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**REPRODUCTIVE RACISM IN DANIELLE EVANS'S "HARVEST:"  
BLACK, CHICANA, AND WHITE MOTHERHOODS IN THE CONTEXT OF  
REPRODUCTIVE RIGHTS DISCOURSES**

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***Abstract:** The paper explores the short story "Harvest" (2010) by African American writer Danielle Evans and traces the figurations of the racialized aspects of gender in "Harvest" within the theoretical frameworks of Black and Chicana feminisms, motherhood studies, and intersectionality. After situating the Black and Chicana characters' anxieties around egg donation in the historical context of reproductive rights, economics, and the politicization of Black and Chicana women's bodies, I discuss how the intersections of gender, race, ethnicity, and class impact the racialized gender identity of especially the Black protagonist and to a smaller extent that of her Chicana and white friends as well. I argue that the current practices of egg donation depicted in the story are imbricated in the wider system of racial capitalism that values women's childbearing capacities differentially in terms of their race.*

***Keywords:** contemporary American literature, race, Black motherhood, Chicana motherhood, motherhood studies, egg donation, reproductive rights abuses, intersectionality, racial capitalism.*

## **1. Introduction**

The short story "Harvest" (2010) by African American writer Danielle Evans is set in an ostensibly post-racial society: an environment in which one's (perceived) racial background is thought to be immaterial in terms of social equality. However, the story exposes the contemporary manifestations of systemic racism by commenting on the US white supremacist climate that the female characters of various racial, ethnic, and socio-economic backgrounds have to navigate. This paper traces the figurations of the racialized aspects of gender in "Harvest" within the theoretical frameworks of Black and Chicana feminisms, motherhood studies, and intersectionality. I explore the extent to which ideological and historical constructs of motherhood frame the experiences of young Black, Chicana, and even (non-Latinx) white women in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. After situating the Black and Chicana characters' anxieties around

egg donation in the historical context of reproductive rights, economics, and the politicization of Black and Chicana women's bodies, I discuss how the intersections of gender, race, ethnicity, and class impact the racialized gender identity of especially the Black protagonist and to a smaller extent that of her friends as well. I argue that the current practices of egg donation depicted in the story are imbricated in the wider system of racial capitalism that values women's childbearing capacities differentially in terms of their race. Finally, I demonstrate that "Harvest" problematizes white womanhood and motherhood in order to indict the normative patriarchal scripts of motherhood as well as to act a 'magnifying glass' by rendering visible the contrast between white women's (as well as mothers') racial privilege and non-white women's lack thereof.

The title of Evans's collection in which "Harvest" was published, *Before You Suffocate Your Own Fool Self* (2010), already foreshadows the volume's thematic preoccupation with gender and race. It is a line from Black feminist poet Kate Rushin's "The bridge poem" (1981), the prefatory piece to *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color*, a seminal feminist anthology edited by Cherríe Moraga and Gloria E. Anzaldúa. Rushin's poem laments the mental burden of the various roles expected of Black women. Among others, it evokes the figure of the Black Southern Mammy, the loyal, content servant in charge of taking care of white children often at the expense of her own: the speaker expresses her disdain for having to remind white people to breathe, that is, to take care of their physical and emotional needs. Accordingly, the acclaim *Before You Suffocate Your Own Fool Self* received engages with the volume's treatment of gender and race. Reviewers praised its fresh female voice and perspective (Dreiling, 2010) and its unflinching thematic focus on the liminality of early adulthood (Peelle, 2010). They have also commented on Evans's subtle treatment of racism: "the blackness of her characters is always there and fraught, both ancillary and totally central to understanding the main conflict [since] her characters are always in danger, and it is Evans's considerable achievement that though this danger cannot be reduced to skin color, it is nonetheless inextricable from it" (Orsi, 2012, p. 172).

In "Harvest," the narrator-protagonist entangled within the systems of white supremacy is Angel, an African American college student, who lives in a dormitory some time after the new millennium with white Laura, African-Americans Nicole and Courtney, and Chicana Candy. A number of their white dorm-mates sell their eggs regularly; however, Black and Chicana students, while envious of the financial perks of being a donor, do not bother applying to be one: these intelligent and healthy young women believe that on account of their skin color,

the agency would reject them. Soon, Angel is shocked to realize she is pregnant; after contemplating abortion, she decides to keep the baby.

