

Inception of Life on the Pendulum of Death: Common Paradigms and Uncommon Narratives on the Polemics between Birthers and Abortionists

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Abstract

Obvious crevices of digression are discernible in the ongoing discourses on conception, women and reproductive rights, and abortion. Against this backdrop, this paper sets out to explore existing thoughts on the bio-physiological processes of conception and pregnancy, epigenetics, and the impact of trauma on the continuum of human psychological development with a view to accentuating the critical intersection of the emerging discourses. By dissecting the conflated and intricate leanings on the opposite sides of the treatise, the paper goes beyond the current paradigm that merely proffers a time frame at which it might be appropriate to legitimize termination of pregnancy (in other words, abort a baby without attracting punitive attention of the state) and advance more creative theorizing, which raises the question of power balance and discipline. Ours is a discussion paper, covering a methodical synopsis of discourses, definitions, aims, philosophical leanings and content analysis of major postulations, and highlights of their operational intricacies. The paper hypothesized that a single-cell blastocyst is a developing human being and engaging discourses on power and discipline, it further explored the influences of epigenetics on lifespan development, and how this impinges on women's right over their reproductive bodies. The paper adopts the Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK), and black feminist thought to deconstruct and trouble the essentialized notion of women's reproductive rights, which are fundamentally colonial, and western in nature. Using qualitative content analysis of existing secondary materials, we foreground the paradigm shifts on the contended topic. By so doing, the paper mapped out a more flexible direction for understanding the disequilibrium of power on the core premises of the argu-

ment divides. Our paper provides uncluttered lenses for scrutinizing the socio-medical procedures involving women's right to their procreative bodies on one hand, and the unborn babies' choice of life on the other, thus creating a broader and more objective rostrum for further discussion and scholarly contribution on the concepts.

Keywords

Inception, Fertilization, Epigenetics, Nature, Nurture, Discipline, Power

1. Background of Study

Genuine areas of contestation are observable in the shifting opinions on: conception, when life begins, the rights of women over their reproductive bodies, abortion, and babies' right to live. Against this backdrop, this paper explores the prevailing thoughts on the following bio-physiological phenomena: conception and pregnancy, epigenetics, and the impact of trauma on the continuum of human psychological development. Through this investigation, the paper aims to accentuate the critical intersection(s) of conflict in the emerging discourses on the incipience of life. For instance, in [Gleitman, Fridlund, and Reisberg \(2004\)](#), the evolutionists, naturalists, scientists, and culturalists affirm that life starts in earnest within two months of conception, in which "the mass of cells has grown to about one inch in length and is now called a fetus" (p. 466); yet the same source advances argument to the worrisome trajectory of competitive motive between the mother and conceived infant in which, the child craves survival, and the mother longs for an opportunity to transmit her gene to the next generation by means of the child's survival (and this perspective is anchored on the theory of natural selection). "From the infant's point of view, the biological function of the mother-child bond is a matter of survival. As it turns out, the function is the same from the mother's point of view, although, for her, the survival is generic rather than personal" (p. 430). This argument willfully forecloses the conventional knowledge about the prenatal fetus-mother union, in which the newly formed human, connected to the mother's supply and disposal systems through naturally provided ducts and tubes continues to be nourished and grow, and exhibits all the characteristics of a living being. And by the distortion created by the foreclosure, the theme surreptitiously creeps into an imaginary theatre of polemic agitation and negotiation between the mother and unborn baby notwithstanding the apparent power imbalance for which the fetus remains incapable of any personal whims. The questions that will advance the thrust of this paper remains: How might we begin to rethink the inception of life? Do unborn babies wield corresponding agency to counter their parent's decisions on abortion? The work hypothesizes that a single-cell blastocyst is a developing human being. We will draw from Michel Foucault's discourses on power and discipline to inter alia, explore the influences of politics, epigenetics, nature, and nurture

on lifespan development. The paper will draw attention to paradigm shifts in the discursive framework with respect to conception, the inception of life, abortion, and the mother's agency on her reproductive body. By so doing, the paper problematizes existing biomedical knowledge and practices on the topic, while mapping out a more flexible direction for understanding the disequilibrium of power on the core premises of the argument divides. The approach will also provide uncluttered lenses for scrutinizing medical procedures involving women and unborn babies and thereby creating a broader and more objective rostrum for scholarly contribution on the subject(s).

2. Method of Data Collection and Analysis

As a scientific investigation, this work will adopt a systematic content analysis of topic-related information from secondary sources while ensuring that standard ethical considerations are implemented throughout the paper. In interpretative phenomenological analysis, the use of such qualitative descriptive approach as content analysis is intended for texts requiring a reasonably, low level of interpretation, as opposed to "hermeneutic phenomenology, in which a higher level of interpretive complexity is required" (Vaismoradi, Turunen, & Bondas, 2013). Content analysis is an approach used in analyzing texts. The relevance of content analysis to this paper is its description of the "characteristics of the document's content by examining who says what, to whom, and with what effect (Bloor & Wood, 2006 cited in Vaismoradi, Turunen, & Bondas, 2013). By adopting content analysis, this paper aims to describe the phenomenon in a conceptual form, in other words, data is viewed as "representations, not of physical events but of texts, images, and expressions created to be seen, read, interpreted, and acted on for their meanings, and must therefore be analyzed with such uses in mind" (Elo & Kyngäs, 2008 cited in Vaismoradi, Turunen, & Bondas, 2013). With the postulation that a single-cell blastocyst is a developing human being, this work draws from Michel Foucault's discourses on power and discipline in order to properly locate the influences of politics, epigenetics, nature, and nurture on the lifespan development, and how these influence women's right over their reproductive bodies. The paper adopts the Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK), and black feminist thought to deconstruct and trouble the essentialized notion of women reproduction and scientific innovation, which are fundamentally colonial and therefore, Eurocentric in nature. By engaging qualitative content analysis (largely descriptive and interpretative) of existing secondary materials from academic and professional bodies, the work intends to establish a non-blinkered podium for the paradigm shifts on the discursive framework that would not only foster a better understanding of the issues at stake, but also enable more scholarly contributions on the socio-politically charged matters of abortion and right of women over their reproductive bodies. The work recognizes that "not all methods of gathering information can be justified, because of this; researchers have an ethical duty to protect the welfare of any participants" (MacFarlene, O'Neil, Tekdemir, Deniz, & Foster, 2017). This work will follow the provisions of the Belmont

