

AMERICAN UNIVERSITY OF BEIRUT

DOES SHE ACTUALLY DECIDE?
THE ROLE OF BIRTH CONTROL IN THE EMPOWERMENT OF
UNDERPRIVILEGED WOMEN IN THE GLOBAL SOUTH

by
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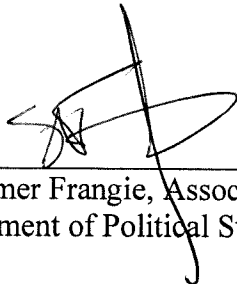
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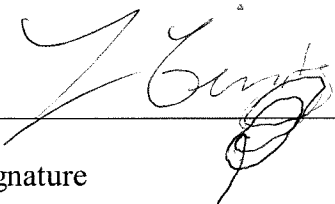
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AN ABSTRACT OF THE PROJECT OF

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Title: Does she actually decide? The role of birth control in the empowerment of underprivileged women in the Global South.

In January 2017 US President Trump decided to cut US family planning aid targeting abortion services in the Global South. This decision provoked former Minister of Foreign Trade and International Development of the Kingdom of the Netherlands, Mrs. Lilianne Ploumen, to initiate SheDecides. SheDecides is a lobby movement that aims to raise awareness and unlock resources for contraception and abortion services in the Global South. The movement implies that if women have access to contraception and abortion services they can make individual decisions concerning their bodies, (reproductive) lives and futures. In this project I argue that access to contraception and abortion services does not constitute the key to the empowerment of underprivileged women in the Global South. Underprivileged women often suffer from the effects of sexism, racism, poverty, war, and occupation simultaneously and therefore it is impossible that access to contraception and abortion services alone will enable these women to be 'free.' In order to realize these women's empowerment SheDecides has to approach these women's lives and suffering from an intersectional perspective and challenge all sources of oppression concurrently. SheDecides' proposed interventions only tackle the legality and availability of contraception and abortion services, without ensuring that women have equal access to the same high quality services. SheDecides does not focus on its end goals, healthier and empowered women, families and communities, but only on the execution of its proposed interventions. For this reason its ideals can easily be hijacked by (governmental) actors who share an interest in SheDecides' proposed interventions while having different motivations in mind. I argue that TNCs and (governmental) actors in the Global North support SheDecides' proposed interventions because they see contraception and abortion services as tools to lower fertility rates among underprivileged women in the Global South and therefore as tools to increase the region's female labor force.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

In January 2017 US President Trump decided to cut US family planning aid targeting abortion services in the Global South. This decision provoked former Minister of Foreign Trade and International Development of the Kingdom of the Netherlands, Mrs. Lilianne Ploumen, to initiate SheDecides. In a nutshell, SheDecides is a lobby movement that aims to raise awareness and unlock resources for contraception and abortion services in the Global South.

Although there is not yet any academic research on SheDecides, the international media has praised the initiative. A quick search on the internet resulted in the following headlines that all celebrate SheDecides' success: "The power" of *She Decides* is its emphasis on gender equality and gender empowerment" (Hand 2018), "How the #SheDecides Campaign Is Keeping Women Alive Under the Global Gag Rule" (Curry 2017) and "Minister Ploumen conquers the world with SheDecides" (Joop 2017). In addition, SheDecides has manifested itself as an important actor in the field of family planning within the international development scene. A number of European Ministers for Development Cooperation have expressed their support for SheDecides and some act as so-called Champions whose primary responsibility is "to propel us toward a reality where every girl and every woman has power over her body. Without question." (The Movement SheDecides 2018). Last but not least in 2018 Mrs. Ploumen received two prestigious Dutch prizes, the Aletta Jacobs and the Machiavelli award, recognizing her work for SheDecides, her activism for the emancipation of women

worldwide, and the ease with which she established a successful international movement (Van Oostvoorn 2018).

The positive reception of SheDecides, both in the Netherlands and abroad, in the international media and within international development circles, aroused my curiosity concerning the movement's proposed interventions and its objective. SheDecides lobbies for individuals, companies, and governments to allocate funds to make contraception and abortion services available to women in the Global South.¹ The rationale behind this, and thus SheDecides primary objective is stated as follows: "Together, we stand up, speak out; change the rules and unlock resources to create a new normal: where every girl and every woman can decide what happens to her body" (Do Something SheDecides 2017). SheDecides implies that if women have access to contraception and abortion services they can make individual decisions concerning their bodies, (reproductive) lives and futures. The empowerment of women is thus reduced to, and can be realized through the ability of women to take this *one* particular decision.

In this paper I challenge these assumptions through asking two interlocking questions. Firstly, does access to contraception and abortion services lead to the empowerment of underprivileged women in the Global South? And secondly, what motivates governments and organizations located in the Global North to support SheDecides' proposed interventions? I will answer these questions in the four chapters that constitute this paper. In chapter one I introduce SheDecides and further elaborate

¹ In this paper I refer to women in the Global South repeatedly. I use this phrase for the sake of practicality while I realize that 'the (underprivileged) woman from the Global South' does not exist. Women in the Global South, as well as their counterparts in the Global North, do not constitute a homogenous group of people, instead their lives and identities are shaped by various factors including race, class, locality and religion (McEwan 2001, 99).

on its proposed interventions, primary objective and target population. I analyze SheDecides' websites, one in English and one in Dutch, and argue that both websites fail to set forth how the provision of contraception and abortion services leads to the empowerment of women in the Global South. In addition, the English website does not clearly define SheDecides' proposed interventions. In chapter two I discuss the intersectional nature of women's oppression in the Global South. Because these women's oppression is not just gendered in essence, a pro-choice approach towards contraception and abortion will not meet their demands. Only an intersectional approach that takes into consideration the effects of the multiple intersecting forces of power will lead to their empowerment. In chapter three I set forth that SheDecides did not foresee the limitations of its proposed interventions because it adheres to mainstream bourgeois feminism. I discuss the notions of ignorance and arrogance that plague mainstream bourgeois feminism and that I consider the underlying causes of SheDecides' failure to implement meaningful interventions. In the final chapter I set forth the economic interests of transnational corporations (TNCs) as well as governments in the Global North to interfere in the reproductive lives of women in the Global South. I set forth how young, underprivileged women play a pivotal role in the global economy through their manual labor in factories that produce goods and services for the Global North. I argue that TNCs do not consider an increase in the availability of contraception and abortion services as their ultimate objective. Instead, their aim is to increase the number of underprivileged women that enter the labor force and one of the main obstacles to achieving this objective is these women's high fertility rates. Thus, TNCs and governmental actors support SheDecides' lobby because it will help realize their

primary objective which is the preservation and enlargement of the female labor force in the Global South.

CHAPTER II

INTRODUCTION TO SHE DECIDES

In this chapter I analyze in depth SheDecides' proposed interventions, primary objective, and target population. As mentioned in the Introduction, SheDecides' primary objective is the empowerment of women; its proposed intervention is to make contraception and abortion services available, and the target population is women in the Global South. SheDecides has two websites, one in Dutch, and one in English that constitute the primary source of information for anyone seeking more material about the movement. Whereas SheDecides' objective, proposed interventions and target population appear very straightforward, SheDecides' websites are actually rather vague. I indicate that despite the fact that SheDecides is a movement that claims to lobby and raise awareness, its websites present several inaccuracies and discrepancies in relation to its proposed interventions, primary objective, and target population. I argue that both websites fail to set forth how the provision of contraception and abortion services leads to the empowerment of women in the Global South, moreover it is unclear that SheDecides only targets women in the Global South. In addition, the English website gives the impression that SheDecides tries to conceal the fact that *all* the movement does is increasing the availability and accessibility of contraception and abortion services. Before I analyze the Dutch website and thereafter the English website, I start with a short discussion on what preceded the emergence of SheDecides and how the movement functions.