## 2. The sociocultural contexts of Black and Chicana motherhoods

The majority of scholarly work done in feminism and the emerging interdisciplinary field of motherhood studies is centered on white, middle-class, cisgender, heterosexual, able-bodied mothers in Western societies, the experience of whom is, of course, far from monolithic, but they do share a variety of concerns. However, for those who fall outside of this category, such as for Black women, women of color (such as Latinas, Native American women, or Asian American women), and/or women of lower socio-economic backgrounds, mothering can take up vastly different meanings and is often restricted by different ideological norms both in and outside of their communities. The following short overview of some of the systemic issues plaguing Black and Chicana women and mothers in the US, relevant to the topic of the paper, is necessary to appreciate the severity of the characters' response to not being able to become egg donors.

When it comes to conceptualizations of African American motherhoods, it has to be acknowledged that the institution of slavery played an immense part in how ideologies of motherhood have been constructed. Black women from the Middle Passage onward were excluded from white spaces as white-dominant society was interested in them as laborers (Glenn, 1994, p. 5). A variety of factors such as the time and place of enslavement, as well as the size of the plantation household and the nature of work needed there tinged the experiences of enslaved women to differing degrees, but what unified plantation life was the reality of reproductive rights abuses. Enslaved women were forced to give birth to multiple children since the principle of *partus sequitur ventrem* stated that such a child would also automatically become a slave (Morgan, 2018, p. 1). The practice of 'breeding' was therefore used widely as a means to increase capital across the South. The physical survival of children (Glenn, 1994, p. 7) due to poor postnatal care of both the newborn and the mother (Schneider & Schneider, 2007, p. 81) presented another hurdle for enslaved mothers. This led to a fear of childbirth (Neely, 2016, p. 37) and of the pervasive practices of gynecological-obstetrical experimentation (Ojanuga, 1993, pp. 28-30; Washington, 2006, p. 70).

The Antebellum South, however, was not the only site of the multi-faceted exploitation of Black women. They were deemed unfit mothers in public discourse even after *partus sequitur ventrem* ceased to apply and the birth of Black children was no longer deemed

economically expedient (Davis, 1983, p. 186; Paul, 1968, p. 78). In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, for example, as eugenics emerged, Black women were increasingly seen as genetically inferior and thus manipulated or coerced into using birth control (Washington, 2006, p. 190-197). The federally funded sterilization of women and girls of color without (informed) consent became rampant in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Davis, 1983, p. 188), so much so that medically unfounded postpartum hysterectomies on Southern Black women became known in the vernacular as Mississippi appendectomies (Roberts, 1997, p. 90). Racial disparities in the quality and quantity of perinatal care as well as maternal and infant mortality rates persist into the 21<sup>st</sup> century: pregnancy-related mortality ratios, for instance, are disproportionately high for Black women.<sup>1</sup>

Chicanas have been in a somewhat similar predicament. Charting the complicated genealogy of the term Chicana (meaning a US woman of Mexican origin) is outside of the scope of this paper, but what is relevant here is that while Chicana is an ethnic category and not a racial one (many Chicanas identify as and are considered to be white, while others have indigenous or other backgrounds), it has been racialized, that is, what tends to unite the experiences of Chicanas with regards to womanhood and motherhood is that they too have tended to be excluded from the relatively protected realm of white womanhood. Whether they found themselves in the US in the aftermath of the 1848 Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo or migrated there since, women of Mexican origin have been undermined as women and mothers by white supremacy. A prominent example of reproductive rights abuses committed against them – which is also believed to have contributed to the racialization of Mexican-origin people across the Southwest – is the mass sterilization campaign in 20<sup>th</sup>-century California, which affected 20,000 women (Lira and Stern, 2014, pp. 11-14). This decades-long operation was underscored by eugenics, which framed Chicana (and Latina) sexuality and fertility as excessive (Gutiérrez, 2008, p. 8); accordingly, stereotypes about diseased, fecund, animalistic, and reckless Chicana women and girls became widespread (Ruiz, 2008, p. 98). They were criminalized and deemed mentally ill, and their children were thought to contaminate the fabric of American society and cost the US too much money (Lira and Stern, 2014, pp. 17-18).