Report with respect to the requisite ethical guidelines. These include that where applicable: subjects must give informed consent—need to know their risk and benefits—before accepting to participate; researchers must try not to have negative impact on the wellbeing of participants (which means to do no harm fundamentally), and ensuring that participants are not exploited, which also means that researchers must ensure that the results and benefits of the study are distributed fairly. We will draw principally from the amended report on research ethics that came into effect in the USA in 1979, which was called Ethical Principles and Guidelines for the Protection of Human Subjects of Research. It outlined the primary principles underlying ethical considerations in research with human beings to include: “respect for persons, beneficence, and justice. The methods used to recognize these principles are informed consent, risk/benefit analysis, and appropriate selection of patients” (Fischer, 2005).

3. Review of Literature

In the light of the discourses and controversies generated so far by the divergent views on: conception, reproductive rights of women, when life begins, and abortion, this paper continues to argue that although the evolutionists, naturalists, scientists, and culturalists acquiesce on the postulation that life starts within two months of conception (Gleitman, Fridlund, & Reisberg, 2004), implicit in this coalesce of ideological leaning is not, and has never been to protect the elimination of the developing human in its mother’s womb, but an insidious attempt to map out a stage in the continuum where such events might assume the legal backing of the state. In other words, the apparatuses and regimes of governance impelled by the lobbyists’ demands, or in a more refined term, driven by the feminists’ agitations for women agency and empowerment, would advance provisions and protections for women to eliminate their unwanted babies at will without penal consequences. The initial representation above does in no way project the paper as challenging women’s capacity to bear rule over their reproductive bodies, against which odds a feminist would have reasoned, “It was as if society didn’t want a woman to get an abortion” (MacFarlene, O’Neil, Tekdemir, Deniz, & Foster, 2017). Conflicting ideological leaning have trailed abortion and the rights women possess to exercise agency over their reproductive bodies in the recent times. What often perplexes a curious observer of this social trend is that the intersections of ideas and opinions on abortion and women’s right have been pervasive across religious, ethnic, social, cultural and political domains. For instance, in 2012, the world-acclaimed Islamic state of Türkiye (former Ottoman Empire), which had been reticent on abortion since 1983 suddenly reared a cream of political elites that challenged the status quo. In his highly contested speech at the fifth International Parliamentarians’ Conference on implementation of population and development; the Prime Minister, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan insisted: “I see abortion as murder... There is no difference between killing the child in mother’s womb and killing her after the birth.” (Radikal, 2012 cited in MacFarlene, O’Neil, Tekdemir, Deniz, & Foster, 2017). The Türkiye head of go-

vernance was not alone in that declaration because many of his parliamentarians shared his views on the subject. The Minister of Health, Recep Akdağ stated: "...Given our political position, we put the emphasis on the baby's right to live... People are asking about cases in which the mother has been through something bad. If necessary, the state will look after such babies. If we are to pass a law that will call for tougher restrictions on abortion, we definitely have to take some complementary measures" (Hürriyet Daily News, 2012 cited in MacFarlene, O'Neil, Tekdemir, Deniz, & Foster, 2017). Opposing views insisted that the expressed opinions do not necessary acknowledge the Türkiye women's right to make decisions on their procreative bodies, and the critics of the anti-abortionist conflate their agitation with other underpinning political interests as they wittingly dodged the questions on women's right on abortion. As categorical as these statements are, essentialization finds no traction on the terrains of poststructuralism. Contextualizing the discourse at the intersection of rights and agency for the individuals involved (in this case, the mother and her baby), this paper will argue for a wider focus and direct trajectory with respect to decision on bio-medical procedures to exterminate a developing baby in its mother's womb. The emphasis must not be solely on the parents' decision (father and/or mother). The unanswered question remains whether the developing baby, be it a blastocyst or fetus, reserves any right as a living being to decide to live or die? Infanticide is a crime globally, but killing a developing child by verdicts of a parent remains a much contested issue globally too. Within this milieu, can one begin to equate abortion with infanticide? What about the child's choice to live or die? Given the polemics generated by abortion not only in Türkiye's political platform, but also in most industrialized western world, the procedure is medicalized, demonized, trivialized, and at the same time valorized, and therefore, reified, as a necessary cure the Türkiye female body needs, which the state apparatuses aim to circumvent through policy initiatives.

4. Nature and Nurture at the Center of Interlocking Conflicts

In this paper, nature on one hand refers to the bio-physiological influence a developing human zygote encounters before birth (note that the impact of this influence may be replaying in the developmental continuum after birth and to death). The influence must be from zygote's genetic inheritance and other bio-physiological factors. Epigenetics factors may be included here. It refers to external modifications to DNA that switches the gene on or off. The alteration does not ineludibly change the DNA sequence, but only affects the reading of DNA by cells. Nurture on the other hand, refers to the influence of external factors after conception/or birth. This must stem from exposure, in other words, this might be explained as the effect epistemic salience (lived experience) and learning have on an individual. "If nature alone dictates behaviour, then scientists could pin-point specific genes and remove them in an effort to reduce unfavourable behaviours, like violence and aggression. If nurture alone dictates behaviour, then people have choices in what environment they expose themselves