A. Emergence of SheDecides

In January 2017 United States President Donald Trump reinstated and expanded the Memorandum Regarding the Mexico City Policy (MCP), also known as the Global Gag Rule.² The MPC restricts the activities of ‘nongovernmental’ organizations (NGOs) that receive family planning aid through the United States Agency for International Development (USAID).³ In order for NGOs to receive US aid of any kind they have to certify that they do not offer abortion services, provide information about abortion or referrals, nor advocate to change abortion laws. If NGOs wish to continue receiving any kind of US funds, they have to abstain from delivering the above-mentioned services even if these services are funded by other governmental or NGO donors (Human Rights Watch 2018). Whereas during previous Republican administrations the Mexico City Policy applied to US family planning assistance awarded by USAID only, President Trump has extended the restrictions and created a new policy “Protecting Life in Global Health Assistance” that extends the Mexico City Policy to all “global health assistance furnished by all [US] departments or agencies” (U.S. Department of State 2018). The MCP applies to domestic and international NGOs that receive US aid only, abortion services offered directly by foreign governments that are funded by US aid are not affected.

In reaction to the reinstatement and expansion of the MCP Mrs. Ploumen initiated the movement SheDecides. SheDecides lobbies for individuals, companies, and governments to increase their ‘development’ budgets to provide contraception and

² Memorandum Regarding the Mexico City Policy is hereafter referred to as MCP.

³ There are very few NGOs that are truly ‘non-governmental,’ the vast majority of organizations that define themselves as non-governmental either receive governmental funding, execute projects and programs for governments, and/or lobby for governmental initiatives (Sternberg 2010, 23).

abortion services to women in the Global South.⁴ Moreover, it aims to raise awareness about the so-called unmet need of family planning among these same women.⁵

SheDecides does not fund projects nor NGOs affected by the MCP itself, therefore the movement does not function as a funding mechanism but as a ‘global’ lobby and awareness raising organization that monitors whether the major funders fulfill their financial commitments.⁶ SheDecides quickly reached an international audience and the movement succeeded in unlocking approximately 400 million euro — funds originating from individuals, companies, and primarily West European governments. Despite the fact that 400 million euro can only mitigate the consequences of the cut in US family planning funding, and thus not reverse the ramifications, it indicates that the movement has successfully established itself (Righton 2018).

B. SheDecides’ websites: Discrepancies and inaccuracies

I start this analysis with the Dutch website of SheDecides because in comparison with the English version it is most concrete and straightforward. The website states the following concerning its objective, proposed interventions, and target population: *“Samen kunnen we meisjes en vrouwen wereldwijd een betere toekomst geven. Door geld in te zamelen voor de organisaties die getroffen worden door de Mexico City Policy kunnen we: Zorgen dat klinieken open blijven; Doorgaan met het*

⁴ There is a need to challenge the notion of ‘development’ as well the notion of ‘development aid’ that will unlikely lead to the ‘development’ of the Global South.

⁵ “The Millennium Development Goals indicator defined women with an “unmet need” as those who are married, of reproductive age, sexually active, wishing to avoid becoming pregnant in the next two years, and who are not using a family planning method” (Oas 2016, 64). This widely used definition assumes that a lack of knowledge or access is the reason why many women do not use contraceptives as opposed to potential cultural, religious, or health related objections.

⁶ Later in this chapter I question SheDecides’ global character in detail.

geven van voorlichting, het verstrekken van anticonceptie en het uitvoeren van veilige abortussen; Zorgen dat lokale organisaties doorgaan met het pleiten voor wetshervormingen om de gronden en termijn voor abortus uit te breiden.” (“Together we can give girls and women worldwide a better future. By collecting money for the organizations affected by the MCP we are able to make sure that [abortion] clinics stay open; continue with the provision of information and contraception, the execution of safe abortions; and ensure that local organizations can continue to lobby for legal reform to limit the terms and conditions governments have set for abortion.” In addition, the website mentions that 214 million women in ‘developing’ countries do not have access to contraceptives and this presumably has led to a higher demand in abortions, indicating the importance of and the need for SheDecides’ initiative (Achtergrond SheDecides 2017).⁷

There are several issues at stake with the way SheDecides presents its objective and interventions. To begin with, SheDecides equates the realization of a “better future” for women and girls with their access to ‘modern’— which is implied to be Western — contraception and abortion services and SheDecides does not substantiate this claim with any arguments. In addition, SheDecides does not target “girls and women worldwide” but only girls and women in the Global South. This is a crucial detail because it is possible to argue that there is equally a need to target women in the Global North where free contraception and abortion is not a common practice, nor are contraception and abortion services always subsidized or provided by governmental

⁷ See previous footnote about the ‘unmet need.’

health clinics (Khosla, 2015).⁸ Moreover, although abortion is legal almost everywhere in the Global North, a wide range of restrictions demarcate when and who is allowed to undergo an abortion (The World's Abortion Laws 2018). Thus while governments in the Global North allocate money for contraception and abortion services abroad, many of their own underprivileged citizens are either left without or have to settle for cheaper, and not necessarily their desired method of contraception.⁹ Furthermore, the website does not mention anything about why 214 million women do not have access to contraceptives and to what extent these women actually desire to use these drugs. Lastly, whereas the website provides conflicting information about several essential issues, it to no extent conceals the fact that the movement solely lobbies for contraception and abortion services to be made accessible and legalized abroad.¹⁰ The main takeaway of this short analysis is that whereas SheDecides' website in Dutch straightforwardly presents its proposed interventions, it does not set forth how its interventions will lead to the empowerment of women in the Global South, nor do they mention their true target population.

⁸ An example is the Kingdom of the Netherlands where women above 21 have not always been, and are currently not entitled to free contraception. Depending on the political composition of the Dutch cabinet, contraceptives has been removed from and added to the basic and compulsory health insurance. The justifications vary from budget cuts, the conviction that Dutch women are already 'emancipated,' considering the prevention of pregnancy an individual responsibility and lastly in 2004 the Netherlands was the only European country that still fully subsidized the pill (Samsom 2017).

⁹ Another example from the Netherlands supports this point. Despite its increasing popularity, several brands of the intrauterine device are still significantly more expensive than the annual cost of the oral contraceptive pill. This causes a woman's or couple's financial capability to influence or determine their choice of contraceptive method (De Ronden and Pennarts 2016).

¹⁰ I believe that SheDecides clearly states in Dutch only that it solely lobbies for contraception and abortion because both issues are not really considered taboo in the Netherlands. These issues are still politically and socially taboo in other countries in the Global North and Global South.

Despite the fact that SheDecides' websites in Dutch and English roughly show the same inaccuracies I will briefly go over the content of the English version. Hereafter I turn to the main discrepancy between SheDecides' websites: SheDecides does not present its proposed interventions clearly and unambiguously to its English speaking audience.

In short, SheDecides' website in English equally fails to lay the connection between the SheDecides' proposed interventions and the empowerment of women in the Global South and moreover does not accurately mention their target population. The main page of the website in English, that is referred to as "The Movement" mentions the following primary objective: "*SheDecides* is a global movement to promote, provide, protect and enhance the fundamental rights of every girl and woman." (The Movement SheDecides 2018). To begin with, it is doubtful to what extent a movement that is primarily funded by governments and non-governmental actors in the Global North can be truly be characterized as a 'global' movement. At the end of the day donors within the international development scene are often able to set priorities that force NGOs to adjust their projects and proposals accordingly (AbouAssi 2012, 585). Moreover, SheDecides does not target every single girl and woman. For instance socio-economically marginalized women in the Global North cannot count on support. There is not a single mention of so-called Global South or 'developing' countries but only of women "around the world." (The Movement SheDecides 2018). Lastly, SheDecides does not set forth how it promotes, provides, protects, and enhances the fundamental *rights* of women and girls nor what these rights exactly are.

In the remaining pages of this chapter I turn to the main discrepancy between SheDecides' websites. Unlike the Dutch website, the English website does not clearly

state that SheDecides *only* lobbies to make contraception and abortion services available to women in the Global South. It is no exaggeration to say that trying to understand SheDecides proposed interventions based upon the content of the website feels like being lost in a maze of ambiguous concepts and general statements. I analyze SheDecides' Manifesto that supporters of the "values and principles" of SheDecides are encouraged to sign (SheDecides The Manifesto 2018). Concerning the proposed interventions the Manifesto mentions that "She is free. To feel pleasure. To use contraception. To access abortion safely. To decide." The Manifesto mentions access to contraception and abortion services however, it is in my opinion unclear that this is *all* SheDecides lobbies for. This becomes clear as soon as you read the rest of the Manifesto.