The politicization of Chicana bodies is apparent in the fears around immigration from Mexico, which are intertwined with a fear of Chicana's alleged proclivity for procreation (Gutiérrez, 2008, pp. 109-112). Attempts to curtail reproductive healthcare and perinatal care

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<sup>1</sup> For examples from both the 21<sup>st</sup> century and the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, see David and Collins (1997); Creanga et al. (2017); Geronimus (1987 and 1992); and Schoendorf et al. (1992). For a discussion on the racial disparity in perinatal care in the wider context of medical racism, see Bridges (2011).

to undocumented immigrant women in the 1990s was also rooted in the assumption that women crossing the border with the hopes of delivering their child in the US took part in organized crime activities (Gutierrez, 2008, p. 117). While women of Mexican origin might not have been forced to ‘breed,’ they were conceptualized as ‘breeders’ with extremely high fertility rates (Gómez, 1974, p. 40). After the new millennium, Chicanas still tend to be oversexualized and dehumanized in public discourse, and Latinas in general face several obstacles regarding reproductive care, including low insurance rates, limited access to abortions, or language and cultural barriers that prove to be detrimental at hospitals and other places of perinatal care (Hooton, 2005, p. 72).

### **3. The racialized landscape of reproductive technologies**

As non-white American women, the majority of Evans’s characters do not feel valued as prospective mothers nor as egg donors. Angel, Nicole, Courtney, and Candy have to reckon with the reverberation of these issues in newly emerged facets of reproductive racism. Reproductive technologies<sup>2</sup> have occupied a unique place within reproductive rights discourse. While “technologies to facilitate conception, ranging from simple artificial insemination to expensive, advanced procedures such as in vitro fertilization (IVF) and egg donation” have become increasingly available, women of color, specifically Black women, seem to be excluded from access (Roberts, 1997, p. 246). White and non-white women have diverging access to reproduction-assisting technologies even in the 21<sup>st</sup> century (Rayna Rapp as cited in Roberts, 1997, p. 310). Reasons from the ‘demand’ side include economic barriers: since fertility treatments are expensive with limited public funding, those who suffer from systemic socio-economic inequality are unlikely to afford eggs, sperm, or paying for the services of surrogate mothers (Roberts, 1997, p. 253). “Racial steering” might be another reason since the medical establishment’s unconscious bias against Black women may manifest in their exclusion: Black women might be advised against certain procedures due to views about their ineptitude as mothers. The perceived lack of belief in their fitness as mothers may lead physicians, for instance, to think that they do not deserve to be treated for infertility (Roberts, 1997, pp. 254-255). Furthermore, “many Blacks harbor a well-founded distrust of technological interference with their bodies and genetic material at the hands of white physicians” and they tend to be

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<sup>2</sup> For discussions on other forms of racialized reproductive labor as gestational surrogacy that are beyond the scope of this paper, see Weinbaum (2019), as well as Davis (1998), who argues that enslaved women can be considered as surrogates for their owners.

suspicious of “genetic marketing” (Roberts, 1997, pp. 260-261), a subset of a general medical mistrust exhibited by Black women.<sup>3</sup>

Not unlike other forms of assisted reproduction, “sperm and egg donation practices in the American reproductive industry mirror positive eugenic beliefs in new and more subtle forms” (Daniels & Heidt-Forsythe, 2012, p. 720), evinced by the lack of demand for non-white egg donors both in “Harvest” and in the extradiegetic world. Hence, it is not surprising that white couples – those who are the most likely to use these services – rarely consider soliciting genetic material from Black women (Kluchin, 2011, p. 3). Many defend couples’ rights to eggs from genetically reliable sources: “of good stock” and not from some “unknown third party,” as a legal scholar puts it (as cited in Roberts, 1997, p. 279). Dorothy Roberts argues that “although this process devalues all women, it devalues Black women in a particular way” (1997, p. 279), referring to Black women’s inferiority in white supremacy’s cultural imaginary.

