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Does social work really want to dance with zombies? A reply to Lynch and Wilson

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Abstract: This reply to Lynch and Wilson's recent publication in this journal is a modest contribution which involves an intermingling of criticism and confirmation with a potted history of right-wing luminaries such as J.M. Buchanan and Gary Becker tucked inside some meta-textural analysis of the Mont Pèlerin Society and the collective dynasty of neoliberalism. The authors place heavy emphasis on the "dichotomous" relationship between collectivism and economic liberalism and suggest that the unresolved tensions impede a critical social work. Rather than offering a "third way" between communitarianism and liberalism, this reply breaks open the debate by changing terrain to post-anarchism and Jean-Luc Nancy's social ontology as a more contemporary reading for the politics of critical social work. By tying the concepts of "freedom" to "community" together in a non-substantialist way, I argue that neither neoliberalism, nor normative versions of community are viable antidotes to zombie economics and our political futures. An alternative account of Agamben's destituent politics of community for social work is elaborated through an engagement with post-anarchist writings of Marcello Tarì and The Invisible Committee.

Keywords: critical social work; neoliberalism; ontological anarchy; biopolitics; community

Introduction

In this reply to Lynch and Wilson (2023) I engage with the core argument that neoliberalism and community are juxtaposed as two sides of an interminable political debate in social work. While agreeing with the authors that the "black boxing" of neoliberalism needs to be carefully unpacked, I disagree that these two sides are intimately aligned, because in fact, they operate at very different levels of political analysis and practice. I show that it is exactly by pursuing what the authors call the "nuanced and complex" dimensions of a degenerate neoliberalism that allows us to trace not only its zombified horrors but also very firmly cast "collectivism" (Maleseviç & Haugaard, 2002) as its antidote and demonstrate why collectivism remains a viable alternative for a politics of social work. This article offers a different reading of activist politics which stand apart from Lynch and Wilson's characterisation of community - e.g. protest, resistance, uprising, dissent, disruption – by advocating a radical shift towards an ontological anarchy of immersive time and place which offers a radical rethinking for critical social work. In contrast to the authors representation of community, this requires that we seize on the logic of kairological time (as opposed to chronological time) to better understand political events and actions as 'figures' against a temporal 'ground'—one that is characteristically organised into an overarching narrative but is broken up into distinctive time segments. This is "community or collectivism in the making", or what The Invisible Committee call in their book *Now*, (2017) "truly political in that it only emerges from life itself and makes it a definite, oriented reality" (p.65). Such a move also means that we re-situate politics, community and 'subjective' freedoms, as affective spontaneous affect, as temporally mobile embodied actors. These actions take place within a reality of continuously

intermingling, and punctuated spaces of unfolding resistance and flowing lines of command (see Malabou, 2023). These are rupturing non-reflective moments of verticality which are crucial to processes of social reproduction . Politically, this is the kairological wager of openness and novelty, change and rupture, and discontinuity amid continuity (Murchadha, 2013). A collective or community reaches a moment in which a rupture occurs, a moment which cannot be calculated in advance. Let us call this a transitive-topological political ontology for social work and community. A flash mob demonstration is a good example of kairological politics. Dreaming is performed in kairological time, and this partly explains why its affects are so intensely felt on waking. Through what Erin Manning (2020) calls a "politics of immediation" people often come to freedoms, communities and political issues through the temporality of events, feelings and circumstances as matters of affective political concern and not through some preexisting right they have which is hard-wired inside and just waiting to be triggered. Catherine Malabou (2023) proposes such an ontological anarchy by re-elaborating a concept of anarchy articulated around a notion of the "non-governable" far beyond an inciting of disobedience or common critiques of capitalism. Simultaneously, we can see this is a new dialectical opening for critical social work that pushes it well beyond the fixed binaries offered up in the diagnosis by Lynch and Wilson.

Margaret Thatcher's motto "there is no alternative" is often cited as the "*pensée unique*" of the neoliberal ideology which has held sway globally for decades. In Le Monde Pierre Bourdieu famously proclaimed we must resist this "single thought" of neoliberalism because it rests on a 'zombie' economic system which is an unthinking monster in the relentless pursuit of a single objective, short-term profits. He goes on to describe neoliberalism as "a program of destruction of collective structures" and nothing more than an "abstract mathematical fiction" (1998a: 3). Yet, in 2022, Slobodian and Plehwe announced that "Neoliberalism is dead again". According to many writers it has died and been reborn several times over (Gerstle, 2022). While the fortunes of neoliberalism wax and wane, economic and political realities across the globe demonstrate that the influence of neoliberalism is falling dramatically in government policy and planning circles. The global financial and economic crisis centring on financialized capitalism is widely considered a fundamental crisis of neoliberalism. Which begs the question of whether social work really needs to pay much attention to it as a "collective of ideas". Following Dean (2012) by thought collective, I mean an organised group of individuals exchanging ideas within a common intellectual framework. In reference to the supposed demise of neoliberalism, Feygin and Gilman (2023) write:

