

## ON GLOBAL REPRODUCTIVE JUSTICE: AN INTERVIEW WITH LORETTA J. ROSS

*Interviewed by Seda Saluk*

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For this issue of *Feminist Approaches*, we met with feminist academic and activist Loretta J. Ross to discuss the current attacks on reproductive rights and freedoms across the world as well as strategies to fight against those attacks. Ross is an Associate Professor at Smith College in the Program for the Study of Women, Gender, and Sexuality. She is one of the co-creators of the “reproductive justice” framework and among the co-founders of the SisterSong Women of Color Reproductive Justice Collective. Reproductive justice combines the concepts of reproductive rights and social justice and argues for the right not to have a child, the right to have a child, and the right to parent children in safe and healthy environments. Ross has co-written three books on reproductive justice: *Undivided Rights: Women of Color Organize for Reproductive Justice* (South End Press, 2004); *Reproductive Justice: An Introduction* (University of California Press, 2017); and *Radical Reproductive Justice: Foundations, Theory, Practice, Critique* (Feminist Press, 2017).

**Seda Saluk:** First of all, thank you for accepting our invitation. I am honored to interview you today for our journal, *Feminist Approaches in Culture and Politics*. You are one of the co-creators of the “reproductive justice” framework and among the co-founders of the SisterSong Women of Color Reproductive Justice Collective.<sup>1</sup> Could you explain how the framework started? What are the central organizing tenets of reproductive justice, and how did you develop this framework?

**Loretta J. Ross:** When we created reproductive justice in July 1994, we were twelve Black women who did it together.<sup>2</sup> SisterSong Collective was founded three years later and chose reproductive justice as its organizing framework, and therefore, it has been associated with popularizing the framework. In 1994, what we noticed was that people who were so busy debating abortion politics did not realize that what you needed to pay attention to was what was going on in the woman’s life before she became pregnant. If she is dealing with a lack of healthcare or a lack of economic security, or violence in her life, whether it's from the state, an individual, or her family, or if she is dealing with a lack of education options or any other kinds of significant human rights issues in her life, those other considerations will definitely affect whether or not, if she becomes pregnant, whether she decides to keep or to terminate an unplanned pregnancy. We criticized both the pro-life and pro-choice<sup>3</sup> movements for starting

with the pregnancy and not starting with what was going on in the woman's life before the pregnancy.

Reproductive justice began by trying to take a holistic view of how women make decisions based on what is going on in their lives. If they have bad answers to all those kinds of life questions, then they may even turn a planned pregnancy into an abortion. If they have good answers to those life questions, they may even turn an unplanned pregnancy into a baby. You have to see women as holistic, human-rights-bearing people to understand how women actually make decisions. It's not based on ideology, the church, what the men in their lives say, or what the government says. It's based on real-life issues that people have to deal with.

After we created the reproductive justice framework in July 1994, we had to define it.<sup>4</sup> We defined it as the human right, first of all, to decide if you will get pregnant. That means your right to use birth control or abortion if you do get pregnant and you want to terminate it, or to practice abstinence if that works for you. That aligns us with what is called the pro-choice movement.

We also believe that a woman, if she decides to keep a pregnancy, has the right to decide if and when she will have children, how many she will have, and the conditions under which she will have those children. That, of course, includes not only having access to high-quality medical care, but also using midwives or doulas and having their birth plans respected when they go to the hospital, as well as resisting unnecessary medical intervention, like a cesarean section that is not medically required.

The third tenet of reproductive justice is probably the most encompassing because it claims that women have the human right to raise their children in safe and healthy environments. In environments free from war, poverty, environmental problems, and gun violence, the right to have safe schools, clean drinking water, food, and all of those similar human rights issues—that was the definition in July 1994.

Then, in September 1994, I was fortunate enough to attend the International Conference on Population and Development in Cairo, Egypt. As a woman from the Global North, I was very pleased to learn that women in the Global South were using the human rights framework to claim the same rights we were very uneasily trying to fit under a very limited US Constitution. All the things I've talked about aren't in the US Constitution. I decided that the claims we were making under reproductive justice were, in fact, human rights claims. In 1994, human rights became the moral, political, and legal foundation for reproductive justice.

A decade later, in 2004, SisterSong's Queer People of Color Caucus, QPOC as we called it, decided that the original reproductive justice framework needed to be expanded. They expanded it by saying that people have the human right to bodily autonomy, gender identity,

sexual pleasure, and the right not to have kids or to have kids as part of the reproductive justice framework. They also expanded beyond the term “woman” to include other pregnant people. That’s not an unexpected or an unwelcome expansion. In the 30 years since reproductive justice was created, we have found that every population adapts it to its own needs. When Indigenous women in the United States use it, they talk about sovereignty as a human right. When immigrant women use it in the United States, they talk about citizenship rights as human rights.