Both Black women and Chicanas have been framed in the US as inferior both genetically and in terms of their mothering abilities, but in “Harvest,” African American students are in a peculiar position relative to other students, non-white, non-Black alike. There *is* a degree to which their experiences are comparable. For example, as the Chicana character Candy remarks, she anticipates the rejection of her genetic material: “Let me go in there and sign Dulce Maria Gutierrez Hernandez on the dotted line and see how fast they throw me out the office. Who knows what could be hiding in DNA with a name like that” (pp. 78-79). Candy’s comment carries the weight of the history of Chicanas’ criminalization and the belief that they are dangerous to the American nation. However, as Afropessimist Jared Sexton explains, while there are similarities between the way various racial and ethnic minorities have suffered under white supremacy, “the singularity of racial slavery and its afterlife” is undeniable (2010, p. 44). The domination of Black people, claims Sexton, is evident in the “specific genealogy” (p. 54) of the gratuitous violence and total commodification (p. 38) that spans from slavery to the present. A specific ad that students are exposed to foregrounds this commodification of Black female bodies. The girls listen to some white donors:

they compared paychecks and pain levels and wondered what had become of the little pieces of them released into the universe. We sat in Candy’s room and faked gagging. Nicole let the back pages of *The Village Voice* fall open, 900 numbers and round brown asses staring up at us from the floor. She said,

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<sup>3</sup> On the long-standing, quantifiable medical mistrust by Black women (as compared to white men, white women, and Black men), see Corra & Carter (2008). The study identifies as the roots of this mistrust the legacy of slavery and institutional racism and sexism in general, and the Tuskegee Syphilis Study and medical (i.e. obstetrical-gynecological) misconduct in particular (p. 78).

‘They’re *mother* material, but who wants to fuck them? If we were hookers, we’d be making twice what they were.’ (p. 67, emphasis in the original)

Nicole’s bitter, sarcastic comment, made while looking at fetishized and literally commodified Black bodies, signals her understanding that being desired and having potentially profitable flesh does not necessarily entail being valued by white supremacy’s libidinal economy. Furthermore, the fact that the girls are casually exposed to this ad underscores the ubiquity of misogynistic, anti-Black violence that Black studies scholars Saidiya Hartman and Christina Sharpe refer to as quotidian (Hartman, 2006, p. 4; Sharpe, 2016, p. 4). These seemingly minor but discursively traumatizing microaggressions bespeak the still-relevant dehumanization of Black Americans.

The seemingly innocent term ‘harvest’ – used here to refer to the process of extracting the eggs – reflects on the predicament of Black women in particular as well. Harvesting, as used in agriculture, refers to an engagement with nature the outcome of which is positive or at least neutral: on the surface, gathering crops is not necessarily violent, nor is it politicized. However, just as aggressive – often colonial – practices have disfigured the land in order to extract as much from it as possible, the delicate hormonal balance driving the natural menstrual cycle is tampered with for the sake of harvesting the eggs. As it has been pointed out by ecofeminists, women of color *and* white women alike have been impacted by the interlocking domination of both nature and female bodies since misogyny and the irreversible environmental damage stemming in part from colonization are both products of white Western patriarchy (Longenecker, 1997, pp. 1-2). The unequal distribution of resources has privileged white people in general but it has nonetheless resulted in exploitative agricultural practices such as sharecropping, driven by un(der)paid work done by underprivileged white people as well as people of color.

In addition to often being economically exploited as sharecroppers, Chicanas have been victims of environmental racism apparent, among others, in the heavy pesticide use on certain US farmlands that has resulted in adverse health effects in pregnant Chicanas and their newborns (Davies, 2006, p. 31; Larsen et al., 2017). Agricultural and misogynistic violation have thus gone hand in hand in places and times other than (or adjacent to) racialized chattel slavery in America. However, several factors bespeak Black women’s unique historical position vis-à-vis the land: the enslaved worked during harvest for the economic benefit of their owners, not for themselves; enslaved women were literally owned just as plots of land were owned; their children were ‘harvested’ from them to then become the property of the slaveholder; and

newly free Black people were inevitably ensnared in the sharecropping system, which exploited their labor to a considerable extent, thus constituting a new form of quasi-enslavement.<sup>4</sup> Hence, the apparently perspicuous title mobilizes the troubled histories of women's bodies used in economic production, thereby throwing into relief the fraught situation Angel and her friends find themselves in.