> Following the successive shocks of Donald Trump's election and the COVID pandemic, policymakers from across the political spectrum are embracing a more active role for the federal government in directly configuring the 'real economy'. These politicians and wonks do not share a common vision for how Uncle Sam should guide industrial development. But they agree that Washington must reclaim some of the discretion that neoliberalism outsourced to central bankers and C-suites.
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> https://www.noemamag.com/the-designer-economy/

Zombification is a term that has been used loosely in Leftist circles to refer to the draining of life force associated with the impact of neoliberalism. The pursuit of 'zombie economists' has been undertaken with fervour over the past few decades. In *Zombie Economics: How Dead Ideas Still Walk among Us* (2010), John Quiggin was one of the first to expose the failures of neoliberalism leading up to and culminating in the post Global Financial Crisis era. He pushes metaphors of horror to describe the impact of decades of neoliberalism "Unlike other

monsters like werewolves and vampires, zombies always come in mobs. Individually, they seem easy enough to kill, but in a group their strength can be overwhelming. So, it is with the ideas underlying market liberalism" (2010: 36, also see Cain & Montgomerie, 2019; for a discussion of the impact of zombie economics on austerity and the dismantling of the welfare state see Mendoza, 2015). I guess zombies are a bit like social workers. You hope that they never show up at your front door. But our predicament is no joke. Whether neoliberalism is little more than a moving corpse is prescient because it tells us something about our collective social work futures. We recently established a *Social Work Futures Research Group* here in Glasgow and my two esteemed colleagues Heather Lynch and Tina Wilson played a crucial leadership role in creating this cutting-edge research group, organised an online international conference on *Futures* during COVID-19, whilst at the same time editing and contributing to the *Social Work and Society* special edition on ' Social Work Future(s) — What social work does the world need now?' This impressive collection of essays is energising because it is one of the few publications in social work that shows how the vitality of inter-disciplinary research spanning fields such as environmental humanities, critical animal studies, quantum physics, Buddhism and plant science can contribute to a post anthropocentric social work (also see Bozalek and Pease, 2021). 'In reply' mode it is tempting to respond to several essays in this fine collection, but it is the article by Lynch and Wilson 'Canonical critiques and geopolitical shifts: Addressing the neoliberalism/collective dichotomy in social work' that is responded to here. As a set-piece the article is chastening, it is Gonzo at play, Tommy the Traveler at work pushing boundaries with verve and polemic. This response to their article hopes to make a modest contribution to the authors plea for a "more situated and thoughtful analysis" (2023:.1) and "ponder the nuance" (ibid: 4) of variants of neoliberalism, but also to avoid the incubation of neoliberalism by naïve liberals, whilst furnishing a stronger anti-neoliberal account for social work derived from anarchistic thought.

Insights into the Mont Pèlerin Society

To understand the work of neoliberalism and the role of the Mont Pelerin Society (MPS) we need to expand our conception of its reach beyond that offered by Lynch and Wilson. They are right to emphasise the significance of MPS and its caucus of intellectuals - founded by von Hayek, Röpke, Hunold, and others in 1947 in Switzerland - as having a pivotal role in the dissemination of neoliberal ideas. For example, as Van Horn and Mirowski (2009) show the Chicago School of neoliberal economics and MPS were "substantively parts of one project rather than different parallel projects" (15). My first deep dive into MPS was in Sydney following discussions with Mitchell Dean just prior to him publishing the highly cited 'Rethinking neoliberalism' (2012) in the *Journal of Sociology*. Mitchell generously alerted me to the long shadow cast by MPS in influencing elections and policy. He stressed the intellectual importance of the wild Friedman over the caged Hayek as well as upsetting my prejudices about neoliberalism's main targets (see Callon, 2002 for a discussion on the difference between "wild" and "caged" economists). Bolshevik central economic planning and its international policy dispersion really were one of the main concerns. The prospect of individual liberties subsumed to "the Plan" in the attempt to bring "the Plan" to a successful conclusion terrified MPS participants. As it probably does Lynch and Wilson. Hayek exaggerated the consequences of centralised planning arguing that this would lead society down a road to serfdom that would end up with some form of a totalitarian state. Nevertheless, a close look at the interdisciplinary and inter-professional circles of MPS and related think tanks such as the *Atlas* network, reveals a powerful nexus of neoliberal authority, leveraging of intellectual power, and political influence. As Bourdieu (1998b) noted the MPS family of neoliberalism's draws it political leverage and economic power from those whose