to and can control their actions” (Sun West DLC Psych30, 2022). Therefore, Woolfolk, Winne, and Perry’s (2007) use of the works of Piaget and Vygotsky to illustrate co-construction of knowledge actually projects nurture as the sole human developmental agent. Having early asserted that lifespan development is a continuum, Woolfolk, Winne, and Perry (2007) overlook the different biological, cognitive, emotional, and spiritual development that happened to the conceived human before they were born. Nevertheless, Piaget’s and Vygotsky’s observation of “egocentric speech” and “private speech” (p. 46) was a confirmation that infants see the world, not through the lenses of people or environment around them alone, but in an already formed cognitive and emotional self with which they were born, and for which the nurturing environment would later be a source of tools for change. This paper recognizes Woolfolk, Winne, and Perry (2007) as an authentic source because it is a well-researched and detailed educational psychology text written by academics and reputable scholars and practitioners in the related field. The authors cited many verifiable works related to the topic, specifically in the concepts of cognitive development and knowledge production. The book cited relevant government agencies and professional bodies and scholars and philosophers of repute and their contributions were used extensively in the book. The source is critical for understanding the thematic concepts under review, only as a depiction of how best not to think of human biological, cognitive, emotional, and spiritual development because unlike the other works on the themes of human development the text seems to have overlooked the prenatal cognitive experiences of the developing fetus. Robbins’s (2001) contribution to the polemics of abortion, beginning of life, and the right of women is in diametric opposition to Gleitman, Fridlund, and Reisberg (2004), in which the evolutionists acquiesced in the naturalists’, scientists’, and culturalists’ views that life starts in earnest within two months of conception. According to the former school of thought, the fertilized egg called zygote or blastocyst, “mass of cells has grown to about one inch in length and is now called a fetus” (p. 466). Robbins’s (2001) opposition stems from Gleitman, Fridlund, and Reisberg’s (2004) further argument for the competitive motive between the mother and infant, in which the child craves survival and mother longs for opportunity to transmit her gene to the next generation as a survival mode. In a bid to ground their evolutionists’ leaning without recourse to the existential realities of the biological and scientific principles, this argument willfully excludes what is already established about the prenatal fetus-mother union. This paper acknowledges Robbins (2001) as a credible source notwithstanding the shortcomings. The text is a reliable, demonstrative textbook written by academics and reputable scholars and practitioners in the related field. The authors cited verifiable works related to conception, pregnancy, and prenatal human development. However, in “learning to be male or female” (p. 176), this paper begs to differ. The textbook projects nurture as the ultimate developmental factor to shape who a person becomes from birth to adulthood. This again, does not take into account the biological, cognitive, emotional and spiritual development that happens to a ba-

by before it is born, and evidences abound that nature and nurture work together in shaping human development from conception to adulthood and death. Moore's 1974 version of a human embryology states that "development is a continuous process that begins when an ovum is fertilized by a sperm and ends at death" (cited in: [American College of Pediatricians, 2017](#)).

5. State and Its Disciplinary Approach: An Introspective Review of Events in Türkiye and South American States

Although the penitentiaries almost all over the world have christened to a euphemistic notation currently referred to as the corrections, not much has changed in terms of the power dynamics between the internees and their incarcerators. This means the lawgiver (directly or indirectly), remains the almighty bourgeoisie (discussing this further is beyond the scope of this paper), while the receiver and victim remains the proletariat. Michel Foucault stressed the emergence of prison as the form of punishment for crimes and this emanated from the development of discipline in the 18th and 19th century. To Foucault prison as a state institution, is a highly reformed system of discipline meant to hem in a person's body. Foucault reasons that discipline grows a nascent economy and politics for bodies. Modern disciplinary institutions should therefore individuate (make bodies separate and distinct from other bodies) with prescribed tasks, and for training, observation, and control. Note that it is the state that wields disciplinary power. In furtherance of this review, our paper would engage a comparative appraisal of some cases in South America and Türkiye with a view to throwing more light on how pervasively and perniciously certain bodies are forced to disappear and dys-appear through reproductive politicking and state's disciplinary mechanism.

6. Power Dynamics on the Polemics of Death and Sustenance: "Mothers" or "Murderers" in Türkiye and Some South American Nations

The questions to guide the thrust of this section of the paper are: who is held accountable and why are (male rapists always almost free) while women are held accountable by law? Again, is the panopticon designed to surround only the poor, and surveillance system, only for monitoring the vulnerable ([Foucault, 1977, 1995](#))? Why then has there not been a case of the wealthy in spotlight among these nations reviewed, does it mean that it is only the poor girls that get raped and impregnated?

Foucault observes that a human subject's body is brought into subjection and compelled to behave in certain ways, a depiction of the state's social control of its population at large. However, Foucault's idea of power is fragile, impalpable and in continuous fluidity. He reasons that 'power is everywhere', diffused and embodied in discourse, knowledge and 'regimes of truth' ([Foucault, 1991](#)). This paper argues that power is both pervasive and concentrated, because a subject reserves the power to either be complicit to their subjugation or resists the op-

pressive state. In 2015, a 10 year old Paraguayan child was sexually assaulted by her stepfather and got pregnant. The state authorities denied her mother's request for an abortion. The pregnant girl delivered her baby at 11 years of age through caesarean section. While the girl's mother was charged with negligence, the 42-year-old step father, who did not deny the assault incident, said he would "submit to a paternity test to show the baby wasn't his" (Izadi, 2015). Again, in 2021, a 13-year-old Venezuela girl was raped and impregnated. The state authorities failed to arrest the male perpetrator of the heinous act, instead the girl's mother, and a female teacher who helped her to terminate the pregnancy were arrested and prosecuted, the three women each faced 20 years jail term because "ending a pregnancy is illegal in almost all circumstances in Venezuela" (Turkewitz & Herrera, 2021). The case of an 18 year old Salvadoran woman came to light, when she was charged with attempted aggravated murder as the state accused her of making efforts to terminate the pregnancy. The youth who denied the charges against her, became pregnant after being raped by her stepfather. She faced up to 20 years in jail, if convicted (Moloney, 2018). Three common denominators emerge with respect to these incidents from South American countries, which are as follows: first, the victims of the assault were women. Second, they were all people at the margin (the poor and vulnerable). Third, they were all re-victimized and/or re-traumatized by the state or its agents. Foucault insists that individuating of bodies could be perpetuated in a state that declares itself publicly to be democratic, while "discipline" could be implemented by the same state through undemocratic power relations. In other words, discipline becomes a state's tool, which aims to create docile bodies that could be controlled and honed in. Foucault believes that certain level of observation is necessary for the controlled bodies to internalize discipline.