Another expansion or at least defining or refining of the reproductive justice framework happened in 2005 by Asian Communities for Reproductive Justice (ACRJ).<sup>5</sup> ACRJ published an analysis that said there were three components of reproductive oppression: Reproductive health, reproductive rights, and reproductive justice.<sup>6</sup> The reproductive health component deals with healthcare providers like doctors, nurses, the hospital system, and midwives, who provide direct services to individuals. Then there’s the second component, the advocacy wing called reproductive rights. This is the fight for legal rights within the limits of whatever legal system the people are involved in. In the United States, we call that the pro-choice or reproductive freedom movement. The third component is reproductive justice, which is the human rights-based organizing wing. We seek to bring all other movements together to support reproductive justice. Whether you’re fighting for economic justice, racial justice, environmental justice, or peace, we focus on all of the other things that affect a family’s ability to prosper and thrive. It goes beyond what the rights-bearing individual has and should expect, and involves what happens to the community or context in which that individual is embedded. For example, an undocumented immigrant cannot access the same healthcare benefits as someone with documentation or who’s a citizen. You have to pay attention to immigrant rights as a reproductive justice issue. Someone who is disabled will not have their rights to bodily autonomy respected in the same way as a non-disabled person. The reproductive justice movement works with reproductive rights and reproductive health advocates to form what we call the continuum of reproductive justice.

**Seda:** As you mentioned, different approaches come to the fore among feminist groups in their struggle to address reproductive injustices. Especially in the struggle for abortion rights, abortion being an “individual choice” has long been a prominent discourse. Individual choice or pro-choice feminism draws on the idea that the decision about abortion should be made by the individual, not the state. This approach also argues for the state’s withdrawal from reproductive decisions but does not say much about the state’s responsibility in areas such as education, health, or childcare. What is your approach to the discourse of individual choice; how do you describe the limits of this discourse in a justice-based feminist struggle? How does

the reproductive justice framework differ from individual choice or pro-choice feminism in practice?

**Loretta:** Obviously, abortion and all reproductive decisions should be made by the individual. At the same time, the state has an obligation to create the enabling environments for those individual decisions to be acted upon. For example, you have a right to catch an airplane. The government can't tell you where to go, how to fly, if you should fly, or even which airline to use or what your destination should be. That is your individual choice. The government has an obligation in three very specific ways. First, it needs to ensure that airplanes are safe and don't come plummeting out of the sky. It also needs to regulate the cost of the ticket and make sure that the airfare is accessible to all people so that not only billionaires with private jets get to fly. Everybody who can afford it should have a right to fly because of government regulation. It also has another accessibility responsibility: making sure that airports aren't located in places that people can't get to and then can't access their individual rights. The government's obligation when it comes to flying or voting, for that matter, is to make it safe, affordable, and accessible. These are the enabling conditions necessary for individuals to be able to exercise their rights.

If you apply that same standard to abortion, you see where the government's obligations are. They can't tell you whether or not to have an abortion, but they do have an obligation to make sure that it is safe, accessible, and affordable. The same happens with voting. The same happens with your decision to purchase a home. There are a lot of individual decisions that the government has an affirmative obligation to make possible. Only the critics of abortion try to exceptionalize out of abortion the obligations of the state and society to make those decisions safe, accessible, and affordable.

**Seda:** The reproductive justice framework encourages us to move beyond a singular focus on abortion and the right not to have children. It urges us to also focus on the right to have children and the means to raise them. I think it is not a coincidence that the framework of reproductive justice emerged in the US. The US is a place where having children makes one actively poorer. It has one of the most expensive healthcare systems, with some of the worst outcomes in the world. The highest maternal and child mortality rate among developed countries is in the US. Black, Latina, and Indigenous women, and their children die at much higher rates than their white counterparts. There is no federal paid family or maternity leave. Education is costly. However, the US is also one of the wealthiest countries in the world, with one of the highest spending on healthcare. How should we interpret this paradox?

**Loretta:** The US is governed by neoliberal racialized capitalist thinking. It's not that we cannot afford to take care of our people; it's just that our elites in power have different priorities. We prioritize military spending, we prioritize tax breaks for extremely wealthy people, and we

prioritize privatizing everything, including access to healthcare, access to food, and access to education. It's not that we can't afford to have a better system, but we don't have the political will to use our resources in such a way that the people benefit from a better system.

