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Reproductive Politics, Biopolitics and Auto-immunity: From Foucault to Esposito

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Abstract The contingent cultural, epistemological and ontological status of biology is highlighted by changes in attitudes towards reproductive politics in the history of feminist movements. Consider, for example, the American, British, and numerous European instances of feminist sympathy for eugenics at the turn of the century. This amounted to a specific formation of the role, in late nineteenth and early twentieth century feminisms, of concepts of biological risk and defence, which were transformed into the justificatory language of rights claims. In this context, one can ask how reproductive politics are to be fitted into the paradoxical relationship between biopolitics and thanatopolitics discussed by Michel Foucault and more recently by Roberto Esposito. In this context, "reproductive life," can be thought of arising at the intersection of thanapolitics and biopolitics as these relate to women's bodies. Revisiting Foucault and Esposito in the light of reproductive politics also allows a reconsideration of the paradoxical feminist aims involved in defending individual rights by reference to overall biopolitical interest and futurity.

Keywords Feminist ethics · Reproductive ethics · Biopolitics · Foucault · Eugenics

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> The mechanisms of power are addressed to the body, to life, to what causes it to proliferate, to what reinforces the species, its stamina, its ability to dominate, or its capacity for being used. (Foucault 1978, 147)

I.

At the turn of the nineteenth century, women's procreative lives sometimes played a critical role in the conceptual division of a population or a people into the competing forces perceived as undermining, or alternatively as enhancing, its overall vitality and future. A number of feminist commentators have revisited the turn of the century intersection of biopolitics, anxiety about the impact of feminism on a people's biological future, and what is taken to be a concurrent biopoliticization of feminist rhetoric and feminist claims.

Yet these readings can be characterized by a common adoption of the "reaction," or "turning back" models of interpreting feminist gestures. Repeatedly in the literature, the anxious preoccupation with the quality and quantity of women's reproductivity is considered to come first, imagined as the context, or the "air" of the day, and feminists are then interpreted in terms of how they "react," with such reactions assessed insofar as they might be understood as reactionary, forerunners of a fascism to come, or, alternatively, resistant, complicit, or indeed actively converting the racially inflected reproductive imperatives women are viewed as confronting.

For context, take the example of feminist historian Ann Allen, who turns our attention to the preoccupations of the turn of the century sociologist Steinmetz. In a 1904 piece repudiating feminist politics Steinmetz stressed, like many in the period,[1] the importance of a rational approach to women's reproductivity, one concerned not only with quantity, but also reproductive "quality." Women's capacity to play a role in selection of their partner and an active control of fertility could, he argued, allow them to play a pivotal role in ensuring the future of a people. Meanwhile women's indifference to such matters was presented as having the most dangerous alternative consequences (*gefährlichsten Folgen*, *die größte Gefahr,* Steinmetz 1904, 754): it could lead to the weakening and the descent—the *Untergang*—of those entities, the people (*Völker)* and the race (*Rasse)*.

A problem that has exercised feminist commentators concerns the reaction (as it is identified) to such preoccupations by turn of the century women's rights activists. For example, both radical and conservative women's rights activists in Germany, who belonged to feminist organizations such as the *Bund für Mutterschutz* and the *Bund deutscher Frauenvereine (BDF)* demanded extensive reform of women's roles and rights. Yet it was common for many feminists across a range of the political spectrum (whose diversity is stressed by historians) to reiterate women's responsibility for reproduction and, often, selectivity of partner with a view to the contribution of offspring to the future of the German people, in addition to stressing reproductive rights and the right to a better quality of conditions respecting maternity.

Such preoccupations have often been interpreted as a reaction to the pressure on women to reproduce and to devote themselves to some ethic of reproductive quality. Thus the feminist preoccupation with stressing women's special maternal character is understood as reactive. Women's unique social contribution as maternal could either be literal—through reproduction—or character related—women could bring those putative unique maternal qualities beneficially to committees and the public sphere. Commentators often agree that there was in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century a dovetailing of the claims of some women's rights activists with the biopoliticization of reproductivity and maternity. This took the form of a feminist preoccupation with population rate, the future of the people, species, race or nation, and the "quality" of reproduction even though that preoccupation just as easily trended towards anti-feminist arguments such as that of Steinmetz.