It is in this context that all the non-white characters – but especially Angel – navigate the complex racialized landscape of reproductive rights. At the forefront of the story are the racialized aspects of class that structure Angel's experiences. She comes from a family of modest means and makes frequent references to class.<sup>5</sup> The friends' financial background seems to be a stronger link of affiliation than their race or ethnicity: Angel says that Laura used to be “a homegirl, a *hermanita*” (p. 66, italics in the original) until she started wearing expensive boots (p. 66). Angel aspires to what she sees as white middle-class status: earning a salary that enables one to have non-tenuous financial security, such as being able to afford a home, provide for a family, have continued access to quality education, and, above all, having enough discretionary income that allows for conspicuous consumption. Her biting commentary on egg donors exposes the way she conceptualizes class differences. When she enumerates the commodities that the donors spend their newly earned money on, she judges those who flaunt purchasing power by buying “stuff” of an ephemeral character, such as stilettos, expensive dinners, or “endless overpriced trinkets” (p. 65), while making it clear that they come from middle-class (or higher) backgrounds as their “parents pa[y] their full tuition anyway” (p. 65). She speaks less harshly of those who prioritize more sensible purchases, such as computers or “a savings account for grad school” (p. 65).

She points out the racialized nature of middle-class identity by commenting on Courtney's background. Being “barely middle-class,” Courtney's family makes financially irrational decisions out of desperation to cling to their status, that is, their choices make sense in their libidinal, but not financial, economy: “the family forgoes vacations and savings and stock for a nice house in a nice neighborhood in the hopes that the neighbors will forget they

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<sup>4</sup> It is also to be noted that the presumed ‘innocence’ of the term harvesting is further troubled when it goes hand in hand with land theft (as in the case of the dispossession of indigenous populations). Also note that enslaved (i.e. ‘stolen’) Black people were forced to work on stolen land in the US, just as Latinx people have often been exposed to agricultural inequalities on land that used to belong to their ancestors, as in the California example mentioned by Davies (2006, p. 31) and Larsen (2017). See Crofts (1995) for an overview of the transition from slavery to sharecropping and its historical interpretations.

<sup>5</sup> For the purposes of this paper, I use class to refer to the financial background and purchasing power of the characters, that is, in accordance with how the protagonist uses it. It is to be noted, though, that Black feminists such as Angela Davis refer to class in Marxist terms (1983), while Cedric Robinson cautions against conflating the struggle of Black people with that of the non-Black lower classes (1983).

are black” (p. 68). In an environment permeated by consumerism and heavy with bitterness as a result of inequality, Angel puts more and more emphasis on the difference between those who earn money through egg donation and those who are excluded from this opportunity. Just as their long-term financial well-being is contingent on skin color due to the racist job market, the girls are aware that their short-term financial situation is impaired by racial capitalism’s hierarchy of values in a supposedly post-racial, colorblind society. Angel is particularly resentful of Laura, who makes money as a highly sought-after egg donor and thus can pass as middle-class solely because of whiteness: looking at Laura, the non-white students infer that what the agency seems to reject is the genetic material of non-white women. Thus, issues of class only serve to accentuate the pervasiveness of race when it comes to non-white women’s reproductive issues.

#### **4. Laura as a magnifying glass**

While the focus is on Angel, and, to a lesser extent, on other non-white women, “Harvest” introduces the reader to Laura’s story as well. Angel contrasts Laura with her well-off peers, remarking that “Laura’s mother was a cashier at Penney’s,” making her one of their community (p. 66). When referring to Laura’s style, Angel mentions that her “wardrobe screamed Kmart” not only to emphasize that she did not dress “like city girls” (p. 71), but the fact that she can only afford clothes from a department store. When Angel decides to get an abortion, she asks Laura to go with her to the clinic. After accompanying her older sister to get an abortion twice while they were still teenagers, Laura is ashamed and is resolute not to get pregnant. She gives no explanation as to why she says yes to Angel’s request to go with her to the abortion provider, nor as to why she suddenly writes Angel a check in the waiting room that will eventually help persuade Angel to keep the baby (for a discussion of Angel’s pregnancy, see Lénárt-Muszka, 2020, p. 78). Angel speculates that Laura’s reason might be “guilt, or anger, or privilege” (Evans, 2010, p. 84). Indeed, the resignation on Laura’s face hints at guilt that might also stem from not having been able to help her sister more, or from a possible Christian upbringing – the text does not attempt to reduce this tension. Laura’s family story is not integral to the plot since it does not advance Angel’s plotline or character development. Its inclusion, then, serves to illustrate the multifaceted issues surrounding women’s reproduction. Up to this point, “Harvest” has only emphasized that Laura enjoys the privileges of skin color, without any specifically negative issues stemming from her racial background or the history of the exploitation of the white female body. Her shame nevertheless indicates Evan’s drive to suggest