On a very different trajectory, Olds, London, and Ladewig (2000) insist that, "Every human begins life as a single cell (fertilized ovum or zygote). This single cell reproduces itself, and in turn each new cell also reproduces itself in a continuing process. The new cells are similar to the cells from which they came" (p. 151). Olds, London, and Ladewig (2000) is not only a credible product of diligent and renowned professionals, but also invaluable for understanding the healthcare of mothers and new born children. The contents of the text are verifiable and references were made to the works of other professional bodies related to the field and present topic. Contributions of the source to the wealth of knowledge in the field of motherhood and pediatrics, from conception to birth and the subsequent bonding between the baby and its mother, is an elaborate collaboration to the earlier claims of Sun West DLC Psych30 (2022) and Gleitman, Fridlund, and Reisberg (2004). In its 2017 publication, American College of Pediatricians states unequivocally that life begins at conception, which it established to mean fertilization of the egg. It is important to note here that unlike the American College of Obstetrics and Gynecology which attempted a redefinition of conception to mean implantation, the American College of Pediatricians argues that "conception" is tantamount to fertilization and happens exactly as

sperm and egg merges and not when the zygote travel down through the fallopian tube to plant itself in the womb. This paper infers therefore that, the controversy in the divergent views of the discourses is not an attempt to protect or promote the newly formed human being, rather it's merely an effort to establish when it would be legal or otherwise to terminate the life of an infant in its mother's body. It is pivotal to this project nevertheless, to relate with the (American College of Pediatricians, 2017) that the development that started at the point of fertilization does not end at birth but extends into early adulthood, which resonates with the earlier contributions in Sun West DLC Psych30 (2022) and Gleitman, Fridlund, and Reisberg, (2004); an indication that when formed, human life comes into existence and joins a continuum of bio-physiological, cognitive, emotional, and spiritual development. This paper acknowledges the authenticity of American College of Pediatricians (2017) because it is a well-researched outcome of a renowned professional body concerned with the healthcare of children. The contents of their text are verifiable and references were made to the works of other professional bodies related to the field and present topic. The contribution of this source to the wealth of knowledge in the field of pediatrics from conception to birth and the subsequent bonding between the baby and its mother not only collaborates the earlier assertions in (Sun West DLC Psych30, 2022), but also serves as an authentic demonstration of the outcome of a well-researched and designed professional and academics topic. The source is of immense importance to the topic because unlike other works on the themes on fetal development, abortion, and women's right, it unequivocally posits its observation and maintained that life begins at the point a male sperm fertilizes the egg in a female.

7. Sperm Race Narrative: An Existential Reality of Human Conception

In the narrative on Sperm Race, this paper garnered that hundreds of millions of sperms released by male during sexual intercourse set out on a race. The sperms swim unpredictably and erratically, a lot of deaths occur along the way, and they have a lot of obstacles to overcome for just one of them to reach the goal. In this race, everything works against the sperms: there is no helping hand by the female reproductive tract. They have to navigate complex series of environment tantamount to warfare, in which timing is everything, the sperm gets to the uterine wall too early or too late, and it is doomed. At the end, only one of these millions of DNA and chromosomes conveying sperms will succeed in attaching to the ovum for fertilization to occur, and conception has occurred. Four weeks after conception brain development begins and the blastocyst start receiving information from the world about almost everything. At week four, we have developed into a small being, at one million cells per second growth rate. Spinal Cord, Heart, and Brain are clearly visible. At month two, the heart begins to beat. Brain grows 100,000 times a minute. This is a stage of critical and significant neurological development. At this point, if a pregnant mom consumes al-

cohol or drugs, or experiences a traumatic distress, tiny brain cell(s) could be damaged, and may create mathematical inadequacies during school age or schizophrenic condition, 40 years later as an adult. If she stays healthy, the brain of the baby would develop to its full potential. At month three, the fetus is now sensitive to stimuli and can move itself around in the amniotic fluid in the womb. At the 4th month, the fetus learns to kick, taste, and swallow. If the mom eats well, that is, feeding on variety of nutritious foods, the fetus learns to appreciate variety of tastes, adopts and later in life, becomes a less picky eater. If she eats junk meals, to adjust and augment the fetal developmental needs (fetal programming), it would, according to new scientific findings lead to health issues later in life such as obesity, diabetes and heart diseases. The 5th month sees the development of hearing and integumentary system. Month six, the brain cortex is partitioned, and eyes open to register light. At the month seven, the fetus develops intervals of sleeping and being awake, hair, and clear teeth formation emerge, response to sound from mom and the fetus has about 90% survival rate if born at this time. Month eight, the fetus is learning to breathe (inhaling amniotic fluid). Fetus behaves almost like a full new born baby but almost always sleeping. At month nine fetus exercises for its exit from the womb, and at birth if not taken away, but placed on mom's tummy immediately after birth, as an affirmation of a learned foundation, the baby crawls to the breast to demonstrate its sucking capabilities (Sun West DLC Psych30, 2022).