The Manifesto commences by stating: "She decides whether, when, and with whom to have sex, to fall in love, to marry [and] to have children." As I will set forth in the next chapters, whereas among many Dutch people marriage and childbearing are seen as 'individual' decisions, this is not a universal norm. Moreover, there are many factors that influence the reproductive decisions of women and families alike, contraception is only one of them. On top of that, SheDecides does not promote, provide, protect, nor enhance the fundamental *rights* of women. Instead, the Manifesto mentions solely that "she has the right to information, to health care, to choose." Thus the "fundamental rights" referred to earlier are reduced to a narrow definition of the right to health. In fact, SheDecides does not *aim* at all to fight for women's "right to health" but only focusses on contraception and abortion services. In addition, when girls and women cannot decide "whether, when and with whom to have sex, to fall in love, to marry and to have children" they are prone to becoming victims of "violence, forced

marriage and oppression.” Does the Manifesto imply that contraception and abortion even have the magical power to prevent situations of “violence, forced marriage and oppression”? Lastly, the Manifesto mentions: “We right the wrongs. [...] We work to make laws and policies just. We stand up for what is right.” This statement refers to abortion and SheDecides’ lobby for legal reform to limit the terms and conditions governments in the Global South have set on abortion. Regardless of what is right or wrong, governments in the Global North who invest in a lobby to legalize and normalize abortion in countries where abortion is condemned for political, cultural, and religious reasons are guilty of moral imperialism or “ideological colonization” (Ekeocha in *Culture of Life Africa* 2017).

Through the analysis of SheDecides’ website I conclude that SheDecides fails to indicate how the provision of contraception and abortion services lead to the empowerment of women. Moreover, SheDecides does not target all girls and women worldwide, but solely women in the Global South. In contrast to SheDecides’ website in Dutch, the English website does not make explicitly clear that lobbying for the availability of contraception and abortion services in the Global South is all it does. The movement lobbies in the Global North for funding from (governmental) actors to increase the availability of contraception and abortion services in the Global South and in the Global South for legislative change. SheDecides conflates women rights with the right to health and the right to choose with providing women contraceptives and access to abortion services potentially to increase its popular and political support.

CHAPTER III

INTERSECTIONALITY AND PRO-CHOICE

In this chapter I set forth why access to contraception and abortion services does not necessarily lead to the empowerment of women in the Global South. “Birth control — individual choice, safe contraceptive methods, as well as abortions when necessary — is a fundamental prerequisite for the emancipation of women,” however it definitely does not constitute *the* key to women’s empowerment (Davis 1983, 202). In order to reach this conclusion I begin this chapter with the concept of intersectionality coined by Crenshaw. Crenshaw has argued that intersecting forces of oppression including but not limited to sexism, racism, and poverty cause women’s underprivileged positions, both in the Global North and in the Global South (Crenshaw 2018). I argue that SheDecides does not approach women’s oppression in the Global South from an intersectional perspective and therefore will be unable to design meaningful interventions that actually alleviate these women’s suffering. Underprivileged women suffer from multiple interacting forces of oppression and therefore access to contraception and abortion services alone will not enable them to make ‘independent’ (reproductive) decisions. In the second part of this chapter I argue that SheDecides adheres to a pro-choice narrative because it focusses on the means — contraception and abortion services — as opposed to the ends — healthier women, families and communities (Ross 2006, 14). I argue that the pro-choice approach has several shortcomings and these shortcomings particularly affect underprivileged women in the Global South. I discuss the disparity between women’s legal entitlement and actual access to abortion services, the relationship between reproductive decisions and the

condition of a woman's community, and lastly the way underprivileged women are encouraged to choose different kinds of contraception in comparison to privileged women.

A. Crenshaw's intersectionality theory

Women do not, neither in the Global North, nor in the Global South, constitute a homogenous category of people, instead they experience reality in a multitude of different ways. This is not to say that being a woman in a man's world does not influence this experience, it means that women's life experiences are equally shaped by additional identities and context specific social categorizations. For instance, the daily experiences of women worldwide are influenced by their belonging to certain socio-economic classes, national, religious, and racial subgroups. Moreover, sex, sexual orientation, and the extent to which women are able-bodied or disabled are equally important factors to take into consideration. Crenshaw has argued that the degree of a woman's marginalization and the intensity of the oppression she faces are influenced by all the aforementioned identities, social categorizations, and forces that shape her daily reality (Crenshaw 1991). Crenshaw provides the example of black women in the United States whose subordinated position cannot be explained by their race nor gender individually. Instead, their subordination is shaped by intersecting patterns of racism and sexism; they suffer oppression because they are black females (Crenshaw 1991, 1244). Only if we analyze the effects of women's identities and other social forces from an intersectional as opposed to considering each individually we can fully expose the intensity, as well as the sources women's marginalization.

Crenshaw thus argues that in order to expose, and ameliorate the oppression of underprivileged women (in the Global South), we need to bring to light all the sources of oppression women face. Contrary to this belief, it seems that SheDecides ignores and thus fails to challenge any other source of oppression except women's gender. I have come to this conclusion through the analysis of SheDecides' primary objective, proposed interventions and target population in the previous chapter. Regardless of the discrepancies and inaccuracies, SheDecides' websites leave one question glaringly unanswered: What exactly causes women's inability to access contraception and abortion services? In other words, why are women in the Global South deprived of what SheDecides considers important elements of basic reproductive healthcare? Unlike Crenshaw, SheDecides' websites are silent about the effects of poverty, any kind of social exclusion, war, occupation, public health austerity and/or defective health care systems on the oppression women face — including their inability to access contraception and abortion services.¹¹ Whereas SheDecides fails to contextualize women's inability to access contraception and abortion services, the website does mention repeatedly that SheDecides “supports the fundamental rights of girls and women” (SheDecides The Story 2018). This gives the impression that these women's rights, or rather lack thereof, constitute the main impediment for women to access contraception and abortion services. Thus, SheDecides' websites seem to imply that women do not have access to particular reproductive services because *they are women* who live in patriarchal societies and therefore suffer from a particular kind of gendered oppression that impedes their access to contraception and abortion services.

¹¹ Nor does SheDecides' website mention that it is possible that particular groups of women in the Global South do not have access to contraception and abortion services because there is a low local demand for these services.

It matters that SheDecides does not identify all sources of oppression that influence the lives of underprivileged women in the Global South and eventually impede their access to contraception and abortion services. In order to realize the empowerment of underprivileged women (in the Global South), interventions need to be proposed that tackle all sources of oppression simultaneously, not just those that are gendered in essence. This is not a revolutionary idea, already in the beginning of the 1990s Crenshaw argued that the interventions of governments or organizations often fail to be meaningful because they are based on the “inappropriate nonintersectional contexts” (Crenshaw 1991, 1251). SheDecides is a primary example of a government-initiated movement that fails to realize its objectives because of its non-intersectional approach to women’s empowerment.

Mrs. Ploumen does not just fail to approach women’s oppression from an intersectional perspective, some of the policies she executed when she was the Minister of Foreign Trade and International Development of the Kingdom of the Netherlands (2012-2017) actively exacerbated women’s oppression in certain countries in the Global South. I support this claim by presenting an example that indicates the effects of the military relations between the Dutch and the Jordanian government on the lives of the people in Yemen. This example is not an isolated happening; there are many other cases that demonstrate that governmental supporters of SheDecides often exacerbate women’s oppression (caused by war, occupation, and poverty) in the Global South by their foreign policies and military relations.