Part of the reason this situation exists is that the US public is woefully unaware of the human rights framework. Only 7% of the American public can even name the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Since 1948, there has been a deliberate campaign by conservatives to keep human rights education outside of our educational system. They call it a communist plot or Sharia law; they will call it everything to keep it out of the educational system. To the extent that young people are exposed to any real history, we now have campaigns to ban the teaching of history in our school system. We have a population that is kept deliberately uninformed so that they can be easily manipulated to support spending and tax priorities that don't work in their best interest.

It's not the amount of wealth a country has that matters, but how it prioritizes spending that wealth. A budget is a moral document. It shows you whose lives matter and whose lives don't. Despite the rhetoric, when you want to find the truth, find out how they spend their money.

**Seda:** As you mentioned, reproductive justice is not just a women's human rights issue but also an economic justice issue. How is reproductive justice linked to economic justice in the US and globally? How do financial or economic crises fuel reproductive injustices? How do deepening poverty and reproductive injustices affect each other?

**Loretta:** Any human being that does not control their body is going to be severely disadvantaged in a competitive environment that lacks social supports. Early parenting, for example, for women, men, and LGBT folks, could be a problem. That will put you at a competitive disadvantage when you have other people to take care of beyond yourself, particularly if it happens in such a way that it interferes with your education or your housing situation. We know of young girls and boys being kicked out of the house for becoming pregnant or for getting diseases. That was one of the things that happened during AIDS and COVID-19. All of these things are economic decisions even though they appear to be only biological.

In the United States, how much funding schools get is determined by what the zip code of that school is. That determines whether or not your child living in a certain zip code will have a better education or a worse education. How roads and bridges get fixed is determined by zip code. If you happen to live in a poor neighborhood, your child's going to go to school, if they have a school to access, on unsafe roads and bridges, or don't have a bus to transport them to school and have to walk through long distances in dangerous neighborhoods. If you don't have a good transportation system, it will affect whether you can get to the doctor for your prenatal

visits, whether your children can get to school, and whether they can go to a library to study. If you live in food deserts where there are no places to buy healthy food, then that's going to also affect you and your children. Whether or not you're in a situation of civil unrest or war. All these things are reproductive justice issues.

There is no economic activity that is not a reproductive justice issue because what we do know is that every state or every empire needs bodies. They need those bodies for their armies, they need those bodies for their labor force, they need those bodies for their economy. Who has the power to decide which bodies matter and which ones don't is a reproductive justice issue.

**Seda:** Yet we know that there is a care crisis not only in the US, but also across the world. There is continuous disinvestment in the care economy, despite the governments saying they want more children or an increased population. Even in wealthy economies, there is limited public support for people with care responsibilities. Feminists have advocated for different strategies to redress the injustices in the care economy; for instance, they have argued for making housework and care work paid, like in the Wages for Housework Campaign,<sup>7</sup> or they advocate for a purple economy that is based on a gender-equitable economic order.<sup>8</sup> What solutions does the reproductive justice framework offer in terms of this care crisis?

**Loretta:** Everything you mentioned, plus a real understanding of our history. During World War II, when so many men were involved in the war effort, and women were needed in the economy, the US government paid for free childcare because they needed women in the economy. We have a history of knowing what is possible if you have the political will to do so. Of course, since then, we have not been in what would be called declared or open wars. There have been more low-intensity conflicts like the ones in Korea and Vietnam and the dozens of [instances of] low-intensity warfare that we are supporting around the world, not to mention the Middle East. There needs to be a political will to ensure that everybody who is able to work has childcare or care support, and there is the issue of elderly care, too, and care for people who are disabled. To do so is not seen as a political priority anymore. As a matter of fact, one of the reasons that the US is so wealthy is that they privatized a lot of the unpaid labor onto the shoulders of women. Yet that's not counted in the GDP as one of the reasons that we are able to maintain this wealthy status.