Amongst many early twentieth century feminist movements there might be strong differences in platforms and claims (between anti-abortion versus pro-abortion feminist movements for example), and yet seeming common ground with respect to the feminist stress on sexual difference, women's unique contribution to society and to the future of the people, and the eugenic imperative. Thus consider the tensions, and yet the common ground, of two opposed feminist leaders: the radical Helene Stöcker and the liberal conservative Gertrud Bäumer.

One of the founders of the feminist organization *Bund für Mutterschutz*, and editor of the feminist journal *Die Neue Generation* (1905/1908–1932), Stöcker defended women's right to easily available birth control and legal abortion, the rights of unmarried mothers, support for women's shelters, maternity insurance, employment and equal opportunity career rights, unionization, wages for housework, and the right to a flourishing and expressed sexuality. In the "*Richtlinien für deutschen Bundes für Mutterschutz*" one hears the vitalist inflections she gave to this last. She stressed as "the highest value, the sanctity and inalienability of human life," arguing that because life should be allowed to "emerge pure and strong," human sexuality should be made a "powerful instrument not only of reproduction but of progressive evolution [*Aufwärtsentwicklung*] and heightened and cultivated joy of life" (Stöcker 1922, cited Wininger 1998, 248). In the face of perceptions of a declining birth rate, she did not support coercion of women to reproduce, nor prohibitions on contraception or abortion. But she did believe in women assuming a social responsibility toward the next generation. In this respect, she took women's special role to be reproductive. Thus women had a right to health knowledge about their spouses (to avoid the transmission of syphilis, alchoholism, criminality, and other aspects associated in the period with degeneracy). The entities at risk were the woman herself, and through the woman, the future of the people (through reproductive communication). She believed that education, rather than prohibition would produce what she took to be the proper feeling for social responsibility regarding reproduction and the new generation: this was part of what she thought of as the "new ethics" of feminism.

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[1] See "The Anti-Feminists" in Evans 1976 (175–205), for more on early twentieth century anti-feminist arguments that feminism would have a negative impact on the population. He describes what he sees as the BDF's response in setting up a "Commission on Population Policy" (Evans 1976, 186).

If one compares Stöcker to Bäumer, chair of the *Bund Deutscher Frauenvereine* from 1910 to 1919 and editor of the feminist journals *Neue Bahnen* (1907–1910) and *Die Frau* (1916–1944) we note that despite their opposed positions on abortion rights, the importance of women's sexuality, pacifism, nationalism and a number of political aims, both activists shared a belief in the importance of eugenics *as* a feminist concern,[2] believing that, granted autonomy and choice, women had a unique capacity, right, and social duty to choose their reproductive partner with a view to the likely offspring, and with a view to the benefit and overall "improvement of all." For Bäumer, eugenics overlapped with liberalism and with a democratic outlook. For her, the "demands of racial politics are by nature democratic, in as much as they *necessarily* apply to all and cannot be limited to the confines of a single class" (Bäumer, cited Repp 2000a, 684).

Biopower often involves a shared supposition, even by putative antagonists, that healthy embodiment, paternalistic governmentality, and an overlapping individual, family based, expert-mediated and state-located care and administration of life is a relatively uncontroversial and non-political matter of overall wellbeing, even where there are disputes concerning the details. The biopolitical intensification of life may produce less obviously antagonistic relationships in regard to the very investments of biopower and the enmeshed individuals and administrative mechanisms. Thus for example, consider Helene Stöcker's consistent opposition to state interference in a woman's right to choose her reproductive partner, to choose whether to become pregnant, and her access to contraception and abortion. Stöcker saw the state as a potential external antagonist, ready to interfere in a woman's rights. But Stöcker and many other feminists, intellectuals, medical practitioners, and state bodies shared a conceptualization of the biological future of a people as a matter over which planning and rational choice should occur. Disagreeing about the extent to which state intervention seemed appropriate, or over the language of women's autonomy, formulated in feminist terms, Stöcker's sense of the state as antagonist overlooked the extent to which she shared a more basic problematization of reproduction and its aims and logics with her putative antagonist. She shared a certain amount of the language, targets and modes of that problematization, including the extensive appeal to "expert" knowledge, and the interest in the advice-dispensing clinic as nexus of individual, expert and the future of the people.

Stöcker certainly would have been opposed to the state targeting couples and women on eugenic grounds with the aim of dictating reproductive choice through the requirement of state authorization or the intervention of forced sterilization (Stöcker 1986, 200),[3] some degree of shared conceptual presupposition was nonetheless already at work, in a vision of the quality of both an individual life and the collective vitality of a people (particularly a future people), the application of the language of choice to reproduction, and overlapping conceptions of agency and reproductive futurity.