interests it serves, reserve banks, stockholders, financial operators, hedge-fund traders, industrialists and conservative or social-democratic politicians. Timothy Mitchell tells it best "The neoliberal order was an economic and social project to be built by capturing and reorganising political power" (2009: 386). MPS did this by altering the intellectual climate and restructuring the terms of popular debate. It would have been helpful if Lynch and Wilson had told us is that MPS has been an intense subject of continuous debate dedicated to a deeper understanding of the organizational and intellectual underpinnings in the rise of neoliberalism (Hartwell 1995; Walpen 2004; Plehwe, Walpen, and Neunhöer 2006; Plickert 2008; Mirowski and Plehwe 2009; Burgin 2012). Apart from these references there are at least a dozen more recent edited collections and single authored books which home in very closely on MPS's historical foundations and moral and intellectual legacy. In this respect it is relevant to a social work readership to point to Jessica Whyte's history of MPS in *The Morals of the Market* (2019), because as Slobodian points out in his review:

> Whyte offers the best history yet of how neoliberals put hierarchical ideas of civilization and race at the heart of their thought from its origins, and how they constructed their version of human rights as a barricade and battering ram against political projects premised on human equality and economic justice.
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> https://www.versobooks.com/en-gb/products/500-the-morals-of-the-market

Mont Pèlerin in Virginia

The authors understandably concentrate their overview on some of the best-known figures associated with MPS, but it's worth acquainting with another neoliberal who has been overlooked in the capitalist right wing's playbook. The life and writing of Nobel prize winner in economics James M. Buchanan. This will go a small way towards responding to Lynch and Wilson's call to investigate "the problems that occur when neoliberal ideas are operationalized" (12). Let's look inside the belly of the whale because the authors want us to appreciate the "nuances" of neoliberalism. Buchanan was a member of the Mont Pelerin Society (MPS) and president from 1984 to 1986, as well as a Distinguished Senior Fellow of the libertarian Cato Institute (Plehwe, Walpen and Neuenhoeffer 2005: 2). Buchanan developed a social philosophy alongside his better-known liberal market economics of public choice theory. His notion of social order was often referred to as "new contractarian" in the vein of Hobbes and he held the view that humans are naturally unequal and born cheaters. Nevertheless, new contractarianism tended to hold to the view that mutual co-operation was important in establishing contracts. Amadae (2011) shows how Buchanan sharply deviated from this assumption in his observation that:

> Once reached, one or all parties may find it advantageous to renege on or to violate the terms of the contract (1976, 26)

In clarifying this Amadae tells us "Essentially, according to Buchanan, even though it is obvious that mutual cooperation (even given inegalitarian original distribution) is superior, there is still the ever-present incentive to rob the other" (2011:.42). Given that for Buchanan we are all naturally born back-stabbers, rule-breakers and defectors the only effective way of obtaining social order is through enforcement policing. In order to maximise utility and secure co-operation "Buchanan looks to force to maintain law and social order without considerations of the distributions of individual entitlements" (2011: 47). To give a social work example of the Machiavellian logic at work here a perpetrator of domestic abuse will not stop because it will lower the pain inflicted on the victim, but because he has calculated

the financial cost of a court appearance, or weighed up the amount of shame any public disclosure will reveal (see Tauchen, Witte, & Long, 1991 for a game theory account of domestic violence). In his book *The Limits of Liberty* (1975) Buchanan wrote:

> any person's ideal situation is one that allows him full freedom of actions and inhibits the behaviour of others so as to force adherence to his own desires. That is to say, each person seeks mastery over a world of slaves (92).

Reading this prompted Nancy MacLean to proclaim:

> S.M. Amadae's luminous explication of Buchanan's thought reveals the falsity of his claim of being a classical liberal and the chilling will to power driving his intellectual program (2017, 242, note 9).

Buchanan hailed from the Deep South and worked at the University of Virginia. He maintained that he "owed his tenacity to blood, soil and upbringing" of his Southern birthright (Tanenhaus, 2017). This is evident in his plea for a Southern federalism "who will join me in offering to make a small contribution to the Texas Nationalist Party? Or to the Nantucket Separatists" (1987, 274). Charlottesville, Virginia was a racial hotspot during Buchanan's tenure in the late 1950s and early 1960s.

> Today we remember ferocious civil-rights struggles waged in Birmingham and Selma. But ground zero for the respectable defense of Jim Crow was Virginia.
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> https://www.ineteconomics.org/perspectives/blog/meet-the-economist-behind-the-one-percents-stealth-takeover-of-america (cited by Parramore, 2018).

According to MacLean (2017) Buchanan was influential in defending Jim Crow policies of school segregation along racial lines in which African Americans were discriminated and relegated to second class citizen (for a critique see Carden, Geloso, & Magness, 2017).