In 2017 the Dutch cabinet decided to support SheDecides’ objective and proposed interventions and made available three million dollars for two organizations in Yemen: Marie Stopes International and the Yamaan Foundation (“She Decides Funds”

2017). Due to these organizations' sole focus on increasing the availability and accessibility of contraception, the Dutch government does not challenge any kind of oppression that is non-gendered in essence while claiming to realize the empowerment of Yemeni women. The empowerment of Yemeni women requires multiple interventions that target the effects of the interacting forces of patriarchy, war, and poverty simultaneously. The Dutch government in 2017, and Ploumen in specific, did not just fail to mention and tackle any of these sources of oppression; in reality they exacerbated the oppression of Yemeni women through its military support to the Saudi Arabian-led coalition that is destructing Yemen (Broek and De Vries 2015). Needless to say, the war that is raging in Yemen has a devastating effect on people and nature and the continuation of the war excludes the possibility that women will be empowered and live the lives they desire to live. Potentially people would argue that Mrs. Ploumen, as Minister of Development, has nothing to do with arm deals. However, Mrs. Ploumen is part of a cabinet and should be aware of these kinds of transactions, specifically when it concerns arm deals between governments. Moreover, on October, 16 2017 Mrs. Ploumen herself informed the Dutch parliament that the Dutch cabinet had come to an agreement with the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan to sell the Jordanian monarchy fifteen Dutch F-16 fighter aircrafts. The Dutch Ministry of Defense received 76 million euros for this arm deal while the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan is part of the Saudi Arabian-led coalition ("Verkoop Overtollige F-16's" 2017). Thus, whereas the Dutch government, as well as several other European governments, financially supports SheDecides' objective and proposed interventions, it simultaneously intensifies women's oppression by its foreign policies, arm deals, and military interventions.

B. Limitations of a pro-choice approach

So far I have set forth that women's oppression is the result of multiple intersecting forces of power and oppression. The fact that there are underprivileged women who desire, but do not have access to contraception and abortion services is a direct consequence of these intersecting forces of oppression. In this final subchapter I argue that these forces of power and oppression do not just influence whether a woman can or cannot access contraception and abortion services, they equally influence the choices granted to women once these services become (legally) available. I aim to clarify that even when abortion is legalized and contraception available, underprivileged women cannot make fully 'independent' reproductive decisions because of their socioeconomic statuses. Moreover, there are still limits to the extent underprivileged women have access to same (quality) services that privileged women have access to. As SheDecides has a pro-choice approach to contraception and abortion services it only focusses on the means — “a divisive debate on abortion and birth control” — and not on the ends — “better lives for women and their communities” (Ross 2006, 14). SheDecides ignores and does not tackle the “inequality of [reproductive] opportunities” that underprivileged women suffer from (Ross 2006, 14).

To begin with, SheDecides calls for (governmental) donors — who are primarily located in the Global North — to fund organizations in the Global South to lobby to legalize abortion or lobby to remove existing restrictions that demarcate when and who is allowed to undergo an abortion. This is problematic because local populations might oppose abortion for cultural, religious, or historical reasons and organizations can become powerful lobbyists without the necessary local support. Moreover, legal entitlement gives the impression that every human being who falls

under the law has equal access and thus equal opportunity to benefit from this particular right. In a utopian society this would mean that all women regardless of class, race, religion, gender, and locality have access to exactly the same high quality reproductive health services. In many states in both the Global North as well as the Global South there is a gap between a woman's legal entitlement and her ability to access reproductive health products and services. For instance, not all reproductive health services are offered for free therefore disadvantaging economically marginalized women. Reproductive health care centers are often located in cities, disadvantaging women who live in the suburbs and countrysides (Grainger et al. 2016). Not all women receive the same quality reproductive healthcare due to racist, and classist stereotypes among governments and healthcare providers (Volscho 2010). The list of examples is long and therefore Chrisler has argued that "rights that cannot be exercised do women little good. Women need more than rights; they need recourses, accessibility of services, equality in other areas, and respect for their decisions" (Chrisler 2014, 205). In other words what the pro-choice movement fights for is not necessarily more "choice" for all women, as being legally entitled to abortion and contraception services does not increase women's choices as long as they are not able to fully exercise their rights. The disparity between legal entitlement and equal access is great in many (welfare) states in the Global North, states in the Global South where projects are executed in the name of SheDecides face an additional challenge. SheDecides calls for governments and companies to fund NGOs to provide reproductive health services in the Global South. Reproductive healthcare services, or to be precise contraception and abortion services, are therefore not always incorporated into national or local healthcare systems. This is a particularly precarious situation for women who depend on these service because there

is no guaranteed long-term access due to the fact that the majority of NGOs work on the basis of short term projects that are funded by foreign tax payers.

The second limitation of SheDecides' pro-choice approach is its ignorance concerning the conditions of women's communities that either expand or limit women's (reproductive) life choices. The notion that 'she decides' as soon as she has access to contraception and abortion services is flawed because reproductive decisions are influenced and directly linked to the conditions of a woman's community (Ross 2006, 14). Moreover, the ability of women to make 'individual' decisions, as well as to control their bodies, is continuously challenged by the different forces of oppression that I have set forth in the beginning of this chapter (Jolly 2016, 166).¹² These forces of oppression do not suddenly change or disappear when a woman obtains the legal right to abortion or access to contraception. Therefore, what first and foremost determines a woman's or a couple's reproductive decisions are the cultural, social, economic, and political conditions that they live in (Smith 2005). Several examples support this claim. There are still communities, primarily those whose livelihoods depend on agriculture, whose children constitute a source of labor as well as often the only form of economic security. Moreover, fertility rates can be high because child mortality rates are high (Hartmann 1990). Fertility of women is also influenced by cultural perceptions as in certain communities motherhood and children grant women respect and status in the society (Kaddour, Hafez & Zurayk 2005). Lastly, in certain communities childbearing can be seen as a tool to resist colonial policies of population control (Shahawy and Diamon 2018). It also works the other way around: Socio-economic conditions can force women and couples to seek birth control as well as abortion because poverty

¹² Racism, classism, paternalism, heterosexism, ageism et cetera.

compels people to restrict their fertility. Parents cannot afford education, healthcare, and other costs that come along with childbearing. Thus, regardless the legality of contraception and abortion services, women who are marginalized by different forces of oppression have significantly less (reproductive) choice in comparison to women who are more privileged. In contrast to what SheDecides argues, access to contraception and abortion services does not enable women to make independent reproductive choices, whatever an 'independent' choice might mean. 'She decides' sounds catchy but it does by no means represent the reality of underprivileged women who despite their potential access to contraception and abortion services can still not decide on their (reproductive) lives because of the non-gendered oppression they face.

Lastly, the pro-choice movement has not sufficiently focused on the notion of choice in relation to the contraceptives offered in (reproductive) health clinics. In the best case scenario women all over the world have access to reproductive healthcare but what about the choices that women are offered in reproductive healthcare clinics? SheDecides does not direct any attention to the fact that governments who invest in the provision of contraceptives in the Global South need to ascertain that the drugs they prescribe are safe and that healthcare workers provide all women with the same high quality consultation and advice. I argue that a choice among potentially dangerous contraceptives as well as an uninformed choice should not be considered a real choice despite the fact that many (primarily underprivileged) women are only granted this 'choice.'

I present two examples that should ring alarm bells concerning the actual contraceptive choices underprivileged women are offered in healthcare clinics both in the Global North as well as in the Global South. To begin with, during a TED Talk

Melinda Gates made the following statement: “Women in Africa will tell you over and over again that what they prefer today is an injectable” (Gates 2012).¹³ The longer-term (three-month) injectable contraceptive Gates describes in her speech is Depo Provera, a contraceptive well known for its harmful physical as well as psychological side effects both during its usage as well as upon cessation. Despite the familiarity of the dangers Depo Provera can pose to women, European and American NGOs still promote the drug among women in the Global South (Oas 2016, 67). In sub-Saharan Africa this has led to an increase in the popularity of the drug and it has even surpassed the combined oral contraceptive pill as the most popular contraceptive (Adetunji 2011). Whereas there is no qualitative research that exposes why women in sub-Saharan Africa continue to use Depo Provera despite the health risks it poses, comparative researches have been conducted in the Global North. The research concluded that in the United States and the United Kingdom racially and economically marginalized women are overrepresented in terms of Depo Provera usage (Gubrium and Ferrer 2008, 3 and Jones 2013, 53). This phenomenon can be explained by the fact that marginalized women receive different medical advice from healthcare workers during consultations in comparison to privileged women. In comparison to white middle-class women, marginalized women are more likely to be advised to limit their childbearing and more likely to be discouraged from having children (Dowing, LaVeist and Bullock 2007, 1803). Marginalized women are often stigmatized as contributing to welfare costs and they “are often judged to be less fit and less worthy of motherhood” (Gubrium 2018, 3).