Thus when Stöcker formulated women's rights, and in particular the idea of individual female autonomy—"rights over herself" [*das Recht über sich selbst*] and "over one's own body" [*über den eigenen Körper*] (Stöcker 1908, 403)—she was simultaneously defending those rights in terms of the overall life of the people and collective rights over its future. Rights over one's body meant the belief in a woman's right to an individual vitality free from syphilis, alcoholism and other toxic influences and the right to sexual expression, but this vision of the right to individual vitality overlapped with a conceptual vision of the future vitality of the people as a whole, in relation to which women's reproductivity was the critical threshold. Women were conceived as individually at risk, their personal autonomy and sexual and reproductive health threatened by forced alliance and sexual violence, but a number of prominent German feminists also considered women to be the critical threshold of the future of the people, bearing corresponding social obligations and privileged responsibilities with respect to that "population" whose conceptual terms come to encompass biopolitical and feminist interests. Thus feminists formulating rights to individual reproductive autonomy in these terms stressed that risk to the individual woman *was* simultaneously risk to the population and its future. These arguments do not only stress likely consequences. Exposing women (as threshold) is not only exposing the people to a possible future threat, though this view is also in place. But women are also being figured as the overlapping point of individual rights and biomass interests: to expose the woman *is* to expose the biomass (the former is the threshold of the interests of the latter). Where the latter was seen as at mortal risk, women's "rational" reproductivity was considered to be the deciding factor.

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[2] She argued that it offered a new, "corporeal" version of liberalism—for his discussion of this view in her 1914 essay, *Gedanken zur Jugendbewegung II*, see Repp (2000a).

[3] ("What we consider 'perverse,' 'inverted' is the intervention of a third party or of the state in one's private life.") For a discussion of this issue see also Herlitzius (1995, 348).

For the prolific author and feminist activist Henriette Fürth—also associated with *Die Neue Generation*, and whose eugenic interests are most clearly seen in the 1929 work *Die Regelung der Nachkommenschaft als eugenisches Problem*—women's role in reproduction was again their particular contribution to the fight against the death of a people (Fürth 1929, 28). Fürth's work is composed of extensive figures and percentages relating to population habits, rates of disease and birth rate, and bears witness to the repetition of this vision of the overlap of women's duties and, accordingly, women's rights. Again for Fürth this vision of women's duty to fight death, and to have an influence on life and what comes into life [the *Ins-Leben-Kommen*] was locked into her vision of women's rights ("*Wer aber den Tod so erfolgreich zu bekämpfen vermag, hat das Recht und die Pflicht, auch das Leben und Ins-Leben-Kommen ordnend zu beeinflussen*," Fürth 1929, 28): just as they uniquely and crucially served—here in the fight against death—so they uniquely made political claims.

Those turn-of-the-century German feminists who opposed and who supported abortion rights shared at least some common conceptualization—for example, they assumed the interests of overall population, present and future, as the proper conceptual substance of feminism. For some feminists (Maria Lischnewska and Ruth Bré), feminism interconnected with the quantitative interests of population, thus abortion was to be prohibited. For others, feminism interconnected with the "qualitative" interests of population, thus abortion was to be supported (Evans 1976, 160–161). Evans offers a comparison of the anti-abortion arguments of feminists Maria Lischnewska and Ruth Bré, with the pro-abortion arguments of Stöcker (Evans 1976, 159–161). Repp cites the BDF's minutes of the 1908 Congress so as to comment that in the context of its debate of the issue, "abortion was … acceptable only as a means to improve the fitness of the race" (see Repp 2000b, 124).

This material on Stöcker, Bäumer, and Fürth is derived from a number of historians of German feminism who confront methodological challenges as they bring interpretive heuristics to a period of feminist stress on maternity, feminine specificity, and eugenic considerations, and I turn now to the methodological questions to hand. Though a range of different positions are taken, I have suggested that much commentary engages the language of reaction and response (see Manz 2007), so that divisions within debate concern the nature of that response. Some of the late nineteenth century German feminisms have been presented as relatively passive reactions to context: as when Richard Evans presents late nineteenth century German feminists such as Helene Lange and her support for the values of motherhood as conforming to the role (emotional, subordinate, motherly) that the "official social ideology of Imperial Germany was prepared to allow" (1976, 28) and as trying to ennoble it rather than rejecting it as false. And, he writes, when Lange so fully accepted the role prescribed for women by social ideology, she was, in this respect, "like nearly all German feminists of the 1870s and 1880s" (28).