He funnelled intellectual ammunition to the "Massive Resistance Movement" for racial segregation and claimed that the crux of the desegregation problem was that "state run" schools had become a "monopoly," which could be broken by privatization. In typical neoliberal style he wanted to offer white families a "choice" about how to spend their education dollars in a racial educational hierarchy through private state tuition grants (Kuehn, 2023a). MacLean summarises his involvement with racial segregationism claiming this school of thought advocates "enlisting white supremacy to ensure capital supremacy." Buchanan, funded by the oil baron billionaire Charles Koch, was one of the architects of Americas racist economics. MacLean (2017) discovered archival letters in which Buchanan wrote to Koch summarising their joint political ambitions and the way in which MPS might be mobilised to help achieve these:

> Buchanan recommitted to their shared goals for the twenty-first century: cripple the environmentalists who pretended to care about climate change as a cloak for their naked power grab over American industry; dismantle Social Security, Medicare, Medicaid, and workplace insurance and pensions to end their deformation of natural competition in the labor market; replace graduated income tax with a flat tax to prevent discrimination against the wealthy; privatize "the most socialized industry in the world"—education, from kindergarten through grad school. And finally, the virtually

> all-white-male Mont Pelerin Society could figure out what was up with feminism, which was “heavily socialistic for no apparent reason.”
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> https://www.bostonreview.net/articles/democracy-chains/

In a debate between Adam Martin and James Broughel in the libertarian online journal *EconLib* they discuss the virtues of Buchanan’s public choice theory and game theoretic approach to welfare economics. https://www.econlib.org/zombie-welfare-functions/ The technicalities of this debate are beyond the scope of this article. But what is most apparent is that Buchanan had his own version of zombies, and consistently advocated a type of zombie economics in his critique of social welfare. He regarded the welfare state as sucking the life blood out of capitalism and draining opportunities for private profit. MacLean (2017) shows how Buchanan regarded society as a cut-throat world which was under siege by takers and in his own language referred to the threat of parasites and predators who were out to fleece the wealthy. He used the metaphor of parasite to describe what he called the “anarchy of academia” arguing that student unrest on university campuses was a direct consequence of the fact that public institutions, like universities, were effectively parasitical on the public purse which subsidised them (Buchanan and Devletoglou 1970). Following a lecture at Rockhill ‘Academic Freedom and the Public University’ (1970) Buchanan successfully lobbied the University of California to sack the scholar-activist Angela Davis because “she was a communist” arguing that the “tax paying public does not want radicals in the university” (Perrone, 1971). Subsequently, a Los Angeles Superior Court ruled that firing her for being a Communist was unconstitutional (Kuehn, 2023b). The case of Angela Davis and Buchanan demonstrates the difficulties in making simple assertions about neoliberals as stalwarts of individual liberty and freedom. With this example of Buchanan “he is better thought of as an advocate of punitive order maintained by significant state government discretion over policy and purse strings, even in cases where legal, procedural, and constitutional rules were all clearly on Davis’s side” (ibid, 20). As Samuels (1976) argued at the time neoliberals will happily enlist the policing or military powers of the state as agents of control when it suits their self-interests and in order to protect the wealthy and powerful. For the elitist Buchanan the people who needed protection were the rich property owners to prevent voters from encroaching on them (for a discussion of Buchanan’s ‘Italian connection’ to the elitist theories of Pareto and Mosca see Irving, 2021). For Buchanan welfare as ‘public service’ is replaced by ‘rational self-interest’, with welfarism regarded as the arch enemy to be dismantled as part of the wider parasite economy. In an article on neoliberal zombification in our times Henry Giroux (2010) argues that:

> Zombie politics supports mega-corporations that cannibalize the economy, feeding off taxpayer dollars while undercutting much needed spending for social services. The vampires of Wall Street reach above and beyond the trajectories of traditional politics, exercising an influence that has no national or civic allegiance, displaying an arrogance that is as unchecked as its power is unregulated.
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> https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.2304/pfie.2010.8.1.1

The “politics of implementation” (Lynch & Wilson: 12) for neoliberalism arguably reached its zenith in Chile in the mid-1970s. Like Friedman and Hayek, Buchanan cheered on Augusto Pinochet’s Chilean Dictatorship and advised on his economic agenda (Meadowcroft, & Ruger, 2014; Offer & Söderberg, 2016). In 1977 Hayek wrote a letter to a German newspaper, the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, to protest about what he argued was unfair

international criticism of the government of General Pinochet. It is reported that Buchanan provided a strategic defense of military rule to a predominantly Chilean audience when he visited the country in late 1981 (Stepan, 1985). He subsequently told a Chilean interviewer that "'nobody would support completely unlimited democracy'" (*El Mercurio*, November 22, 1981). MacLean (2017) claims that Buchanan personally supervised and designed the Pinochet regime's antidemocratic revisions to the Chilean constitution (see Farrant, 2019 for a defence of Buchanan's role in Chile). According to Fisher (2009) the most influential Chilean inspired by Buchanan's Virgina School was José Piñera, the minister responsible for labour reform and the privatisation of the social security system. Fisher goes on to say that:

