as ectogenesis can offer huge support for women's empowerment and freedom, claiming that it "frees women from the tyranny of their reproductive roles" (Firestone qtd in Buran 50). The association between women's reproductive role and their experienced oppression is a foundational concept to each of the texts in this research, and certainly each text has showcased how vulnerable women's reproductive systems are to control and oppression.

An area in which this text perhaps lacks critical detail, and where the others prevail, is in a more thorough exploration of how this technology, and its access in society, affects BIPOC, as these groups are the most vulnerable to economic inequality. It would be particularly interesting to consider, as both *WOTEOT* and *Red Clocks* successfully explore, how the history of the reproductive control and exploitation of women of colour, through practices such as state-run sterilisation programmes, leaves these women more vulnerable to exploitation under these technologies. Given the text's prediction that

ectogenesis will provide new and innovative forms of class discrimination in such a short period of time, it is fair to assume that it could extend to encourage further control over who can, and cannot, reproduce. If ectogenesis is the only socially mandated form of "safe" reproduction, and it is reserved for those economically advantaged enough to afford it, then those who cannot afford it face the option of "harming" their child or not reproducing at all. Similarly to the medical care experienced by Yasmine versus Maddie, in *Red Clocks,* healthcare in a privatised system favours those who are at the top of society's ladder and can be detrimental to those at the bottom. The push of neoliberalism towards the privatisation of, what should be public, services weaponises neutral technologies such as ectogenesis into tools to wield against the economically, racially, and socially disadvantaged. Although this is certainly alluded to in *DBTSOT,* it falls short of a thorough examination of the implication of the technology it proposes will define the future.

Conclusion

As evident from the analysis presented in the previous three chapters, many contemporary feminist speculative fictions express an anxiety about the vulnerability of reproduction under neoliberal capitalism, which recent political developments in America have illustrated is a pressing concern for many women today.

Piercy's *WOTEOT* presents a firmly utopic vision of a reproductive future where the availability of ectogenesis "will finally make true equality between humans possible" (Takala qtd in pg 51 Buran). Whilst ectogenesis is a neutral technological advancement, its development is not acontextual or ahistorical. As posited by Anna McFarlane, "science and medicine are read as intrinsically patriarchal realms whose increased involvement will never result in a better outcome for women and their offspring" (23). Although it is difficult to say that the involvement will *never* result in a better outcome for women, it is worth considering how this may be yet another method of interference into a space that is reserved for those who can bear children, and how easily that may be coopted within a system that so privileges the wants and needs of those at the top of the economic system.

For ectogenesis to overthrow patriarchal hegemony and create equality, as suggested by *WOTEOT,* it must be assumed that "the biological basis for sexist discrimination and the oppression of women is based on women's ability (or perceived ability) to reproduce, and that removing this basis for oppression via ectogenesis would restructure society and finally allow for women's liberation" (McFarlane 22). However, this fails to address that as long as ectogenesis, and women's liberation, exist within the neoliberal structure, there will always be those that benefit more than others. As in the case of *WOTEOT,* it is not merely because Connie is a woman that she is degraded, but because of the complex interaction of her gender and her class/race. As evident in the treatment she receives in the mental health facility, the medical profession is not exempt from the same class and cultural prejudices that lead to artificial distinctions between individuals, which permeate society more generally. In fact, as discussed several times in this research, healthcare is particularly vulnerable to privatisation through neoliberal policy, which opens it up to further risk of varying treatment based on social class.