Alternative interpretations encourage us to reconsider this propensity to diagnose docility and reaction, with Ann Allen accordingly arguing that Fürth, Bäumer and Stöcker, at least, "did not submit passively," but rather engaged in a *redeployment*, a restructuring, (Allen 1988, 31) of the available concepts of feminine maternal duty, and pressures with respect to birthrate and the duty to reproduce. Amy Hackett, discussing Stöcker, agrees that "eugenic ideas were "in the air," to be plucked by those on the left or right" (Hackett 1984, 118). For Heide Schlüpmann, Stöcker's feminist stress on love and maternity was determinedly *against* [*dezidiert gegen*] the reactionary biologism of the day, and the question to be considered is more whether it "really" succeeded in this respect (Schlüpmann 1984, 11).

As an alternative to seeing the turn-of-the-century feminists as part of a "disturbing move to the right," if not the forerunners of fascism and the worst chapters in feminist history,[4] one sees here deployments of interpretative lens which locate, with respects available concepts and ideologies "in the air," responding feminist gestures. These are interpreted as resistance, adoptions, restructuring, revisings, or reshapings by feminist activists. Language and values that appeared to subordinate women to the aims of the collectively conceptualized *Volk*, also became the very matter, the working substance, of the formulation of feminist claims: it is in these terms that Allen cites Fürth and Stöcker.

One problem with such accounts is their figuring of the prior. Either context comes first and the women respond actively or compliantly, according to the commentator, or the women's bodies come first, and are seized by the practices and interests of biopolitics. As compared with models of compliance, reaction or resistance seen in assessments of turn-of-the-century eugenic feminism, could one alternatively conceptualize in this context, to use Roberto Esposito's term, the auto-recoil of biopolitics (Esposito 2008, 38)? This will not be an easy model to manipulate, compared with the far greater facility with which we think of a) pre-existing ideological context and b) feminist reaction; or a) life or reproductive life and b) its investment by power.

II.

I have so far considered the phenomenon whereby biopolitical rhetorics and formations at the turn of the century may be projected by feminist scholars as prior, with women then depicted as incited by and responding to the latter. Another variation will have feminism projecting women's reproductive lives imagined as "prior," and as subsequently invested by power. I turn now to another context in which a possible projection of a conceptual "prior" has been queried: Foucault's articulation of biopolitics and biopower. A question raised by one of his interlocutors, Roberto Esposito, is whether Foucault projects a prior life, subsequently invested by power (Foucault 1978, 139). Having brought together these three rhetorical phenomena I will turn to a modeling of immunity and auto-immunity, offered by Esposito, as a means of pursuing alternatives to these "priors." In each case, the question is: what kind of a conceptual model will best stress that life does not precede and await its investiture by power?

Foucault made some sporadic references to feminism, described as a counter-movement, in a few remarks in interviews (Foucault 1980, 56, 1990, 115), but not in the first volume of *History of Sexuality*, nor in the lectures presented at the Collège de France concurrent with the production of that work (later published as *Society Must Be Defended*, Foucault 2003). As a result, the remarks he makes about feminism do not enter into his discussion of the biopolitical concern with population. Thus it falls to the reader to devise a possible Foucauldian reading of feminist movements and concerns as they have engaged and been engaged by the problematics of population, and the society that must be defended from internal threats conceived as biological.

One can ask how feminist interests have coincided with the relationship between thanatopolitics and biopolitics, addressed in the last pages of both *History of Sexuality I* and *Society Must Be Defended*. Answering that question, one's attention is immediately drawn (and has also been drawn by Esposito) to reproductive politics. Although it is possible to interpret reproductive politics in terms of the intersection of biopolitics and of thanatopolitics, Foucault's own account of the ways in which life is invested with power did not shed light on this particular question. Yet one can think about women's reproductive life—(women's lives as valued, problematized and rendered significant in their capacity to bear and produce new life, and as exposed to injunction or loss of life for that same capacity) as occupying a significant position at the nexus of biopolitics and thanatopolitics.

Because of a parallel between the questions of whether a "prior" arises in the Foucauldian conception of the biopolitical investment in life, and of whether it arises in feminist concerns with the politicization of women's reproductivity, I am interested in a conceptual modeling that offers an alternative to the prior in both contexts. This is Esposito's model of an auto-reflexive immunity and auto-immunity, proposed in his debate with Foucault as offering a more flexible means of thinking about the relationship between power and life.