> He claimed that the reforms created "the basis for a new political, economic and social reality" (*Que Pasa*, December 17, 1980). Piñera stressed the importance of propaganda work for the military, the staff of advisory bodies, and public servants in general, who needed to be cajoled to implement the reforms. The neoliberal utopia of a society self-regulated by the market seemed to be just within reach, fostered of course by a military regime with absolute political power (2009, p.325)

In a short testimony statement to the Cato Institute in 1997, Piñera described Buchanan as a "visionary". Buchanan participated in an MPS Regional Meeting in Santiago that was held in 1980 and made recommendations about adding a conference panel on the "moral defences" that could be "mounted for the market economy" (see Farrant & Tarko, 2019). The dark irony is dripping here. It's hard to see past MacLean's verdict that Buchanan was not driven by any general project of social liberation but only with a blind obsession with power which sought merely to manage any crisis that might befall his capitalist benefactors.

We need to talk about Gary!

Gary Becker was MPS president between 1990–1992 and was on the Executive board between 1985 to 1996. In 1983 he was appointed to the University of Chicago economics department and later became known as one of the 'Chicago Boys' of neoliberal economics. As with Buchanan he was awarded a Nobel Prize in 1992 for extending microeconomic analysis to a wide range of social behaviour and interaction, including nonmarket behaviour. His work is particularly relevant to social work because the empirical focus of research which included family life and marriage, fertility, parenting, suicide, household management, romance, crime and punishment, welfare benefits, racial discrimination and addiction (see Webb, 2015). These lend themselves readily to social work interventions more than any other neoliberal economist and any MPS influencer. Regarding Becker's claim to respect the pre-existing freedom of individuals, Foucault in constructivist vein suggests that this liberty is itself formed by liberalism. He writes 'this governmental practice which is installing itself is not content to respect such-and-such liberty, to guarantee such-and such liberty. More profoundly, it is a consumer of liberty…It must produce it, it must organize it' (Foucault, 2004: 65).

What is particularly significant about the work of Becker for critical social work is his attempts to push furthest the logic of the extension of market rationality to all domains of social life. Becker vigorously constructed not only a theory of market behaviour, driven by a series of cost–benefit calculations, but also a "politics of life". Winnubst, for example, maintains that Becker's concept of human capital is developed into 'the barometer of all life's activities' (2013: 466). In his lectures on neoliberalism Foucault argues that Becker produces subjects as 'entrepreneurs of themselves'. He bases this claim on Becker's conception of the utility-maximizing agent who solely acts upon cost/benefit-calculations.

Becker’s oeuvre constituted an extreme version of biopolitics in advocating normalizing techniques based on statistics for the regulation of population(s). His rational-choice and demographic economics are in fact a biopolitical technology of normativity. What may feel like a sombre reminder given recent events in the Middle East, to get a feel for the obsessive micro enconomics Becker gave a paper the link between terrorism and fear, using Israeli terror incidents during the 'Al-Aqsa' Intifada of 2000 as case examples. He focused on how terror acts effected public services such a coffee shops and bus services, and asked whether suicidal bombings had more impact at weekends or after public holidays. The extract below gives a glimpse into Beckers bio-thanato economics about fear and terrorism.

> Consistent with our theory, the overall impact of attacks on the usage of goods and services subject to terror attacks (e.g., bus services, coffee shops) reflects solely the reactions of occasional users. We find no impact of terrorist attacks on the demand for these goods and services by frequent users. Education and the exposure to media coverage also matters. We find a large impact of suicide attacks during regular media coverage days, and almost no impact of suicide attacks when they are followed by either a holiday or a weekend, especially among the less educated families and among occasional users (2011: 1).

Becker was primarily concerned with how to keep the consumerist capitalistic wheels of the economy for services and goods moving during the height of “terrorist” campaigns (example “Proposition 2 An increase in the degree of terrorism ↲ reduces consumption of ξ when expenditures on reducing fear, E are exogenously given” 2011:72). In a bizarre summary he proposed that “People can *invest* in controlling their fears, bringing their subjective beliefs closer to objective probabilities” (ibid: 4, italics added).