8. Analysis of the Secondary Materials

As in Turkish women's contestations to wield power and control over their reproductive bodies, the paradigm shift instantly subsumes the bodies of Türkiye women in the power influence of the government. Hence, the evolved disciplinary framework in the power-wielding apparatuses of the state, on one hand, met out surveillance and retribution, and the Türkiye women's reproductive bodies, on the other hand, are subjects of voluptuous gaze and subjugation as the population control victims of the state. Türkiye womanhood and its procreation bid thus, finds signification in spatial symbolism of power, influence, and resistance. The much debated tragedy of abortion as infanticide not only congealed and coalesced into a rostrum for doing disability but also a space of political demographic manipulation in which the bodies of fetuses are meant to disappear and dys-appear. There is an insidious shift from the bio-epigenetics (controls involving conception, and genetics considerations) to the socio-political hegemonic influence (demographic controls by the state through the perpetuation of legislative, executive and judicial appropriation bills emanating from lobbyists). MacFarlene, O'Neil, Tekdemir, and Foster (2017) is pivotal for making sense of the ongoing discourses on conception, abortion, women's right over their reproductive bodies, and the divergent views on when life actually begins; because unlike other works on the thematic issues, it reached beyond religion and spirituality to secularity in which, Türkiye is reimagined and presented as a socio-psychological space with respect to abortion, child bearing, and the bodies of

women. At this analytical stage, we wish to diverge to a wider methodical leaning by drawing from Patricia Hill-Collins' postulation on gender, power and the concept of the interlocking processes of oppression. According to Butler (1992: p. 21), "gender is performative, insofar as it is the effect of a regulatory regime of gender differences in which genders are divided and hierarchized under constraint". One might be tempted to disapprove of the words 'under constraint' by claiming that the Türkiye and South American female subjects are under no constraint to be in such individuated body forms. But could they have become anything different if they wished to, given the social taboos, prohibitions, threats of punishment they would experience in ritualized norms peculiar to their socio-cultural milieu (with respect to termination of pregnancy)? The repetition of learned norms in Butler's view constitutes the temporalized scene of gender construction and destabilization. But she also insists that gender is an assignment to the "extent it is never quite carried out according to expectation, whose addressee never quite inhabits the ideal s/he is compelled to appropriate" (Butler, 1992: p. 22). In other words, connecting a female's name with abortion or termination of pregnancy initiates the process by which certain performances of these titular positions are compelled. No single sociological idea has attracted such a vast army of discourses as gender. The notion of male and female qualities being determined by biological notations (essentially, western positivist perspective) was vigorously and somehow successfully challenged by behavioral scientists who believe that gender differences are socially acquired through cultural conditioning. Situations of internalized oppression, as experienced by the Türkiye and South American women in the narratives, were only understandable in traditional paradigm in which power as domination, operates from the top down, by coaxing unwilling victims to bend to the will of the more superior. Hill-Collins (1990: p. 225) reasons that this premise failed to account for "the willingness of the victim to collude in her own subjugation". This underscores the irony in Türkiye and South American women's defense of their agency and right over their reproductive bodies. Implying that Türkiye and South American women's site of oppression could well have served as their 'sites of resistance' but for their cultural contexts (Foucault, 1982: p. 781). Since it is the culture that formed the ideas and molded experiences shared with community members, individual biographies are essentially rooted in these overlapping cultural contexts. Their position as reproductive subjects, economic aids and home builders, left the Türkiye and South American females in the subordinate position described by Hill-Collins (1990) as the "interlocking processes of oppression" (p. 221). This paper argues that the resistance Türkiye and South American women face by challenging the perceived state punitive, oppressive, and pervasive policies in the court are, in fact, evidences of resistance through agency, which might reinstate power equilibria in the echelon. By so doing, they served as effective checks on male oppressive controls and dominance. Türkiye and South American women on one hand, and the state agents on the other, constitute binary opposites, thus are glaring exemplifiers of what Patricia Hill-Collins framed as a contradiction

in the “matrix of domination”, interestingly though, Hill-Collins failed to recognize that a matrix of domination contains few pure victims or oppressors (p. 228).

9. How Then, Might We Begin to Rethink Conception: Sperm-Race and Fertilization of a Female’s Egg?

It is particularly fascinating to learn that a woman’s reproductive abilities are developed before she is even born from her mother’s womb! A woman’s eggs develop inside her as she is being developed, before birth. On the opposite side of the spectrum, though, a man’s sperm is continually reproduced and generated by the body at maturity age. Sperm is constantly replaced, while a woman’s reproductive abilities have a limit. “When we study lifespan development we must start at the beginning—conception! The journey from conception to birth is a complex series of physical changes and stages” (Sun West DLC Psych30, 2022). It is noted that the male testicle is three degree cooler than other human’s body organs or parts, and for every heart-beat, equivalence of 1000 sperms are produced in the testicle of a man. Thus scientists have, through research likened conception to warfare: because sperms after production in the testicles have to navigate storage in epididymis via its ducts, and swim through cervical canal through the uncharted path to the uterus (note that any wrong turn means slow and lonely death). These happen simultaneously in the popular “Sperm Race” (in which boys with X chromosomes’ are faster, but Girls, with Y chromosomes last longer), after which only one sperm out of the millions that started the race (many would die along by coming in contact with cervical acids and the female’s body defense systems), only the very lucky ONE would succeed in attaching to fertilize the egg). It might therefore be considered unethical, uneconomical, and irreligious to waste such a hero/heroine through pregnancy termination on grounds of exercise of power and influence. Does it therefore imply that women are denied power over their procreative bodies? Note also that if a mom’s abuse of substance (drug or alcohol) can destroy the fetus’ developing brain cells leading to a mathematics deficient adolescent, and/or a schizophrenic adult forty years down the road, it would amount to understatement to assert that as early as the second month of fetus formation, life as we know it had begun. Sun West DLC Psych30 (2022) is therefore an invaluable source for understanding the historical shifts and controversies regarding conception, women’s reproductive rights, differing opinions of when life begins, and issues related to abortion, because it demonstrated in no uncertain terms the very time it might be assumed that human life actually started in the procreation continuum and the series of developments that it triggered, which continued after birth until death.