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[4] As Allen comments, identifying the problematic reading she counters: "Despite their critical, even iconoclastic attitudes toward the mainstream feminist movement, these feminists have often been identified by modern historians of the women's movement as outstanding representatives of a more general trend—the decline of German feminism and its capitulation to the reactionary political climate of the prewar and wartime years" (Allen 1988, 31).

One of the interesting aspects of Esposito's reading of Foucault is its greater interest in amplifying the possible place of women's reproductivity in Foucault's account of biopolitics. For example, in *Bios*, Esposito has revisited Foucault's fleeting remarks on the role of reproductive biopolitics under National Socialism. It will be recalled that as Foucault formulates this in *History of Sexuality 1*, "the Hitlerite politics of sex [*politique hitlérienne du sexe*] remained an insignificant practice [*une pratique dérisoire*] while the blood myth was transformed into the greatest blood bath in recent memory" (Foucault 1978, 150). Esposito nuances this remark, stressing the differentiated regulation under Hitler of access to contraception, abortion and reproduction amongst women whose reproduction was, on grounds of race, encouraged, discouraged, or violently or murderously prohibited (Esposito 2008, 143–4).

Thus one can speculate about how Foucault might have thought further about the related intersections of biopolitics and thanatopolitics, and the role of women in reproductively related "race suicide," "race murder," and race "defence" rhetorics in the eugenically oriented periods he discusses, including the late nineteenth century and the period of National Socialism. I turn first, however, to Esposito's account of immunity.

A number of models of immunity are offered by Esposito, and these include the auto-immunities. Esposito does propose, quite simply, the model of *immunitas* as that which "protects the one who bears it from risky contact with those who lack it" (2008, 50). He also defines it as accepting a contained amount of what is understood as auto-damage or disease—"introducing . . . a *fragment* of the same pathogen from which it wants to protect itself" (2008, 46, emphasis mine)—or (citing Durkheim on smallpox vaccination): "we give ourselves voluntarily [a true disease], yet it increases our chance of survival," (2008, 48). According to a further modeling of immunity (2008, 46), he proposes the form of accepting that which saves and preserves by limiting the power to expand. He offers what he defines as a Nietzschean account of immunity in these terms: offering the example of the Nietzschean account of the soul to which we can add Nietzsche's account of certain untruths as the condition of life (see *Beyond Good and Evil*, #333, in which Nietzsche describes the fictions of logic, appearance, number in such terms). A super-ego that is both necessary for civilization and subjectivity and yet in many respects crippling is similarly defined in *Bios*. According to another model, "If life is abandoned to its internal powers, to its natural dynamics, human life is destined to self destruct" (2008, 58). This is Esposito's interpretation of Hobbes' description of the natural propensity and right to defend one's life. Here, self-defence concurrently puts humans at jeopardy. When each agent self-defends, the collective result is self-destruction. Esposito interprets this as another immunity argument. Here, what should protect may damage. But in another way of thinking about *immunitas*, "in order to be saved, life has to give up something that is integral to itself"—here, the example offered is acquisitive desire which can incur a deadly reprisal (2008, 59). The antigen here is presumably that sovereign power might appropriate a degree of the individual freedom deemed vital to the ends of collective and individual survival. The sovereign's offered protection is an antibody. Sometimes Esposito offers as the model of *immunitas* the introjection or tolerance of what should (or to a small extent, does) damage, to the ends of self-protection.

Following rereadings of Hobbes, Freud and Nietzsche in terms of immunities and auto-immunities, Esposito turns to Foucault through this prism. Accordingly, he suggests that Foucauldian life should be considered always already power, and biopower always already life, rather than "investing"[*investir*] life (Foucault 1978, 139), or taking "possession of life" (Foucault 2003, 253), thereby better respecting the overall radicality of the Foucauldian approach to power and resistance. It means that:

> what in the previous declensions of biopolitics was presented as an unalterable given—nature or life, insofar as it is human—now becomes a problem: not a presupposition but a "site," the product of a series of causes, forces, and tensions. (Esposito 2008, 30)

Esposito identifies—and most importantly, averts—a tendency to think about Foucauldian "life" as targeted or invested by power as if life were anterior to it.