Becker believed that he could solve the controversial issue of immigration in proposing a market solution. He argued that the UK government should sell migrations visas with a potential earning of over £600 million a year. Talking of the Conversative-Liberal coalition government he said “The coalition’s immigration cap scheme could be amended using this proposal to ensure that the most suitable immigrants are allowed in. The people willing to pay the most to live in the UK are likely to be the same people who would contribute most to our economy” (2011: 1). His theory of marriage illustrates the biopolitical tenor of this brand of economic liberalism, “Marital patterns have major implications for, among other things, the number of births and population growth, labor-force participation of women, inequality in income, ability, and other characteristics among families, genetical natural selection of different characteristics” (Becker, 1974: 299). While he had much to say about individual rational optimisation, rational choice making, and the maximisation of individual utility his concerns with not mainly with individuals but with statistical cohorts of groups and sample populations (Becker, 1993: 402). As the above example shows, while his analysis operates at the level of populations, the certainties produced by statistical normalization hold profound implications for individuals. Newheiser argues that:

> the Chicago economist Gary Becker exemplifies what Foucault describes elsewhere as biopolitics: a form of power applied to the behaviour of a population through the normalizing use of statistics. Although Becker’s preference for indirect intervention might seem to preserve the independence of individuals, under biopolitics individual liberty is itself the means by which populations are governed indirectly (2016:3)

Becker's approach to fertility, gender and the family had a significant impact on the way researchers and policy makers considered issues about fertility transition and childbirth. Jemima Repo argues that 'gender' is an apparatus that works biopolitically through neoliberal concepts of autonomy, choice, and empowerment. In her 2018 article she concentrated on Becker's theory of fertility to supplement this broader concern with the biopolitics of gender by developing the:

> genealogy of neoliberal biopolitics in three original ways. First, I introduce Becker's key texts on the economics of fertility to the archive of the genealogy. Second, I argue that Becker's theory of fertility was more than a micro-level theory of reproduction – it was a new economic paradigm of demographic change based on a rational choice model of human behaviour. Becker's theory of fertility, I argue, serves as a link between the management of individual bodies through the discourse of *homo economicus* and biopower at the aggregate level of population. Third, I tie these genealogical observations to present-day rationalities of population governance in the context of development, which I argue are heavily influenced by Becker's theory of fertility (236).

Repo situates Becker's paper 'An economic analysis of fertility', as a crucial site at which population first became problematized in neoliberal thought (239). She lifts the lid on the motives sitting behind the analysis or what might better be called the ideological stance of Becker in formulating his theory of fertility.

> Becker's model of fertility decision-making based on simplified assumptions about reproduction was integral to being able to extend price theory to reproductive decision-making in the family. The number of children was treated as the result of the 'demand' for children relative to their 'cost' to parents, determined by 'a mix of various factors: income, child costs, knowledge, uncertainty and tastes' (1960, p. 231). Effectively, the number of children in a family depended on how much families could afford to spend on them – in other words, their 'cost' or 'price' both in terms of income and time (2018: 242).

In Becker's insistence on a bottom-up approach that focused on economic decision-making in the family, having and rearing children is considered a consumption good in the new theory of fertility. In anticipating potential moral outcry, in his own words he said "It may seem strained, artificial, and perhaps even immoral to classify children with cars, houses, and machinery (1960: 210) Becker used a human capital benchmark of "quality" to account for parental decision-making about having children (e.g., how much time and money would be invested). Fertility declined if children were more expensive, Becker claimed. He suggested that children were like cars that came in different qualities and therefore different prices: 'I will call more expensive children "higher quality" children, just as Cadillacs are higher quality cars than Chevrolets' he said (1960: 211). Repo sums up the general implications of Becker's economic formulations as follows: "therefore, reproductive decision-making was an automated regulator of population quality: those with more human capital would produce fewer but higher-quality children; those with less were likely to produce more but lower quality children" (ibid: 246) (also see Blake, 1968 for an earlier critique of Becker's brutalist methodology and its disregard for social context). As will be shown below Becker exemplifies the regime of power that Foucault calls 'biopolitics'. It would be revealing to empirically investigate the extent to which, if at all, the assumptions of Becker's various economic demographics have been carried over into children and family social work, risk assessment, human growth and women's development policies, child protection or informal carer support.

Conclusion

Lynch and Wilson are right to point to the slovenly preference for easy targets in social work, and by implication the term neoliberalism needs to be defined with greater precision and nuance. I also warned about this tendency at some length in the recent *Routledge Handbook of International Critical Social Work* (2023) and suggested that neoliberalism should not be ubiquitously used "as a denunciatory category for just about anything we disagree with" (15).