We are fighting, of course. I remember in the 1980s, we fought for family and medical leave,<sup>9</sup> but the liberal feminists of the moment did not believe that paid family leave would ever win, so they fought for unpaid family leave. In the 40 years since then, we have been trying to fight to get paid family leave. I never believed that we should have settled for unpaid family leave. I don't believe in sacrificing the more vulnerable people for a political win. We have a long way to catch up to basic human rights standards for an industrialized country. As a matter of fact, that's why the European Union and Canada voted the United States off the [United Nations]

Commission of Human Rights.<sup>10</sup> We can't consistently violate basic human rights standards and then have an authoritative voice on what other countries should do about human rights. A lot of the press at the time it happened claimed that it was Cuba and Russia that kicked the United States out, but it was not. It was our closest allies in Canada and the European Union. They said, "You shall not represent us with your poor performance on human rights. You're lowering human rights commitments and compliance. You're not raising them." Again, there is little information that the US voters have on what is going on in these international agreements, norms, and standards. The media is much more obsessed with talking about everything but our human rights obligations.

**Seda:** Talking about human rights violations, there is also increasing repression of abortion rights across the globe. In 2006, for instance, the National Assembly in Nicaragua outlawed abortion in all circumstances right before the general elections in the country. Similarly, in 2020, Poland's constitutional tribunal instituted a total abortion ban, which made access to safe and legal abortion more difficult. In 2022, the US Supreme Court overturned the *Roe v. Wade* decision, which had recognized abortion as a constitutional right and had been in effect for nearly 50 years. How do you think we got here? How do these global developments challenge the demand for reproductive justice today?

**Loretta:** For as long as there's been history, there have been authoritarians who believe that they have the right to control women's bodies for their own purposes. From Emperor Augustus in ancient Rome, commanding the elite Roman women to have more babies, to now, you just have authoritarians seeing the manipulation of women's bodies as necessary to fulfill their own ambitions. Hitler kept track of women's periods and would give cash payments to people who had more babies. Orbán is thinking of doing the same thing, whether he's going to implement that or not. This is the standard playbook of patriarchal authoritarians to try to control the behaviors and the morality of people in order to manipulate them.

I'm particularly disappointed in Ortega and Nicaragua. I spent a lot of time doing solidarity work with the people of Nicaragua, and I've been there several times. This was when Ortega was a liberation fighter and not a despot. He won't give up power. It disappoints me that people make so many wonderful promises to get to power, and then once they get to that power, they abandon the people that got them into power. They tend to then only support the oligarchs that will keep them in power, and that's what Ortega has done.

That's generally how societies are organized that are patriarchal. When they are patriarchal, then they become authoritarian and really see not only women's bodies but all bodies as the subject of the state. They decide who gets killed in wars, who gets to participate in the economy, and who gets to receive the benefits of society, which is why a feminist revolution is always necessary.

We also have people like Elon Musk who think that his sperm is so valuable that he's offered to send it to Mars to start a new colony. We also have to be concerned about the techno-eugenicists. These are the people who do believe that they have superior breeding stock, and those are the ones who should be encouraged to breed as freely and often as possible, while discouraging, through anti-natalist policies, those they designate as undesirable. It's just plain old eugenics that has always been around.

The thing that amuses me when I can find humor is how strikingly unoriginal all authoritarians are. It's like they have one playbook, and it's the only one that they know. We can counter them because we know what they're going to do; they all do the same thing. What's so ironic is that if they actually believed in the thriving of children and the enabling conditions that would encourage people to have families, then they would do strategies to do that, like free healthcare, childcare, safe environments, an absence of wars, public policies that are conducive to healthy and thriving children. They don't do things that would encourage people to have more children. In fact, they're doing the opposite. Yet they're supposed to think that people are not noticing how dystopian they are making the conditions under which they're trying to urge people to have children, but they also are recognizing that for the very elites, they do have the ideal conditions under which to have children. That's the only ones that they really care about anyway.

**Seda:** What do you think about the “tradwives” (traditional wives) movement in the US and Europe? Followers of this movement argue that women should have the right to stay at home and take care of their families, calling for a return to ultra-traditional gender roles. Their statements resemble the right-wing politicians' statements in the sense that they both invoke nostalgia for an imagined idyllic past where men were providers, women were homemakers, and there were only two genders and few immigrants. At the same time, what is promoted is a life that is not possible for the majority of society in the current economic system. How should we understand the increasing appeal of being a “tradwife” for some women in this economic and political climate?

**Loretta:** I feel sorry for “tradwives” or the myth of them, anyway. Despite their desperate attempt to portray themselves as content, privileged, and treasured, that economic model for women has been tried in the past with disastrous results. That's why Betty Friedan wrote *The Feminine Mystique* in 1963.<sup>11</sup> A gilded cage is still a cage, and voluntary servitude is still slavery. Some women strike what we feminists call the “patriarchal bargain,” believing that the benefits of patriarchy will accrue to them and protect them, if they submit to voluntary oppression. They often disguise the reality of their lives (the violence, the economic dependence, the subordination of their real selves) because they perceive themselves as making smarter decisions than women who fight the patriarchy. But not only are they objects

of pity; they are also the ones who sneak into our abortion clinics while publicly fighting against abortion. They show up at our domestic violence shelters and food pantries when their partners don't uphold their end of the bargain. So, I feel sorry for them for the seductiveness of the delusion they're trapped in.