On this reading, life and politics should instead be seen as "simultaneously the matrix and the provisional outcome of the other" (Esposito 2008, 30). Denaturalizing the life "invested" by power (and minimizing the sense that a "prior" "life" is subsequently invested or possessed by power), Esposito's qualification situates resistance in the immunity, or auto-immunity of power, such that it, "in order to reinforce itself … continually divide[s] … itself and fight[s] against itself" (2008, 38). This protrusion, also imagined as a line of fracture immanent to biopolitics, *is*, he argues "life itself"(38). (Because of the auto-inhibiting or auto-destructive—mutually protective and destructive—inflection given by Esposito to the necessarily antithetical gestures of biopolitics, the immune is consistent conceptually with the auto-immune. There is not, in his declension of immunities, a rigorous distinction between these terms.)

Rather than arguing that power becomes "joined" to life, the term "immunity" will enable us to describe the concurrently enhancing and proliferating, and toxic and auto-negating properties of the "power to preserve life"(Esposito 2008, 46). So if we turn to the terms used in a discussion of the relationship between the thanato- and bio-political aspects of power in the last pages of *Society Must Be Defended*, it will be recalled that the suicidal tendency of biopower is identified by Foucault as either the excess or the paradox of the technological possibilities of biopower, or as the excess of biopower itself: "this excess of biopower appears when it becomes technologically and politically possible for man not only to manage life, but to make it proliferate, to create living matter, to build the monster, and ultimately to build viruses that cannot be controlled and that are universally destructive"(Foucault 2003, 254). According to the model by which Esposito inflects Foucault, it will not be the case that power *either* negates life, or enhances it (nor that thanatopolitics need be seen as either the excess or the paradox of biopolitics) but that many of the means of enhancing life, will also be concurrent means of negating life. The biopolitical intensification of life will *also* be auto-exposing, undermining, partake in, or admit, the risks or toxins that were the object of defensive and protective measures. The term immunity, Esposito argues, better enables us to articulate together (2008, 46) that what is required to defend, enhance and sustain is also what undermines or proves toxic.

In *History of Sexuality 1*, Foucault was interested in the biopolitical formation of "birthrate" or "reproduction." By the early twentieth century, and in the context of the eugenic interests he mentions, it is arguable that reproductive life had become "simultaneously the matrix and the provisional outcome of this biopolitics." What then of the feminist implications of Foucault's interest in population? How have women's reproductive lives been enmeshed in biopolitical concerns about population decline, the interested to optimize birthrate and the perception of pregnancies as differentially valuable? What does this mean for what Foucault took to be the excess, or the paradox, concerning the relationship of a biopolitics to a thanatopolitics? Working with the immune/auto-immune model, one is returned by Esposito to the biopolitical power to intensify, enhance and maximize, as it concurrently implies the capacity to inhibit life, or even to end life en masse.

III.

So how might a stress on the auto-recoil of biopolitics inflect a feminist thinking of biopolitics? I mentioned that Foucault does not consider the "thanato" aspects of the politics of reproduction. But Esposito's consideration of Foucauldian biopolitics has been somewhat more inclined to indicate that the same technics governing birthrate also govern selective birth dissuasion, and selectivity of access to abortion.

The question then arises of what kind of thanatopolitics such technics can involve, and I want to first consider Esposito's own response to this question. As he notes, discussing German National Socialism, women were the principal victims of its forced sterilization programs with a high death rate. This was also a regime under which the death penalty could be incurred by women whose pregnancies and abortions were differentially sanctioned. (Esposito makes brief remarks on this point; for a comprehensive discussion see Bock 1986.) In this sense, (although this is to elaborate the point in a different direction to that favored by Esposito) a thanatopolitics was certainly interconnected with the biopolitical intensification, jeopardization or termination of women's lives *as* reproductive. Here again, I underline that in using this term I am not referring to a concept of "foetal" nor of "future" life, but of women's lives formulated as vitally capable of variations on reproduction (rational, governed, regulated, restricted, enhanced, stimulated, problematized, medically enhanced, resisted, rejected, and so on).