To conclude, we can ask a basic question. Is collectivism the radical Other of economic liberalism as suggested in the authors title? Does the sharp opposition between libertarianism and collectivism exist? Well, no, not if you are a fan of anarcho-communitarianism or what is more fashionably referred to these days as post-anarchism, which draws on the Italian Autonomia, Tiqqun and Situationist movements (Rouselle. & Evren, 2011: Newman 2011). Both unite a geopolitical concern for social and ecological justice while recognizing the integrity and individuality of the subject. Individual liberties are co-extensive with other social beings along with the multiplicity of meanings circulating whenever individuals are "with" one another. These "anarcho" branches of political thought regard liberty and social equality as intimately related (see Emma Goldman's summary of anarchist principles from her 1900 essay "Anarchism: What it Really Stands For", Antliff, 2007: 57). In the histories of anarchist movements there are ample examples of autonomous non-hierarchical groups from housing associations to publishing houses which focused on individual liberties and social organisation. Colin Ward's *Freedom Press Group* is a classic example (see Wilbert & White, 2011). The post-anarchist view of freedom is much closer to the communitarian perspective developed by Jean-Luc Nancy than that of Kropotkin or Bakunin. As we shall see Nancy's (1988) anarchic unleashing of freedom's freedom is a counterpoint to what he calls the identity politics of both libertarianism and collectivism. His theory of freedom is a robust critique of libertarian notions of freedom as substantialist selves who possess essential properties of rationality, choice, rights and liberties. By thinking of freedom as rights or properties of the self we are condemned to regard it as a blind and obtuse necessity. Hutchens (2005) explains:

> For Nancy freedom is not philosophy's rational "decision to decide", the volition of a moral self, or "ontologically free" subject, but the very decision dictated by the open immanence of existence itself. And that openness is a singular surprising "burst" irreducible to ontological presuppositions … In alternative terms, free agency is a spontaneous movement that is inaccessible to reflective consciousness and thematic expropriations (64).

For Nancy freedom is an experience, and likely to be an intense and surprising one at that (Badiou's reflections of the conditions of truth formation has strong parallels to this). Against foundationalist perspectives such as libertarianism, Nancy maintains that "each time freedom is singularly born" (1994: 66). Happily, for some perhaps, the libertarian ego is emptied of its properties or its own substances. Nancy's critique of libertarian notions of freedom is that it presupposes a free subject before any acting (Hutchens, 164). Devisch and Schrijvers help unpack this:

> This 'each time', obviously, will have its effects on just how to consider the *Jemeinigkeit* ("mineness") of Dasein. No longer will the I or ego be the first on scene; the ego is rather delivered to itself by the very fact of something happening 'each time'. I am not 'there' each time something happens, but rather: each time something happens, I am brought to be 'there' (2011: 270).

Freedom itself unfolds as a shared exposure within the social world. To summarise this unique perspective, according to Nancy freedom is never "my" freedom to attain, possess or act upon. On the contrary, freedom is a relational experience of belonging-together rather than a distancing or displacement from it. "What Nancy suggests for an experience of freedom is to understand the power relations that operate on our everyday relations with every possible being and to deconstruct them" (Kelekçi, 2020: 12). Nancy says that 'ideology today demands freedom but does not think about it', because if we did reflect on it, it would be apparent that the free individual is nothing more than the auto production of a specific identity (1988; 10).

Nancy's alternative theory of freedom has striking similarities with the concept of community that we proposed in the article 'The making of a civil society politics in social work: Myth and misrepresentation with the Global Agenda' (2014) which is criticised by Lynch and Wilson as part of the "collectivist" mind-set that disables critical social work. They single out our contribution because within the critical social work corpus we do not evince a nostalgia for *Gemeinschaft* or a type of "lost community". But neither do we suggest that communities are called into presence by "the *invisible hand* of community" as the authors suggest (2023:10). Far from it. We were interested in the portability of communities in their making and unmaking. Our account foregrounds the ways in which issues, objects and materialities bring communities and publics into being. No doubt these object-oriented communities are partly performative and require particular 'felicity conditions', meaning that certain circumstances need to be in place for them to come into presence. As Marres (2005) says "issues spark publics into being" and the "process" through which object-oriented politics are achieved, takes centre-stage.

> Issues precisely enable the democratic vibe to come out. To acknowledge the role that the problems that affect people play in bringing politics about, does not mean the end of democracy, but its beginning (2005: 15).

Such examples of community-in-the-making are not just experiential and value-laden but also affective. Here the focus is on matters of concern (Latour, 2004) and the political attachments and affects that people mobilise in the making of community (also see Marres, 2007). Networks are formed which link material configurations, affects and objects with emergent public collectives. Like Nancy's theorising of freedom, we argued that communities are experienced in their affective "bursts" of temporarility. Each community is singularly born. The object-oriented perspective proposed sees communities as continually emergent, they are always a partial process of defining objects, materialities and democratic concerns. One of the strengths of the object-oriented perspective, with its singularities of community, is that it conveys the range of multiplicities and diversities of mobilised commitments. The controversial objects of protest can be anything from animal science labs, high carbon emission roads, oil pipelines, tree cutting, use of pesticides, sewage dumping, Israeli flags, surveillance cameras on lamp posts, fracking drills, floods, fox hunting and abortion clinics to the White House. An obvious advantage with an ontologically grounded notion of community-in-the-making is that it provides a militant democratic space in which social work and community activists can form together against the zombies of neoliberalism. This is the politics of object-oriented democracy on the move as it bursts on the scene. In Deleuzian terms our sense of community is not about the hardening of place or neighbourhood but about its deterritorialization. As Chilvers and Kearnes point out:

> Rather than being fixed, an object-centered approach to community attempts the double move of recognizing the contingent construction of both the objects of public participation and the definition of what constitutes 'the public' (2016: 37).