¹³ Melinda Gates runs the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, the foundation politically supports SheDecides and has pledged to invest 375 million dollars during a four year period to increase women’s access to contraception in the Global South (Batha 2017). I discuss the Gates Foundation in more detail in the next chapter.

Classist, racist, and cultural perceptions of governments and healthcare workers alike thus influence the quality of healthcare services marginalized women receive. These perceptions also influence the usage of Depo Provera among marginalized women because consciously or unconsciously healthcare providers make a different cost-benefit analysis of Depo Provera for privileged and underprivileged women. For privileged women the benefits, protection against pregnancy, do not outweigh the perceived costs, the dangerous side effects. For underprivileged women the benefits do outweigh the costs (Gubrium 2018, 3). Here the benefits do not refer to the lives of the individual women in question, but to governments and healthcare providers who aim to solve social issues, primarily poverty, by influencing or controlling women's reproductive lives.

The second example that indicates that is questionable to what extent underprivileged women are granted actual contraceptive choices come from Yemen. As mentioned the Dutch government funds the Yamaan Foundation that cooperates with Marie Stopes International and has developed a “voucher program to increase [women's] access to LARCs [long-acting reversible contraceptives] and PMs [permanent methods] (Ginger et al. 2016, 89). Through the voucher program the Yamaan Foundation targets women in poor areas (Ginger et al. 2016, 99) and distribution agents provide these women “information on family planning (relevance and range of methods available, including LARCs and PMs)” (Ginger et al. 2016, 100). A voucher “gives access to free family planning counseling at a health care facility as well as free LARC/PM services, while short-acting methods are provided for free or at a heavily subsidized rate” (Ginger et al. 2016, 100). The authors do not provide any additional information on why short-acting methods are sometimes provided for free

and other times only heavily subsidized. What is clear is that providing poor women with the choice between two kinds of contraceptives whereof one is free and the other is not always free, their decision making process will in all likelihood be dominated by her financial capabilities and not by her actual preferences. The point of these rather lengthy descriptions of choice in relation to contraception functions to indicate that once a woman has access to contraception it does not necessarily indicate that she was granted a real 'choice' in selecting her preferred contraception method. Access to contraceptives does not have an empowering effect if healthcare workers give medical advice based upon racist perceptions instead of the individual interests of each woman. Moreover, what is left of the meaning of 'choice' when the contraceptives offered are not safe or if women are financially obliged to choose for long acting instead of potentially desired short acting contraceptives?

In conclusion, women in the Global South who desire but do not have access to contraception and abortion services are often marginalized by several forces of oppression simultaneously. SheDecides' proposed interventions only alleviate one aspect of gendered oppression, distributing contraception and providing women with safe abortions services will therefore not result in these women's empowerment. In addition, legal entitlement to abortion and contraception services does not increase reproductive choices because women's and couples' choices are first and foremost restricted and determined by their communities' socio-economic conditions. Once underprivileged women have access to contraception governments and healthcare workers sometimes consider contraception and abortion as tools to solve persistent 'social problems.' Davis has correctly argued that "what was demanded as a "right" for the privileged became to be interpreted as a "duty" for the poor" (Davis 1981, 210). As

will become clear in the next chapter whereas white elitist feminist have fought for their right to birth control underprivileged women have to resist racialized and classist stereotypes in order to receive high quality reproductive healthcare.

CHAPTER IV

FEMINISM AND SHEDECIDES

SheDecides' proposed interventions, the provision of contraception and abortion services, do not lead to its primary objective, the empowerment of underprivileged women. This raises questions about the motivations of SheDecides: Is the movement actually interested in the realization of the empowerment of women or do they aim to provide women with contraception and abortion services for a different reason? If SheDecides' motivations and actions are truly shaped by their commitment to women's empowerment and gender equality, why did SheDecides not foresee the limitations of their proposed interventions? In this chapter I argue that SheDecides' motivations are shaped first and foremost by a particular kind of feminism that Angela Davis has referred to as mainstream bourgeois feminism (Davis 2017). Mainstream bourgeois feminism represent the interests, needs, and opinions of the white female elite in the Global North and it has tried, rather successfully, to establish itself as "the only legitimate feminism" (Amos and Parmar 2005, 44).

In this chapter I discuss two limitations of mainstream bourgeois feminism that constitute in my opinion the underlying causes of SheDecides' failure to design and implement meaningful interventions that actually contribute to the empowerment of underprivileged women in the Global South. First I discuss the issue of ignorance concerning the lives and experiences of underprivileged women as a consequence of the privileges mainstream bourgeois feminists enjoy. The mainstream bourgeois feminist movement can only design and implement meaningful interventions in and for the Global South with the insights, opinions and participation of underprivileged women

themselves. Secondly I discuss the issue of arrogance and argue that because of arrogance the mainstream bourgeois feminist movement will not overcome its ignorance concerning the lives and experiences of underprivileged women. I set forth that mainstream bourgeois feminists tend to think they can define the ‘feminist struggle,’ represent and speak for underprivileged women in the Global South. At the end of this chapter I briefly analyze a section of a speech by Melinda Gates as an example of a white, elitist woman who ‘represents’ and ‘speaks for’ underprivileged women from the continent of Africa and their desires for modern, western contraception.

Before I discuss the limitations of mainstream bourgeois feminism I want to mention that initially I did not plan to discuss SheDecides’ mainstream bourgeois feminist motivations independently from the motivations of (governmental) actors in the Global North. I considered both SheDecides and the donors to be driven by the same economic as opposed to feminist motivations.¹⁴ I came to rethink this after I received my first informal feedback that stated that the first two chapters of this paper present “[een] overtuigend voorbeeld van (wat mij betreft) hoe goede voornemens in andere delen van de wereld heel anders kunnen uitpakken” (I would argue a convincing example of how good intentions can have different repercussions in other parts of the world).¹⁵ I did not expect that my analysis of SheDecides could lead others to conclude that the movement is established out of “good intentions.” Presumably SheDecides’ proposed interventions simply failed to realize women’s empowerment due to different socioeconomic and political contexts in the Global South. I came to think of this remark

¹⁴ In chapter four I set forth the economic motivations of donors in the Global North in detail.

¹⁵ Personal email exchange 15 October 2018.

not as an individual conclusion, but of one that potentially represents the prevailing opinion among many citizens in the Global North. Moreover, it made me realize that it is actually very likely that SheDecides' initiator Mrs. Ploumen as well as SheDecides' Champions think of the movement as fighting for feminist values of women's empowerment and gender equality.¹⁶ For these two reasons I realized that there is a need to clarify that I do not consider SheDecides to constitute an example of a movement that started out of good intentions. Instead, I consider SheDecides as the most recent example that the white female elite in the Global North still adheres to mainstream bourgeois feminism that sometimes disregards and other times coopts the experiences of underprivileged women (Ortega 2006, 62). To discuss whether or not SheDecides, and the mainstream bourgeois feminist movement in the Global North in general, has good intentions or not is unnecessary at this stage. As long as mainstream bourgeois feminists preach a feminism that is not intersectional, the possibility of good intentions is excluded in my opinion.

A. Ignorance and arrogance as a consequence of privilege

In this chapter I do not aim to provide a detailed overview of mainstream bourgeois feminism, this would simply be impossible considering the fact that this kind of feminism does not constitute a monolithic movement or entity (Amos and Parmar 2005, 45). Instead I want to elaborate on the notions of ignorance and arrogance as a

¹⁶ Gender equality as a concept and the focus of the feminist movement in the Global North already indicates a certain bias towards the interest of white and elitist feminists. What does fighting for equality between men and women mean when men in the Global South (and North) equally suffer from various forms of oppression? Moreover, there is no point in women demanding equality to men who equally suffer from patriarchy as well as having to comply with a hegemonic masculinity (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005).

consequence of privilege, two of the underlying causes of SheDecides' failure to design and implement meaningful interventions.