10. Engaging African Traditional Ecological Knowledge and Black Feminist Thought

Situating traditional ecological knowledge in the ongoing discourses evokes a rush of intuitive ambivalence: a sense of historical nostalgia that unsettles exist-

ing belief system bolstered by colonial logics, which tends to deny Indigenous peoples' philosophies and epistemological predisposition. It also evokes admiration of the seductive neocolonial tropes embedded in the hegemonic assumption of knowledge in which Western science subsumes all other knowledge-bases to the margin. For according to Willinsky (1998), the imperialists' quest was not only described as an expression of the resolve to know, which in itself was nurtured by the unparalleled hunger to amass power that aims albeit, subtly at the creation of distinctiveness and otherness, but also the weird, "stand-alooft companion" from the colonialists' hegemonic drive for political and economic expansion (Willinsky, 1998: p. 51). Western science assumes a reified status, and becomes validated as the criteria for all forms of human civilization and advancement. It therefore doubles as a tool for demonization and domination of the colonized peoples' pre-existing knowledge-base, and an inalienable scepter of imperialists' authority. Willinsky argued that the imperialists' 'will' to know cannot be divorced from their unconscionable and uncontainable crave for power, an obsession achievable only by Cartesian mind-body dualism. This split separated the decidedly European mind from nature's body: "To know nature, one must make it alien, perceive it as fundamentally other"...One can imagine how the degree of detachment afforded by distance might lighten concerns about imperialism's subjugation of peoples and territories. They were objects of study, the knowledge of which benefited humankind (p. 51).

The whole process of the imperialist movement, which often masks as civilization through dissemination of knowledge, is hence, clearly a quest for power and domination for economic and political gains. To explore Indigenous peoples perspectives on the controversies regarding conception, differing opinions of when life begins, women's right over their reproductive bodies, and issues related to abortion through the lenses of traditional ecological knowledge will most likely generate a pellucid vantage from which to dispassionately appraise the rationale of such responses. Indigenous Africans' traditional ecological knowledge comprised the philosophical, epistemological, and experiential understanding the peoples share with their physical environment and cosmos over centuries, which is balanced on African peoples' Indigenous education and ways of knowing. African Indigenous education relates to all forms of environmentally relevant knowledge production, validation, and dissemination. Relevant to this paper is the understanding that Indigenous peoples' TEK provides them the environmentally relevant recipe for resolving and managing their immediate ecological problems (including medical, pharmacological, spiritual, cultural, and socio-political emergencies). Implication of this expose for the thematic-core of the paper remains that of incrimination of the colonialists for their justification of the hegemonic clout wielded over Africans and the nations in the continent through demonization, and denial of the continent's traditional ecological knowledge-base (Lebakeng, 2010). No doubt, pre-contact African healthcare delivery, including: women's health and child-bearing, pharmacological, and medical systems had advanced and was sustaining the inhabitants of the continent

for centuries before the Arabic, European and recently, Indo-China colonial contacts; and as it happened to other colonized Indigenous peoples and cultures around the world, the colonizers benefitted immeasurably from the Indigenous peoples' vast ecological knowledge-base before imposing their authority on the peoples and their heritages (Isichei, 1983; Belanger, 2018; Smith, 1999). The goal of engaging TEK in this work is to inspire authorities and institutions of learning to challenge the predominant colonial views, constructs, and theorizations on women's health and child-bearing, pharmacological, and medical systems, that hitherto have denigrated Indigenous peoples' Ways of Knowing, and therefore have continued to cripple meaningful and environmentally relevant socioeconomic development in Indigenous societies. Put succinctly, the colonized people's traditional views on: inception of life, abortion and women's reproductive rights contrasts sharply from the generic Eurocentric views that has continued to subsume all under its sphere of influence, and it is part of the goals of this paper to construct a solid pedestal for the multiple opinions on the concepts to be generated and constructively interrogated.

11. Black Feminist Thought

It is no use re-engaging the polemics as to whether African feminisms are anti-colonial, for indeed, they are. Most of the proponents of Black feminist thought have used their works to connect African women's resistance of domination, oppression and subjugation with anti-colonialism (Timothy, 2007). It becomes imperative to locate African feminist thought within anti-colonial framework because according to (Wane, 2004, and Dei, 2000 cited in Timothy, 2007) "African feminist thought as an anti-colonial discursive framework is a counter and an oppositional discourse: it is a denial and repudiation of the repressive presence of colonial oppression. Embedded in anti-colonial discursive framework is the notion of "Indigenosity" that is central to African women's varied local knowledge, which have been denied and rendered invisible to the rest of the world" (p. 160). The justification of reflection on Black feminist thought for the present discourse on inception of life, abortion and women's reproductive rights, although influenced mostly by the scholarly contributions in the field, is that it is both a forum and a process for advancing knowledge among the minorities in the Western dominated social space. Black feminist thought within the context of the dictum: knowledge is power, becomes a site for empowering those who are enmeshed in the loop of racial, class and gender discrimination and marginalization. By offering the subordinate groups opportunity to encounter and share knowledge about their own experiences in a mutual community of faith, transformation and empowerment are achieved while economic, political and cultural identity negotiation remains at the intersections of societal categorizations of class, race, and gender. Black feminist thought thus, is a tool with which women of African, Asian, South American descents, and the native peoples of the world exhibit resistance to perceived oppression (who the existing social structures in the wider social, economic and political spheres; and the mainstream femin-

ism have continued to relegate to the lowest rung of social echelon through discrimination). Black feminist thought challenges existing institutions of power, and manifest its agency at appropriate levels of negotiation in order to reclaim the stolen, negated or marred identities. In black feminist thought this plethora of voiceless and faceless armies can unreservedly vent their experiences both as individuals and as collective whole with the sole aim of directing the gaze of the society on their plights, thereby stimulating consciousness and perhaps, inducing social transformation of the structures of political, economic and cultural dimensions. Hill-Collins (1990) has not stopped short of reiterating the critical role of knowledge in the empowerment of the oppressed peoples. The black feminist thought's paradigms of operation according to her, visualizes race, gender and class as the trident interlocking systems of oppression that has to be disrupted.