Finally, I want to take up Lynch and Wilson's implicit concern that critical social work cannot answer the question 'What would it mean to win?' We can ask the same question of critical social work, as Badiou (2004) does of anarchists politics, that is, how would we go about achieving the desired egalitarian collective social forms? How to 'win' is, of course, not only a matter of proposing alternative social forms, but also of the means by which these might be achieved. Here I want to turn to Agamben's notion of destituent politics where he proposes a force, that, in its very constitution, deactivates the governmental machine. He rhetorically incites that we make ourselves "Ungovernable" (see Agamben, & Wakefield, 2014). In the 2014 book *Use of Bodies*, Agamben wrote:

> If to constituent power there correspond revolutions, revolts, and new constitutions, namely, a violence that puts into place and constitutes a new law, for destituent potential it is necessary to think entirely different strategies, whose definition is the task of the coming politics," (266)

These are important strands for contemporary anarchist thought and particularly in the writings of *The Invisible Committee* (2017), and the essay "Let's Destitute the World," which calls for destitution rather than constituent power: to knock down, rather than reconstitute political institutions (see Newman, 2017; Guérin, 2017). For instance, the Invisible Committee's attitude toward all political parties, the bureaucrats of trade unions, elections and their outcome are one of utter indifference. "Engendered by anonymous forces divorced from authorial claims and in defiance of the regimes of property" these slogans *Merry Crisis and a Happy New Fear. Let's Disappear. Death to Politics. Everyone Hates the Police. End of Work. Magical Life. Omnia Sunt Comunia. Let's Destitute the World* appear on street graffiti all across Europe (Dubilet, 2021). As with Nancy's "experience of freedom" and the bursts of instantaneous object-oriented communities the destituent subject seizes the opportune moment, "the moment of *kairos*, against the vanguardist obsession with the forward march of history" (Tari, 2021:5). Community becomes "self-present" in its immediacy not through the mediation of its socioeconomic positioning or its sense of place but with its insurrectionist celebrations that erase every identity. Tarì sketches a portrait of the destituent subject as a militant who acts as *if they were not* a militant – by assuming the identity of non-identity. Deploying various affective and rhetorical tropes associated with the Situationist Movement, Tarì turns to the left-libertarian Nietzschean anthropologist Pierre Clastres to insist that destitution must take primitive forms if it is to wage war against the state (also see Mario Tronti's 2008 interview on destituent power). Tari is against collectivism and libertarianism.

> The gateway to the transformation of self and world doesn't lie in the reform of the state or in its technological acceleration. It is not to be found in "collectivization" or in the affirmation of will. All of these means merely erect screens between the truth and the reality of existence so as to never let them meet (2021: 15).

In *There Is No Unhappy Revolution: The Communism of Destitution*, "counter-hegemonic political blocs" replace collectivism, and Tari goes on to give fresh insights into how destituent power works through the metaphor of the primitive:-

> Primitive war thus has nothing to do with the will to power, nor with economic reason—it has more to do with the "political." Through war, the primitive community a

> priori destitutes the state, identified as the enemy par excellence—while also developing a whole series of techniques that keep the state at a distance, thus blocking any attempt at creating a hierarchy within any centralized form of economic-political control (2021: 41-42).

Destituent social work will be concentrated with insurrection, abolition, domination in all its forms, as a de-activation of constitutive State power and its legal apparatus. It regards the oppressive exercise of power as positive grounds for action and critique (Zizek & Douzinas, 2010: Toscano, 2016). Destituent social work is likely to share with libertarians deep concerns about the violence of the State, its border police and securitisation devices and the illegality of the law. Kiersten Solt, a member of the Vitalist International, rejects identitarian politics and outlines a new political thesis as part of a manifesto called the *Seven Thesis for Destitution* (https://vitalista.in/). From this vantage point we can refine Badiou through Tari and say, ‘we know that the communism of destitution is the right hypothesis’. In anti-teleological vein, as with the anonymous Invisible Committee and Jean-Luc Nancy this is a communism of a “sharing of as sensibility and elaboration of sharing” (2007: 16).

I very much doubt in the bars and discos of social work, in the balladic tones of Donna Summer, this will be the ‘Last Dance’ with the zombies of economic liberalism. Like the ballad genre critical social work needs to confront what appears to be a constant state of mourning. In its deepest recesses it evinces what Anna Rowlands (2020) calls “a politics of mourning as a response to pervasive suffering and legacy of political aspiration and failure” in social work and society. Maybe we should call it “soul-work”.

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