SheDecides' proposed interventions do not lead to the empowerment of women in the Global South because the movement is ignorant of the intersectional nature of oppression and marginalization. This ignorance is the consequence of the tangible privileges that mainstream bourgeois feminists enjoy: they are often white, affluent, in positions of (political) power, and they hold citizenship of states located in the Global North (Frye 1984). The enjoyment of tangible privileges inevitably results in an additional privilege which is the possibility to stay ignorant of what it is like not to have these privileges (Sholock 2012, 702). White elitist feminists have relatively little, or no experience with oppression that is not gendered in essence, they tend to be protected from the violence of racism, poverty, and war. Because mainstream bourgeois feminism first and foremost represent the interests, needs, and opinions of this particular subcategory of women, they do not approach women's oppression and underprivileged realities from an intersectional perspective (Davis 2017).¹⁷ Moreover, feminists of color in the United States have repeatedly shed light on the lack of feminist solidarity by mainstream bourgeois feminists when women of color are the target of any kind of misogynist attack. Mainstream bourgeois feminists' solidarity is limited to the women and feminists who are like them in terms of race and class (Hobson 2013).

¹⁷ Or as Davis states: "any feminism that privileges those who already have privilege is bound to be irrelevant to poor women, working-class women, women of color, transwomen [and] transwomen of color. If standards for feminism are created by those who have already ascended economic hierarchies and are attempting to make the last climb to the top how is this relevant to women who are at the very bottom?" (Davis 2017).

Needless to say it is impossible to fully eradicate ignorance concerning the experiences of underprivileged women among the privileged mainstream bourgeois feminists in the Global North. Privileged women will never not know what it is like to be underprivileged because it is beyond the bounds of possibility to fully comprehend someone else's reality. Shollock has therefore argued that mainstream bourgeois feminists have to acknowledge their "epistemic uncertainties," they have to acknowledge that there are certain things that they do not know (Shollock 2012, 710). Only underprivileged women themselves know their realities, the sources of their oppression and most importantly their needs to end their positions of subordination. In order for the mainstream bourgeois feminist movement to design and implement meaningful projects the insights and opinions of underprivileged women are "not a luxury but a necessity" (Harding 1991, 282 in Shollock 2012).

The ignorance of mainstream bourgeois feminists could partially be overcome would they enter a dialogue and listen to what underprivileged women have to say concerning their realities, their needs and the sources of their oppression. However, it is unlikely that mainstream bourgeois feminists will overcome their ignorance because their movement is equally plagued by arrogance (Ortega 2006, 56). Mainstream bourgeois feminists tend to think they head a universal feminist movement and that therefore they can represent and speak for underprivileged women in the Global South.

With the rise of postcolonial, critical race, and feminist studies, activists and scholars have challenged the notion that mainstream bourgeois feminism constitutes a universal political project (McEwan 2001, 96). Nevertheless and as the proposed interventions of SheDecides indicate, mainstream bourgeois feminists still represent the interests, needs and opinions of the white female elite in the Global North (Davis 2017).

In addition, they believe that their experiences are universally shared among women worldwide. For instance, the mainstream bourgeois feminist movement in the Global North has fought for access to contraception and legalized abortion as part of their struggle to end their subordination. This does not automatically mean that all women consider access to contraception and abortion services to constitute a top priority, nor that access to these services will end the subordination of all (less-privileged) women (Davis 1981, 202). Due to structural inequality between women (as well as men) in the Global North and the Global South as a consequence of primarily Europe's racist colonial history, the mainstream bourgeois feminist movement has relatively successfully attempted to establish itself as "the only legitimate feminism" (Amos and Parmar 2005, 44). To reinforce and protect their agenda, the movement has repressed and excluded dissident voices that can weaken as well as potentially destroy the movement's assumed homogeneity (Ortega 2006, 59).¹⁸

Mainstream bourgeois feminists sometimes disregard and other times co-opt the experiences of underprivileged women in the Global South. In order to uphold their position as belonging to the only legitimate feminist movement, they often speak for other women — who are supposedly 'silenced' by their own cultures — their experiences, needs and desires (Amadiume 1997 in McEwan 2001). Ortega has argued that when the voices, political activism or academic work of marginalized women are

¹⁸ There is one essential issue that explains the exclusion of underprivileged women within the mainstream bourgeois feminist movement. Both men and women in the Global North directly benefit from the oppression of underprivileged women in the Global South. Like white women in the United States benefitted from the enslavement of black women (Davis 2018), women in the Global North benefit from the (labor) exploitation of underprivileged women in Global South. In short, underprivileged women in the Global South are exposed to exploitative labor conditions in order to produce garments, electronic appliances and food for the markets in the Global North. I set forth this issue in detail in the next chapter.

cited or referred to by mainstream bourgeois feminists this does not indicate a sudden desire for an inclusive feminist movement (Ortega 2006, 62). Instead, it indicates that the voices of underprivileged women are only heard in the Global North when expressed by these white and elitist feminists. Through using the words of marginalized women (from the Global South) mainstream bourgeois feminists “construct a reality that is in fact closer to what [they want] it to be rather than what it is [...]” (Ortega 2006, 62). “In other words, this ignorance goes hand in hand with the production of knowledge about the experiences of women of color. The result of this ignorance is that women of color continue to be misunderstood, underrepresented, homogenized, disrespected, or subsumed under the experience of “universal sisterhood” while “knowledge” about them is being encouraged and disseminated and while feminism claims to be more concerned and more enlightened about the relations between white women and women of color” (Ortega 2006, 62).

If we assume that Mrs. Ploumen established SheDecides driven by feminist ideals of female empowerment, the limitations of her feminism is one of the underlying causes of SheDecides’ failure to design meaningful interventions. The mainstream bourgeois feminist movement, that I consider SheDecides to be a product of, has racist, classist, and Eurocentric tendencies that has prevented the incorporation of underprivileged women, their experiences, and desires, in their movement. Due to misplaced arrogance and despite their ignorance, mainstream bourgeois feminists think they can speak for and represent underprivileged women while taking away the agency of underprivileged women to articulate their own struggles and political agendas (McEwan 2001, 101).

B. Melinda Gates as the spokeswoman for underprivileged women

Melinda Gates, together with her husband Bill Gates, runs a foundation that politically supports SheDecides and has pledged to invest 375 million dollars during a four year period to increase women's access to contraception in the Global South (Batha 2017). In 2012 she gave a TED Talk that shows in my opinion how "ignorance goes hand in hand with the production of knowledge about the experience of women of color." (Ortega 2006, 62). Gates states the following:

"Let's just take one country in Africa, Senegal. Their [contraceptive usage] rate is about twelve percent. But why is it so low? One reason is that the most popular contraceptives are rarely available. Women in Africa will tell you over and over again that what they prefer today is an injectable. They get it in their arm — and they go about four times a year, they have to get it every three months — to get their injection. The reason women like it so much in Africa is that they can hide it from their husbands, who sometimes want a lot of children. The problem is, every other time a woman goes into a clinic in Senegal that injection is stocked out. It is stocked out hundred and fifty days out of the year. Can you imagine the situation? She walks all his way to go get her injection. She leaves her field, sometimes leaves her children and it is not there. And she does not know when it is going to be available again. This is the same story across the continent of Africa today." She continues "[...] these coercive policies [of sterilization programs] were not even needed. They were carried out in places where parents already wanted to lower their family size. Because in region after region, again and again, parents have wanted smaller families. There is no reason to believe that African women have innately different desires. Given the option, they will have fewer children. The question is: Will we invest in helping all women get what they want now?" (Gates 2012).