In the article, constructing colonized bodies, Boddy's (1998) deconstruction of the normative of Indigenous bodies, for instance, drew lines of comparison depicting westernized notions of pregnancy and maternity cares as obtained in a Toronto orthodox medical platform and a rural Sudanese Town of Hofriyat. The thematic relevance of Boddy's (1998) article is in two folds: first, the colonization of female bodies depicted in the control and manipulation of the Indigenous Sudanese female reproductive body parts (as was the control and regulation of Türkiye and South American female reproductive bodies); the former, made possible by the medical professionals and the society, informed by the prescriptions of the British neo-colonial ideologies. This is quite consistent with Michael Oliver's individual model of disability that comprised the personal tragedy theory (which coins and locates a problem in the body); the psychological or professional theory (which assumes authority over normative knowledge) and the medicalization theory which sets out to recover or rehabilitate the 'ailing' or dysfunctional body (Oliver, 1996: p. 31). Second to this theme is the resistance to the Western hegemonic impositions on the bodies of Sudanese women which Amal's body represented. Janice Boddy sets out parallel narratives that explore the bodies of Sudanese women as metaphors of cultural domination, oppression and resistance. Throughout the article, lines of comparison are drawn depicting westernized notions of pregnancy and maternity cares as obtained in a Toronto orthodox medical platform and a rural Sudanese Town of Hofriyat. Culturally induced biases and contradictions (British versus Sudanese) mark the opening of the article. Türkiye women's experiential realities with respect to conception, abortion, and the right of women over their reproductive bodies, as in the experiences of the three South American women highlighted earlier in the paper are depictions of agency, indocility, and resistance of subjects towards a perceived threat from the state. In this analysis, similar to the politicization of the Türkiye female reproductive bodies, Amal became a metaphor of resistance, it was both a site of resistance and a protected space, a figurative house within which mingled the male and female contributions to sustain human life. Amal's reproductive body also was cast as a symbol of disability by the bio-medical prescriptions. The

deviant body was therefore compelled to seek normative.

12. Marginality, Mothers' Right versus Babies' Choice: Rearranging Biological and Socio-Political Privileges to Accommodate Equilibrium

Is it not both surprising and also critical to emphasize that, as far back as 2003, a group of thought put forward a theory on the social construction of women bodies? (see Weitz, 2003). This argument of thought propounded that a process evolved in which ideas and concepts, (including scientific) about women's bodies emerged and became socially accepted, which was fundamentally a political process, that "reflects, reinforces, or challenges the distribution of power between men and women" (Weitz, 2003, p. 9; see also Aziz, 2023; McCarthy, 2023); an argument that resonates with the earlier questions of this paper on the disproportionately increasing scientific research on female reproductive rights that underplays or overlooks similar development on men's procreative systems. Drawing inference from the slavery era in the United States of America, Roberts (2003) reflects on the struggles of African American mothers to protect their daughters from being sexually exploited by the White slave owners. Relevant to this discourse is the posture that associated "reproductive freedom with equality" (p. 282), so that whether in the nineteenth century or twenty first century (as is the case at the moment), a cue is raised to the unfamiliar terrains of the social, political, and economic underpinnings for the control of female procreative choice. The insidious drive(s) irrespective of state initiating the enterprise, often weighs its punitive pendulum against the poor women in the societies, and in the western systems, women of color. This arrangement is deemed pervasive, and essentially pernicious. Reflecting on the earlier discourses in which the politicking of Türkiye and South American law-makers were incriminated in the promulgations against abortion rights of women, we can draw unmistakable attention to the parallels and dichotomies between the 17th century African American females' death-defying struggles over their daughters' reproduction rights and the current doggedness of women's right activists, feminists, and pro-abortionists to assert and defend the inalienable right of women to the ownership of their reproductive bodies. We, however, would beg to differ within the logics exemplified in the two scenarios. We wish to conscientiously and categorically reason that the heartless, profiteering, and therefore economic underpinning for the subjugation of the daughters of enslaved African-American women was unjust and regrettably refutable. In other words, the economic motive of White slave owners who wielded unparalleled power over their subjects to maximize profit cannot be equated with the present efforts by the state to regulate abortion. Understandably, both scenarios involved power dynamics, discipline, and regulations, when weighed against the delicate balance of the means and ends, the reality becomes obvious. The African-American mothers' fight over their daughters' reproductive rights was a counter balance to the slave masters' bid to maximize his gains by forced procreation using their subjects, which is the means. The