The vulnerability of certain individuals to prejudice and neglect of healthcare within neoliberal America, as a result of their socioeconomic class, is further evidenced in *Red Clocks.* This text examines how the structures of inequality that permeate neoliberal society do not require technological advancements in order to expose racial and class disparities. In fact, by presenting a completely antithetical vision of reproduction to both *WOTEOT* and *DBTSOT,* the very same inequalities reveal themselves. As explored with ectogenesis in both chapter one and three, reproductive technologies are never acontextual. Although *Red Clocks* proposes the restriction of reproductive technologies, rather than their advancement, these technologies remain a pervasive tool by which to police black, brown, Indigenous, and working-class women's bodies. The text suggests that limiting such technologies does not prevent them from being utilised; rather, for those who are white and privileged, as Mattie is, there is a possibility to circumvent the legal requirements and ultimately succeed in the termination. For black, brown, Indigenous, working-class, or any other iteration of "undesirable" person, even if the termination is successful, the overall outcome is still bleak. Yasmine is not allowed to successfully terminate her pregnancy and move on, instead she is convicted for her "crime," sent to a penitentiary for underage girls, and is left infertile by the procedure. For the crime of attempting to police her own politicised black body, she has her liberty and any potential future child stripped from her. Similarly, the reproductive technology, or lack thereof, of IVF is utilised to perpetuate a vision of the family unit that limits reproductive options to those who do not conform to the hegemonic ideal, i.e. white, heterosexual, and middle class. By presenting a vision of contemporary America that has reneged on many of the progressive reproductive policies that are available today, Zumas suggests that it is not necessary to introduce novel technological developments in order to reveal social and class disparities.

Like both *WOTEOT* and *Red Clocks, DBTSOT* explores how the fate of reproduction is central to any speculative vision of the future; however, unlike *WOTEOT*, Charnock does not adhere to the claim of Tuija Takala that "if and when ectogenesis becomes a safe option, it will finally make true equality between humans possible" (qtd in pg 51 Buran). The vision of reproduction presented by *WOTEOT* suggests that reproduction truly is a defining aspect of the oppression experienced by women, and by opening that responsibility to all genders, the basis for gender discrimination is undermined. In

Red Clocks, although not explicitly exploring artificial reproductive technology, the message of the text still subscribes heavily to a similar ideology as each female character is defined by her relationship to her own reproductive capacity. It is the central issue that drives the text forward; it follows, then, that a similar claim could be understood from Zumas' text: that to free women from the "tyranny of their reproductive roles" is someway akin to making "true equality between humans possible." In *DBTSOT*, however, Charnock confronts something that is fundamental to understanding the relationship between reproduction and oppression.

In envisioning the future of reproductive care in this way, *DBTSOT* examines the same concerns that were explored in both *WOTEOT* and *Red Clocks,* namely how medical care is disseminated differently depending on socio-economic status. However, unlike Piercy, Charnock does not subscribe to the idea that ectogenesis "will finally make true equality between humans possible" (Takala qtd pg 51 Buran). Rather, the text suggests that it may just offer an alternative mechanism by which social class can be implemented and measured. The leap in reproductive technology takes place over a relatively short number of years, in the text, from 2034 to 2120. Yet, in this mere 90 years, the social policy around reproduction has developed so that a woman who chooses to bear a child naturally is considered to be a victim of her economic standing, at best, and potentially even accused of harming her baby.

Ectogenesis itself is a neutral technology, it can neither liberate nor oppress individuals of its own accord. It can certainly offer new and innovative forms of reproduction that removes the sole responsibility of procreation from one group in society; however, it can just as easily coerce women's reproductive choices because of the social structures and policies that are "already inhospitable to pregnancy" (Sander-Staudt 113) and inhospitable to any individual that can be exploited by the system of neoliberal capitalism. This inhospitable system is at the forefront of all three texts in this thesis. Written across different decades and countries, the thread tying these three texts is their setting within neoliberal capitalism. As such, it can be surmised that "it is social organization which creates problems, so the solutions need to be social, not just technical" (Buran 61). In response to this, all three texts posit collective forms of family structure as a solution to the individualism and competitiveness valued by neoliberal capitalism. Alternative or shared family, such as the three-parent structure in Mattapoisett in

WOTEOT, the collective form of motherhood experienced by Mattie in *Red Clocks,* and the various forms of alternative and shared parenthood presented in *DBTSOT,* suggest that this form of collective experience is an example of the social solution required to undermine a system that is predicated on inequality and division.

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