Gates' TED Talk is in my opinion a primary example of a mainstream bourgeois feminist producing knowledge about the assumed experiences, desires and lives of underprivileged women in the Global South. Gates gives the audience the impression that she has received a mandate to speak for all underprivileged women who do not have access to western contraception, that she has the solution to end their suffering and that she truly cares about their fates and lives. In her talk Gates has

created a reality that is unlikely to correspond with the realities of underprivileged women in the Global South. For instance, the fact that health workers relatively often advise poor underprivileged women of color to use injectable contraception, and that these women trust their doctor's reproductive health advice, does not mean that these women prefer this particular kind of contraception (Gubrium and Ferrer 2008). Stating that women prefer injectable contraception because they can easily hide this kind of contraception from their husbands is a schoolbook example of "blaming culture" [as opposed to inequality, poverty, occupation, war, structural adjustment programs and capitalist exploitation that cause defective healthcare systems] for problems in 'non-western' contexts and communities" (McEwan 2001, 100). Gates insinuates that women in Africa need to be saved from local patriarchal cultures and that injectable contraception is a tool to resist the oppressive nature of their husbands (and communities) (Abu-Lughod 2002). In addition, not all African women 'work on the field.' This statement nurtures people's (colonial) imaginations of an 'uncivilized' and 'undeveloped' Africa where modernization, whatever that might mean, has not yet started. In reality, due to primarily poverty that is prevalent in rural Africa, Africa's urbanization is among the highest in the world (Awumbila 2017). Whereas Gates presents an example from Senegal, she concludes that this story represents what is happening everywhere on the continent of Africa, as if the continent of Africa constitutes a politically, socially and economically homogenous entity. Lastly, the desires of women in the Global North do not represent the desires of women in the Global South and therefore African women, due to their unique particular experiences and lives, probably do have innately different desires than women in the Global North. Gates presents herself as the white 'savior' of African women because she proposed to

provide women with injectable contraception that, she argues, these women are in dire need of.

In conclusion, in this chapter I have aimed to clarify that the issue with SheDecides is bigger than the movement itself. The primary reason why SheDecides' proposed interventions do not lead to the empowerment of underprivileged women is related to the fact that SheDecides is a product of mainstream bourgeois feminism. Adherents of this particular kind of feminism tend to be white and elitist women who are ignorant of the lives and experiences of less privileged women both in the Global North and in the Global South. Due to their misguided arrogance they sometimes disregard and other times co-opt the experiences of underprivileged women for their own personal or political agendas.

CHAPTER V

MOTIVATIONS OF DONORS

The question that has remained unanswered until now is why (governmental) actors in the Global North have collectively invested millions of dollars to influence (read: reduce) the fertility rates of women in the Global South. Whereas SheDecides gives the impression that first and foremost women in the Global South enjoy the benefits of increased control over their fertility, I demonstrate that transnational corporations (TNCs) that own factories in the Global South are the real winners.¹⁹ I argue that TNCs, and therefore governmental actors in the Global North that directly benefit from the profits TNCs generate, support SheDecides' proposed interventions because they see contraception and abortion as a tool to lower the fertility rates of underprivileged women. They want to lower fertility rates because they consider high fertility rates to impede underprivileged women's access into the labor force in the Global South. Young underprivileged women fulfill an indispensable role within many of the export-oriented industries in the Global South and high fertility rates forms an obstacles to their employment as manual workers.

In this chapter I discuss three main issues: I set forth how in the 1970s (inter)governmental actors in the Global North encouraged the incorporation of women in the Global South into 'local' economies through 'development' programs under the

¹⁹ TNCs win as well as the states where their headquarters are established. Headquarters of TNCs are primarily located in "the wealthy countries of capitalism's center" (Magdoff and Magdoff 2005, 18) as in 2006 the majority of TNCs were located in the United States, followed by the United Kingdom, the Netherlands, Germany, France, Italy, Brazil, Belgium, Switzerland and Mexico (UNCTAD 2006).

guise of these women's empowerment. Primarily underprivileged women entered formal economies and became workers in factories that produce goods and services primarily for export to the Global North. Hereafter I discuss the gendered labor oppression that female workers experience, oppression that keeps down labor costs and enriches capital owners and managements of TNCs. Lastly I argue that the labor of underprivileged women is particularly profitable when there is a large female labor force. A country's female labor force refers to the number of women currently employed as well as the number of women currently unemployed but looking for work. TNCs profit from large female labor forces for two reasons in particular. Due to the physical and emotional damage directly caused by exploitative working conditions in the factories, female labor turnover rates are relatively high. Moreover, a large pool of unemployed women who are looking for employment causes employed workers to be more careful in their labor demands knowing that they are relatively easily replaceable.

Before I start this chapter there are two important issues that require a short explanation. To begin with in this chapter I argue that TNCs, and therefore governmental actors, in the Global North share SheDecides' interest in increasing the availability of contraception and abortion without sharing SheDecides' primary objective. The fact that other actors, and not women in the Global South, benefit from SheDecides' lobby is a direct consequence of SheDecides' pro-choice approach. SheDecides does not pay attention to how its proposed interventions work out on the ground and potentially reinforce other sources of women's oppression. Had the mainstream bourgeois feminist movement that SheDecides is a product of not been plagued by ignorance and arrogance, it could potentially have foreseen that contraception and abortion are used as tools to decrease fertility rates of underprivileged

women that enable these women's entrance into (oppressive) capitalist labor relations. The second point I would like to clarify is that (governmental) actors have multiple motivations to invest in contraception and abortion services in order to reduce the fertility rates of underprivileged women in the Global South, the indispensable role of female workers within the global economy is only one of them. In general motivations to reduce women's fertility rates have varied depending on time and location and are usually shaped by desires to perk flows of unwanted migration (Magendane 2018); to prevent resource scarcity (Hodgson and Cotts Watkins 1997); to change the genetic quality of the human population (Jolly 2016); and to 'end' poverty and other social issues (Gates 2012).

A. Women and the formal economy

Women between the age of fourteen and twenty-five constitute the majority of the workers in the factories that produce goods and services for export-oriented industries in the Global South. I do not want to address this issue from an economic perspective, analyzing how essentially poverty has driven these women from traditional occupations in and outside the household to formal employment in these industries. Instead I want to set forth how (inter)governmental actors located in the Global North have encouraged the incorporation of women into 'local' economies through 'development' programs under the guise of these women's empowerment.²⁰

²⁰ As the name already indicates export-oriented industries produce goods and services for the export. The relocation of factories to the Global South after the 1970 economic crisis in the Global North started a process during which countries in the Global South become areas of production and the Global North an area of consumption. "The export-oriented production in developing countries gears most labour time, raw materials, skills and technical development towards the demand of the markets in the rich

In the 1970s (inter)governmental actors in the development scene came to the conclusion that despite the investment of millions of dollars of development aid, the socioeconomic position of women in the Global South had not significantly improved. They attributed this stagnation or deterioration partially to the “passive, oppressed and ignorant” character of the average woman in the Global South and partially to the fact that development plans did not specifically target women as a social category (Koczberski 1998, 401). (Inter) governmental actors, who are the primary ‘development’ donors, started to push for an integration of women into formal economies through their development programs. They concluded that women in the Global South will not ‘develop’ unless incorporated into development programs designed in the Global North and unless they become workers in the formal economy and enter into capitalist relations (Amos and Parmar 2005, 48).

Just like access to contraception does not constitute *the* solution to underprivileged women’s struggles, participation in the formal economy does not necessarily liberate or empower. (Inter) governmental actors, as well as mainstream bourgeois feminists, who preach and have preached the magical effects of women’s participation in formal economies ignore three essential issues. To begin with they ignore, and therefore devalue women’s roles and activities in the informal economy, household and community (Koczberski 1998, 339). Moreover, they assume that having an income automatically increases women’s social status failing to recognize that the sources of women’s status are “culturally specific and multidimensional” (Koczberski

countries, not towards the needs of the people in the underdeveloped countries” (Mies 1986, 114). Thus, underprivileged women do not produce services and goods they need and can consume themselves, but what others, local elites and more or less the average citizen in the Global North can buy (Mies 1986, 118).

1998, 339). Lastly and most importantly, Abu-Lughod has argued that the “magical value of work for women” is based upon a middle upper class perspective of work (Abu-Lughod 2009, 88). For women who voluntarily decide to work in the formal economy, receive a good payment and experience personal fulfillment, work can definitely have an empowering effect. However, a good amount of underprivileged women in the Global South ends up in export-oriented industries that dominate local economies. Generally speaking work in these industries is underpaid, exploitative and women’s decision to enter the industries does often not constitute a ‘free’ choice but rather an economic necessity (Dasgupta and Williams 2015).