ends was to generate more man-power for his plantation, while the present day pro-choice would assert freedom of women in the society to inter alia, decide whether or not to terminate a pregnancy. This leaves us with the lingering question, not of morality or ethical dimensions, but similarly, the right of the aborted babies to their choice of life. We are again drawing from Michel Foucault's views on the modernization of patriarchal power, for in [Bartky \(2003\)](#), [Foucault \(1977\)](#) is depicted as warning that increasing use of law in assertion of political freedom might yet be followed by an insidious counter movement that projects discipline against the body. The body needs to perform more now than just the political allegiance. Discipline now aims to subjugate and regulate the body's operation. Undisputedly, [Bartky \(2003\)](#) made irrefutable claims of subjugation and subjectification of female bodies to the voluptuous gratifying gaze and gleeful satisfaction of the male in modernization era rooted in patriarchal domination. But insisting that the "styles of the female figure vary over time and across cultures, they reflect cultural obsessions and preoccupations in ways that are still poorly understood" (p. 28); the work unarguably argues against the basis of its logic and rationalization because culture itself is a hallmark of a society's way of life and social population does not preclude women. Some rhetoric questions might be pertinent therefore, how might we begin to rethink power in the light of women's current move to appropriate and use their bodies as tools of empowerment, resistance, and triumph, by choice rather than legal compulsion? [Bartky \(2003\)](#) writes, "Today massiveness, power, or abundance in a woman's body is met with distaste. The current body of fashion is taut, small breasted, narrow-hipped, and of a slimness bordering on emaciation; it is a silhouette that seems more appropriate to an adolescent boy or a newly pubescent girl than to an adult woman" (p. 28). In other words, a psychological analysis of a modern woman's subconscious would reveal a personality conscious of men's affects, gazes, and amorous desires; and she is making all efforts to satisfy or at least live up to those needs, which begs another question, how is the subjective female complicit to the body's subjugation? It becomes obvious that Bartky is parochially, or better still, deliberately denying, and therefore undermining the inherent power in the female body images, which the latter deploys at will to both speak and resist her perceived systems of oppression or subjugation in the society. While it will be out of the context of this paper to delve further into the various citations [Bartky \(2003\)](#) uses to depict female's subjugation, the assertion that "we are born male and female but not masculine or feminine. (and again, citing [Butler, 1992: p. 11](#)), Fertility is an artifice, an achievement, "a mode of enacting and re-enacting received gender norm which surfaces as so many styles of flesh" (p. 27), is as counter intuitive as it is a disembowelling of feminine of its innate power to negotiate, resist, and appropriate its rights. Although Bartky engaged Foucault's notion of discipline and punish that produces docile bodies, the relevant sampled reflections from journals and magazines of body control and modifications cited by the work show that women wield as much, if not more agency over their bodies as do their male counterparts. What Bartky does not unravel, which

could hold the key to a pellucid view into the esoteric realities of female body image, ownership, power, choice, and resistance remains the various races, and echelons of womanhood and their degree of fame attachment for each category of female. While appearing to lay claims to generic representation of womanhood, [Bartky \(2003\)](#) soon wallowed in the sin of essentialization. For instance the Black feminist thought sharply contrasted Bartky's representations. To refocus to the thematic underpinnings of this paper however, [Roberts \(2003\)](#) argues on the side of caution, implying that the experiences are not the same for all women from all intent and purpose. She reasons that the poor women and women of color experience their body differently and that the state's power of discipline and punish is more envisage on them than the rest of the women in the western societies. She reasons, "of course, the reality for poor women is that these decisions to deny them the choice to terminate their pregnancy ...and by approving a policy of encouraging child birth, the court has permitted the government to use financial coercion to influence women's reproductive decisions (p. 27). [Roberts's \(2003\)](#) impressive locution leaves no one in doubt as to the writer's position as a feminist. Our paper is however developed on the basis of no-partisanship. But it will not fail to trail the slim margins of the discourse in order to locate the voices of the voiceless trapped in the abyss represented by global feminism. We would continue to ask if the choice of the unborn should be jettisoned into oblivion, and made to disappear and dys-appear on account of women's desires to wrest power over their reproductive bodies from the state. [Pollitt \(2003\)](#) reflects on another dimension of assault on feminism by insisting that restraining pregnant mothers from drugs and alcohol is indeed the determination on the part of the doctors (to wit, by extension, the state) to control female procreative bodies and processes a "disdain for female and belittling of females' intelligence" (p. 293). Also of critical importance to this paper's deliberation at this juncture is Pollitt's view that, "all the women affected so far have been poor and black or Latina, without private doctors to protect them (in Florida, non-white women are ten times as likely to be reported for substance abuse as white women, although rates of drug use are actually higher for whites)" (p. 292). This assertion resonates perfectly with our earlier submission on the experiences of the women (and of course the poor) in South America with respect to reproductive choice and the state's punitive measures that regulates abortion. Candidly, the pendulum, weighs lopsidedly against poor women and women of color (in industrialized societies), and their right to choose or make decisions on their reproductive bodies, unfortunately, this would be so if the conceived baby is precluded from the equation.

13. Conclusion

Since life exists in fetuses to the extent science, some traditional beliefs and nature have proven under different circumstances that critical experiences of stress or trauma in fetuses ripples or metamorphose into events of dire consequences in the life of adolescents (such as struggling with math calculation in school age)

or full-blown adult (as in suddenly becoming schizophrenic), decisions on living or dying of a fetus must not be exclusive of the parents. Some theorists in the past believed that nearly all important developmental changes were controlled by biological factors (nature), saying our behavior unfolds over time, like a plant growing from seed to flower. Other theorists believed that the psychological environment (nurture) was the master of our development, saying our behavior is molded by experiences. It would be improper to congeal the debate on “inception of life” to a parochial framework for mapping out when it might, or might not be appropriate to terminate a fetus in the womb. Questions on the choice of the blastocyst to live must also be explored using every instrument that may avail itself for such investigation. Fetuses are, however, unable in their susceptible and vulnerable state, to contend with their parents in decision-making. It is only justifiable to reason that the state (Government) as the defender of the citizenry must establish mechanisms and strategies to defend unborn babies and ensure that only health-related, inevitable complications are grounds for an abortion procedure. We would also argue that tying the polemics and discourses of abortion to the politics of demographic control in part, negates its gross nature and enormity of its unhealthy realities, and further undermines, conflates, and therefore, complicates ethical consideration of the rights of the unborn on one hand, to choice of life, and on the other hand, women’s agency over their bodies. As the pendulum continues to sway more against people situated at the margins of society, emerging discourses must be geared towards addressing the social trend on issues of abortion, the right of women over their reproductive bodies, and the choice of unborn babies. There is, therefore, a call for an urgent refocusing of the global sociopolitical trajectory towards politicking that is necessary to evolve a just, equitable, unbiased, culturally and ethically sensitive approach to scientific investigation in reproductive healthcare and delivery.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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