that Laura is not immune to the restrictive, normative views patriarchy has imposed on the construction of motherhood.

The Western patriarchal discourse of motherhood and its normative codes have been made up of and informed by a number of theories, beliefs, and interests, all intent on policing women's bodies and behavior – including those of white women. In the binary oppositions that subtend the Western philosophical tradition, women have been positioned on the “nature” end of the nature/culture spectrum presumably because of their “direct bodily involvement with procreation” (Glenn, 1994, p. 22), which has resulted in the conflation of motherhood with womanhood. Motherhood scholar Andrea O'Reilly argues that the “ideological assumptions” undergirding our contemporary view of mothering include not only essentialization or idealization, but naturalization as well – the belief that motherhood is driven by instinct and is natural to all women (2016, p. 65). Motherhood, then, has been subject to many restrictive norms both on the social and the individual level for white women as well, all of which has an unescapable effect on Laura: the fact that she is ashamed of her sister's pregnancy reveals her assumptions about what ‘proper’ motherhood looks like.

The brief inclusion of Laura's storyline does more than decry the sociocultural construction of motherhood; it also sheds light on the complicated affective dimension of Angel's situation. When Angel finds out about the pregnancy, she first calls her mother. However, because of the mother's preoccupation with gossip, catalogues, and horoscopes (Evans, 2010, pp. 71-72), Angel finds it impossible to open up to her. Feeling frustrated and angry with herself, she visits her father and tells him about both the pregnancy and her plan to get an abortion. He immediately offers some practical advice and emotional support (pp. 74-75); however, Angel is not ready for compassion: “I had screwed up, I wanted to punish somebody” (p. 75). She abruptly leaves to visit her boyfriend, conscious of her immature anguish and her need to lash out at somebody (p. 75). He is eager to become a father and immediately starts budgeting, but she senses a tone of desperation behind his enthusiasm and notices that he is “making grossly obvious mathematical errors” (p. 76). Again, she leaves abruptly, which illustrates her agitation (pp. 77-78). More importantly, back at the dorm, she does not interrupt the girls' conversation about their frustration over not being solicited as donors. Instead, she imagines how they would react to the news of her pregnancy and realizes she is not ready to cope with Nicole's realism, Candy's feminist sensibilities, and Courtney's empathy.

Instead, she visits Laura, who proves to be the best target on whom to project her anger and shame. After telling her the “whole story,” she asks her to go with her to the clinic (pp. 79-

80). “I’m asking you ... because I can’t really tell them” (p. 80), she explains, which, on the one hand, could simply refer back to her not wanting to hear the specific reactions she imagines earlier. On the other hand, since the girls are talking about their pain of not being good enough to be egg donors, Angel’s decision of not sharing her predicament with them might stem from an effort to shield them. She needs Laura “to understand what she [Laura] couldn’t possibly: how it felt to not be her” (80), hinting at the gap of privilege and fulfillment she sees between the two of them. She acts as if Laura has personally offended her; her passive-aggressive attitude shows her misguided need to make Laura feel uncomfortable throughout their brief and tense conversation, ending with a slight insult: “maybe you know what it feels like to almost be a mother” (p. 80). Again, Angel exits the conversation without closure, barely covering up her need to hurt Laura. The narrative function of Laura’s character is thus to highlight the abyss between her and Angel, Nicole, Courtney, and Candy; she is mostly there to serve as a backdrop to Angel’s pain.