B. Export-oriented industries: Yet another form of gendered oppression

The 1970s were not just a period wherein the (inter)governmental actors in the Global North aimed to integrate underprivileged women into ‘national’ economies in the Global South. After a period of rapid economic growth in the Global North after the Second World War, economic decline dominated the 1970s and 1980s. In “un urgent need to find new ways to squeeze out more profits” many companies located in the Global North moved their factories to the Global South where labor was and still is extremely cheap due to the fact that labor unions are weak, demoralized, prohibited, or persecuted and workers have little, if no rights (Magnodd & Magdoff 2004, 19). Thus while (inter)governmental actors invested their ‘development’ aid into enabling or encouraging women to enter the formal economy (read: export-oriented industries), women were “rediscovered by international capital” as the perfect workers for the newly opened factories in the Global South (Mies 1986, 116).

The fact that both (inter)governmental actors and TNCs focused their attention on women as the perfect factory workers cannot be a coincidence and therefore it is safe to assume that (inter)governmental actors ‘assisted’ (their) companies in the recruitment of underprivileged women. It is important to note that these companies do not employ women in all ranks and therefore these women do not control, nor have the power to potentially disrupt, entire production processes. Instead, the division of roles in factories reflect the existing patriarchal structures of societies and therefore women work along the assembly lines and men dominate the top of the factory hierarchies as supervisors and managers (Elson and Pearson 1981, 100). As mentioned in the previous subsection, these assembly line jobs are highly underpaid and exploitative and therefore it is impossible that TNCs hire underprivileged women to contribute to the end of “the subordination of women as a gender” (Elson and Pearson 1981, 95). In fact, women work along the assembly lines because of their assumed *and* forcefully developed “nimble fingers” and “docile dispositions” (Elson and Pearson 1981, 98).²¹ Only women, and not men, have “nimble fingers” and “docile dispositions” as the result of their experiences of subordination, oppression and violence as women living in patriarchal societies (Elson and Pearson 1981, 98). Moreover, as a consequence of these gendered experiences, women tend to easily accept the “discipline of factory life” that includes physical, emotional, financial and even sexual exploitation. Thus, the TNCs that employ women for assembly line jobs do not challenge, but directly benefit from, reinforce and, aggravate women’s subordination and existing gender inequalities.

²¹ Women develop “nimble fingers” through household activities like cooking, sewing, embroidering, baking and other similar activities. Men often do not take responsibility for these activities and therefore do not develop these “nimble fingers.”

C. Contraception as a tool to influence the size of the female labor force

In this final subsection I argue that TNCs and (governmental) actors want to increase the accessibility of contraception and abortion services as a tool to decline fertility rates of women in the Global South. Whereas the majority of the states in the Global North has witnessed a decline in fertility rates as a consequence of the availability of contraception in combination with a rise in standards of living, in the Global South fertility rates have to drop as a sole consequence of the availability of contraception and legalized abortion. Lower fertility rates of underprivileged women in the Global South will enable these women to enter the formal labor force and work in factories that produce for the export to the Global North. This international capitalist system that generates great profits for TNCs and their host countries can only be maintained if there is a large female labor force that includes unemployment women who are willing to work.

It is generally believed that lower fertility rates among women in the Global South will increase their participation in formal economies and therefore “enhance their productivity to global capitalism” (Wilson 2015, 818). A report by the World Bank, referred to by Wilson, emphasizes the importance of women in the Global South for the global economy and furthermore sets forth how both total levels of fertility and timing of births affect the labor supply of women in the Global South. Moreover, the “[...] legalisation of abortion, which leads to reduced total fertility, has also been linked to higher female labour force participation.” (Grépin and Klugman 2013, 5). Thus, the labor of exploited women in the Global South is an important characteristic of the current global economy and in order to increase the flow of female workers their fertility rates have to drop.

In order for TNCs and their host countries to continue to profit from the exploitation of underprivileged women, they have to create a female labor force that is larger than the number of women that can be employed in export oriented factories for two reasons in specific. To begin with, in the factories the labor turnover rates are high, this means that women primarily work on short contracts (Wright 2006, 28).²² The labor turnover rate is high because the average female factory worker does not ‘just’ produce goods and services, she “generates widespread prosperity through her own destruction” (Wright 2006, 3). Female factory workers generate widespread prosperity for capital and business owners as well as consumers in the Global North. Female factory workers cannot generate the wealth they do without setting in motion their own destruction. Due to the exploitative labor conditions women relatively quickly develop physical and mental problems that cause them to lose “the physical and mental faculties for which [they were] initially employed.” (Wright 2006, 2). Women are initially hired because of their ‘nimble fingers,’ however after two years of repetitive work their fingers cease to be ‘nimble.’ Therefore, “at some point (in this case, within two years), the replacement of these workers is regarded as more valuable to the company than their continued employment.” (Wright 2006, 28). Thus the labor turnover is so high because within two years women reach their ‘date of expiration’ and it becomes cheaper for TNCs to hire and train new female workers. Due to high female turnover rates this system is ‘sustainable’ when countries have large reserves of female workers.

The “reserve army of [female] labor” has another important function and that is to create a situation wherein female workers know that they are relatively easily

²² Wright states that in the factory she conducted her research women would stay approximately two years (Wright 2006, 28).

replaceable (Magdoff and Magdoff 2004, 18). In short, when unemployment is high, those who are employed will be less likely to demand, among others, better working conditions, higher salaries, and union membership. Thus, the higher the supply of labor, the more difficult it becomes for workers to demand improvements in their labor condition, the easier it gets for TNCs to make huge profits.

In conclusion, in this chapter I have set forth one reason that might have motivated (governmental) actors in the Global North — that host the majority of the TNCs in this world — to invest in the availability of contraception and abortion services among women in the Global South. TNCs and (governmental) actors in the Global North are interested in reducing the fertility of women in the Global South through the provision of contraception and abortion services because they want to increase the size of the female labor force. TNCs are particularly interested in employing young underprivileged women because their “nimble fingers” and “docile dispositions” that enable TNCs to suppress labor costs. Because of SheDecides’ ignorance and misplaced arrogance, it has adopted a pro-choice approach that does not pay attention to whether or not women have actually benefited from their increased access to contraception and abortion services. This has led other actors to benefit from SheDecides’ lobby and increase their own economic interests. By increasing underprivileged women’s access to contraception and abortion services TNCs aim to reduce these women’s fertility rates. Reduced fertility rates is seen as the removal of one obstacle that has previously prevented the access of underprivileged women into the paid labor force.

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

Access to contraception and abortion services does not constitute the key to the empowerment of underprivileged women in the Global South. Underprivileged women often suffer from the effects of sexism, racism, poverty, war, and occupation simultaneously and therefore it is impossible that access to contraception and abortion services alone will enable these women to be 'free' (Sign the Manifesto SheDecides 2017) In order to realize these women's empowerment SheDecides has to approach these women's lives and suffering from an intersectional perspective and challenge all sources of oppression concurrently. SheDecides does not challenge any non-gendered form of violence neither does it raise awareness about the existence of other forces of violence that influence women's lives and access to contraception and abortion services.

In addition I have argued that at this point in time it is irrelevant to discuss whether SheDecides' initiators have good intentions, and are therefore truly interested in the empowerment of underprivileged women in the Global South. As long as the feminism that SheDecides' initiators preach is not intersectional, and their proposed interventions are based on non-intersectional contexts, the possibility of good intentions is excluded. SheDecides does not take an intersectional approach to women's oppression because it is ignorant of the interests, needs, desires, and opinions of underprivileged women. Moreover, misplaced arrogance plagues the movement, mainstream bourgeois feminists think they head a 'global' feminist movement and can therefore 'represent' and 'speak for' other underprivileged women in the Global South.

SheDecides' proposed interventions only tackle the legality and availability of contraception and abortion services, without ensuring that women have equal access to

the same high quality services. SheDecides does not focus on its end goals, healthier and empowered women, families and communities, but only on the execution of its proposed interventions. For this reason SheDecides ideals can easily be hijacked by (governmental) actors who share an interest in SheDecides' proposed interventions while having different motivations in mind. TNCs and (governmental) actors in the Global North support SheDecides proposed interventions because they see contraception and abortion services as tools to lower fertility rates among underprivileged women in the Global South and therefore as tools to increase the region's female labor force. TNCs and (governmental) actors want to increase the size of the female labor force because underprivileged women, who are socialized in by poverty plagued patriarchal societies, fulfill an indispensable role as manual workers in factories that produce for export to the Global North.

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