In contexts where women have been subject to the death penalty for abortion,[5] it might be argued that the sovereign power described by Foucault, whose fullest expression is seen in the taking of (women's) lives, could dovetail paradoxically with the biopolitics engaged in the enhancement, intensification and proliferation of (reproductive) life, and whose *limit* and negation (rather than fullest expression) would be seen in the willingness to end the life of the woman on the grounds of contests over reproduction. Foucault does include the desire to maximize, or otherwise govern birthrate within his first reflections on biopolitics (Foucault 1978, 25, 100, 116, 118). Particularly given his stress that these regimes can overlap, that they complemented rather than replacing each other (Foucault 2003, 241), it makes sense to stress the concurrent biopolitical and thanatopolitical aspects of women's reproductive life. Although he does not consider this possible counterpoint, ending women's lives on the ground of their resistant intervention in their reproductive lives would arguably be an expression of sovereign power. Certainly, what Esposito wants to stress (and as a number of remarks from Foucault also indicated), is that Foucault required a more intimately connected means of understanding these modes of power as complementary, given that the taking of life as the limit point or negation of the one politics [bio-], and as the fullest expression of the other [sovereign/thanato] are only apparently opposed formations.

One could try a number of variations of the arguments we have seen through the prism of immunity in Esposito's sense. A biopolitics targeting women's reproductivity has at times included taking the lives of women, certainly. Defence of the future of the "people" through an intensified biopolitical focus on women as reproductive also opens up a dependency on that reproductivity interrelated with unexpected routes of women's feminist resistance or recalcitrance, to be sure. That is one way of thinking of immunity, but one highly thinkable through the action-reaction model. The problem with the action–reaction model is, of course, that it assumes the feminist variations were not already *part* of the phenomenon to which they are being figured as a response (but why should we assume feminism is not part of the biopower as opposed to merely the respondent or target of it?). Why should we incline ourselves towards a model of the feminist agents as, if not literally passive (compliant dupes of context or ideology), still passive in the sense of merely "reacting" to context? There is a poverty of heuristic options if the only alternative to passivity is that they be "active", as when they are interpreted as "restructuring" available discourse. Manz describes this as the debate between interpreters giving the feminists the status of victims versus agents, an opposition she similarly finds problematic [Manz 2007, 28, 34]. I propose auto-immunity as an alternative to these options.

IV.

I suggested that immunity is a model less inclined to separate power and life, power and resistance, power and its own, auto-protecting, auto-toxic self-divisions. Consequently, a number of possibilities emerge. Women's reproductive life (women's lives as valued, problematized and significant in their capacity to bear and produce new life, and as exposed to injunction or loss of life for that same capacity) could be considered immune in Esposito's sense. In this case, to return to the feminisms most relevant to the historically biopolitical regimes discussed by Foucault, our questions would include how feminism hoped to expand and enhance, not just women's rights, but " life," in a particular sense—through its embracing of women's lives as importantly and politically reproductive, and through the conceptualization of their threshold relationship to population and its future. The flourishing of feminism and of women's reproductivity was rendered co-extensive with a vision of the flourishing of the vitality, the life, and future of the people. A number of feminists from a spectrum of political positions identified women as critical to this vital future, accordingly demanding rights in the name of this critical role. Their vision of the flourishing of life *was* a vision of the flourishing of feminism. But evidently, these feminisms are also interpretable as defending themselves through an auto-damaging feminist discourse meant to defend the life of, but also toxic to, many of the feminist interests in whose name they spoke.

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[5] In France during the Nazi occupation, abortion was punished with the death penalty; in Germany, the unauthorized abortionist could be so subject. In Britain one could receive the death penalty for participation in abortion from 1803–1861 under the Ellenborough Act.