While “Harvest” foregrounds the agony of those who cannot be egg donors, it also touches upon the struggles of donors such as Laura, whether directly or obliquely. Those whose genetic material is solicited by the agency might enjoy the consumer items they can now afford, but their abdominal pain, bloating and the disruption of their menstrual cycle (p. 67) signal the long-term health risks of egg donation. In fact, the procedure can be regarded as inherently invasive not only because it entails repeated interventions into the donor’s delicate endocrine balance but also because it ruptures the integrity of the body through repeated drug injections and the extraction itself, which involves puncturing the vaginal wall while the donor is sedated (Martineau, 2019). The success of the agencies hinges on young women’s willingness to undergo a series of painful, intrusive procedures for a financial reward usually referred to as “compensation” for the donor’s time (Martineau, 2019). This euphemism, as well as the use of the misnomer ‘donor,’ is used in an attempt to divert attention from the commodification of female bodies and serves to mask the fact that there is an entire, multimillion-dollar, international<sup>6</sup> industry predicated on the use of said bodies. While Laura’s discomfort is not directly narrated, Angel does remark that donors are in pain (p. 67), and, as Laura is motivated to undergo egg donation again and again for financial reasons, she can be regarded as an instrument – essentially, a victim – in the lucrative business of reproduction.

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<sup>6</sup> Although “Harvest” does not mention the international aspect of assisted reproduction, American (typically but not exclusively white) egg donors are in high demand on international markets, whether legal or illegal. Another facet of the international surrogacy market is its reliance on surrogates – also called gestational carriers, another euphemism that underlines their instrumentalization – who often undergo several pregnancies for financial reasons. See Cunha (2014) and Frank (2009).

Apart from centering Angel's and the individual egg donors' situation, "Harvest" subtly comments on the wide-reaching social ramifications of childbearing itself as well. The fertility industry is embedded in a wider, pronatalist framework, which views having children as entirely natural, inherently moral, and even necessary in order for humanity to survive or a nation – or even a race – to thrive. This framework, often supported by religious views and enacted through public policy, influences those at the other end of the egg donation 'chain:' people who are adamant about becoming parents regardless of the ethical dimensions of the fertility business. Individual motivations might, of course, vary: clients might be driven by Western culture's tendency to idealize parenthood and promote the idea of the 'perfect' family as well as by a variety of other, personal and culture-specific factors, but whatever their reasons might be, their longing for a child is monetized on a large scale. Women's reproductive capacities – regardless of race or ethnicity – as well as the notion of 'motherhood' and 'family' have been politicized (albeit to varying degrees and in diverging ways), leading to a climate in which Angel, Laura, Candy, the agency's clients, and the abortion clinic's patients all tussle with (not) wanting and (not) having a child or with (not) having marketable eggs. Therefore, the seemingly personal decisions of having a child or donating eggs are enmeshed in the logic of capitalism not only in the case of Black American women, Evans's oblique treatment of which fact only accentuates the complexity of the short story.

## 5. Conclusion

In sum, "Harvest" problematizes diverse facets of motherhood along a racial/ethnic differential, encompassing a wide range of stages and manifestations of (not) becoming a mother. It alludes to various historical tensions briefly but unequivocally: Candy's comment about her Spanish-sounding name brings to mind the enduring vilification of Chicana motherhood as well as the perceived genetic material of Chicanas, just as *The Village Voice* ad evokes the long-standing commodification of Black female bodies. The story's capacious discussion of (un)wanted eggs and (un)wanted babies exposes both historical and contemporary figurations of the maternal in the US and sutures them to a capitalist logic that it heavily criticizes. While in Rushin's poem it is the Black speaker who reminds white people to breathe lest they suffocate, in the story it is a white woman – Laura – who holds space for a Black woman, lends her money, and enables her to breathe a little more freely. The white woman's money might even ironically result in the birth of a Black child as she dissuades Angel from terminating her pregnancy. However, this will not eventually change the fundamental,

underlying power dynamics that inflect the experiences of the women of “Harvest”: Laura’s symbolic act fades in comparison with the systems of white supremacy and racial capitalism that have long subtended women’s disparate access to reproductive rights by framing Black and Chicana motherhoods along economic interests.

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