When feminists formulated rights through these means, they adopted, it is not hard to say, a potentially destructive defense as a means of justifying women's rights. That can be seen in the very identification as equivalent of the flourishing of the life of "the people," the vitality of the race, the potential for new life through reproduction, the flourishing of women's own lives, and the vitality of feminism and its claims. This concurrent enhancement of what life was for feminism, and the auto-destructive aspect of such enhancement can be thought in a number of ways. For women to stress the intersection of the life of the people, the woman's life, reproductive life, and the vitality of feminism, was concurrently to accept that alternative arguments, differently figuring the societal requirements on women's reproductivity, might be similarly valid. The calculation of women's contribution to population and biological futurity was not always in the interests of individual autonomy and choice. Some feminists saw them as powerfully overlapping, but the conceptualization of the collective interests of a biological future could just as easily force their disconnection, or the argument that individual female autonomy jeopardized rather than contributed to the interests of the collective biological future. Second, consider that rights claims were made on behalf of "women," with non-procreative women associated with a maternal *character* that also contributed to society. This seemingly stretched feminist claims made through a stress on maternal qualities to include all women. Nonetheless, this means of figuring women disallowed of the claims of women who least fit, or who rejected, the reproductive and maternal emphasis. Third, it is useful to remember the individualism of the feminism in question. Although the justificatory language was the conceptual overlap of the collective (and future) vitality of the people and the woman's individual life, the rights that were sought on this basis were nonetheless formulated in individual terms (even where their impact and import was presented in terms of collective interest): the right to vote, work, to be educated, in some cases the right to abort, to enjoy sex without prejudice. These were rights that were said to enhance the life and future of the people, to which women individually made a claim. This seemed possible because of the argument from "overlap," (the reproductive life of the woman *was* the life and future of the people, and she bore responsibilities and was entitled to rights accordingly). But such an argument also allowed for reverse arguments limiting these individual rights if they could plausibly be said to jeopardize the vitality of the people. These are three ways in which it could be argued that the very formation of the social-experiential-conceptual-practical entity, the "woman's life," was one which both enhanced the possibilities for her rights claims, and, concurrently, jeopardized them: in these senses, these arguments can be described as operating at the nexus of the immune/auto-immune.

In pursuing the immunity of the feminist appeal to the overlap of the woman's maternal life and the life of the people, I suggest also that Esposito's reading can be amended. I asked which thanatopolitics were in question. For, interpreting selective regulation of reproduction as the power to "nullify life in advance,"(Esposito 2008, 145) through the anticipatory suppression of birth, Esposito in fact assumes that the relevant thanatopolitics is that which ends in advance the life of "future" life, or "future" persons,[6] even as he also recognizes that the life in question is not only that of the putative potential newborn, but also the woman forcibly and sometimes mortally sterilized, receiving the death penalty for abortion, or turning to sometimes deadly illegal abortions. One does not need to mobilize the notion of the future person, or the "nullified life in advance," to stress the seizing of women's lives as reproductive in the interconnections of thanatopolitics and biopolitics.

My suggestion is that, in place of Esposito's reference to "potential life," women's lives as reproductive be considered immune. We saw that one outcome of using the model derived from Esposito is that life and politics should be seen as "simultaneously the matrix and the provisional outcome of the other" (Esposito 2008, 30). Once the life in question is specified as, in this case, women's reproductive life, it may be all the clearer (as it would likely be with any similar *instantiation* of "life") that there is never a natural life seized, targeted or invested by power. Instead, (reproductive) life is always already produced power, dividing against and fighting itself as laws, doctrines, practices and governmentality engage the vicissitudes of women's reproductive life.

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[6] See his reference to policies in China, "causing the abortion of a large number of those who would have become future women," and his stress on a new extreme of sovereign power—Nazi regulation of reproduction—as the capacity "to nullify life in advance" (Esposito 2008, 6, 145).

So, the alternative question will be: how does reproductive life already have to be significant and problematic so that biopower and reproductive life are simultaneously the matrix and provisional outcome of each other? When we think of them as simultaneously instantiating each other, we are less likely to abstract feminists from their contexts and see them as responding to them, or to attribute a tacit innocence to a feminism whose interest in languages ranging from maternal duty to eugenic futures would appear as the effect of the air of the day. Eugenic feminisms were, of course, as much the air of the day, as the response to the air. (But making this point need not go in the direction of Claudia Koonz, for whom they would be the "forerunners" of fascism [Koonz 1988, 31, discussed Repp 2000b, 105]).

I have finally suggested that in considering the female reproductive lives of eugenic feminism as biopower, rather than seeing women's bodies and agency as "targeted" or "invested" by biopower, we can concurrently conceptualize the auto-reflective (auto) immunity of biopower. For example, the terms in which Helene Stöcker claimed abortion rights could concurrently admit the conceptual and practical logic of their denial. To claim rights against the excessive interference of the state on behalf of a woman's body and autonomy *was also* to accept that the state might have rights one's over one's body through the very conceptual apparatus with which that interference was denied. To argue for a woman's right to "responsibly" choose her reproductive partner with a view to the future of the people against those who would interfere in that choice *was* to accept that that women's reproductive choices were associated with a concept of the health or the interests of the people, variations of which could also conflict with the stress on a woman's right to choose. And, in a form not identified by Foucault, reproductive biopolitics were concurrently thanatopolitical. To intensify, enhance and maximise life *as* women's reproductive life, was to do so in a mode consistent with the laws and practices that jeopardized or ended women's lives.

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