**Seda:** Current attacks on reproductive freedoms coincide with the right-wing, populist movements' return to power. There are currently many ethno-nationalist, authoritarian regimes around the world that try to prevent some women from reproducing while encouraging others to reproduce more. We are also witnessing an increasing militarization across the world. With developments such as Israel's genocide policies and practices in Palestine, the US's embrace of these policies and practices under the Biden administration, and the Ukraine-Russia war bringing the world to the brink of nuclear war, we seem to have entered a new political era beyond right-wing populism. In today's world, where right-wing movements are in power, militarism surrounds us everywhere, and global poverty is deepening, how can we build a global or transnational reproductive justice movement? How can we respond to the attacks on reproductive health services, reproductive freedoms, and reproductive autonomy both locally, in our own communities, and on a global scale?

**Loretta:** We could point to a number of genocides that are taking place, for instance, in Sudan or Congo. There's an indifference to the suffering of people who are seen as disposable. Achille Mbembe,<sup>12</sup> an African theorist, discusses necropolitics, the decision-making process that decides who should live and who should die according to colonialist logic. We need to raise this issue and really examine it.

When we talk about a global scale, I invite people to take a meta-view. The people who oppose human rights only have two things to their advantage: lies and violence. On our side are truth, evidence, history, and, most of all, time. I don't believe that as powerful as these authoritarians see themselves, they don't have the power to roll back time, deny the truth, bury all the evidence, or make people forget their history. They are trying their best to negate those existential forces that they cannot control.

I think we actually have a winning hand when we take a meta-view, as opposed to looking at it granularly. At the granular level, it looks like everything can be overwhelming, and it's easy to fall into despair, cynicism, or apathy, where you give up. When you look at the long arc of human history, you can see, and I put this phrase in my upcoming book, *Calling In*, these are just people who are pimples on the ass of time. Like any other pimple, they are going to burst.

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. said, "There's a freedom explosion taking place." In 1968, March 31st, his last Sunday sermon, four days before he was assassinated, he said: "There's a triple revolution taking place. The revolution in technology, the revolution in weaponry, but the best

revolution and the most powerful one is the human rights revolution.” That freedom explosion is taking place around the world. He’s proven to be a prophet. This is what we are seeing now. Since I learned about Dr. King’s plan, I’ve been dedicated to bringing human rights home to the United States through human rights education, because people can’t fight for rights they don’t know they have. I’m helping to institutionalize human rights education at my school, Smith College, and I perceive it as the best way to unite people globally to fight for peace, dignity, and joy.

I wish I could control the timeline of when change happens because I don’t want vulnerable people to suffer because it’s taking so long. I think there’s an inevitability about justice and freedom. As a Black person whose family came over here as slaves, I’ve seen the remarkable progress we’ve made, and yet there’s much further to go. One thing we say in the civil rights movement is that don’t imagine that you are the entire chain of freedom. The chain of freedom stretches backward toward all of your ancestors and forward toward all of your descendants. Your only job at this moment is to make sure the chain of freedom doesn’t break at your link. Don’t give up. Don’t lose hope. Don’t fail to step up to the challenge of keeping the chain of freedom intact, even though you may not be alive to see the outcome. Take a lot of pride in the fact that you kept that chain intact.

**Seda:** Thank you for these empowering words. Lastly, I want to ask you about your upcoming book, *Calling In*. Can you tell us a little bit about the book?

**Loretta:** *Calling In* will be published by Simon & Schuster in February 2025. It’s about learning how to overcome your trauma and use your emotional intelligence and integrity to work with people you have difficulty talking to. I use my 50 years of activism as an intellectual biography to share the lessons I’ve learned from the mistakes I’ve made. We need to understand that “calling in” will be as important to the human rights movement in the 21st century as non-violence was to the civil rights movement in the 20th century: a statement of our values and a practical way to achieve our vision for the world. The book can be obtained here: [Calling In: How to Start Making Change with Those You'd Rather Cancel](#).

**Seda:** We will be looking forward to your book. Thank you so much for this interview.

**Loretta:** Thank you for interviewing me.

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<sup>1</sup> SisterSong Women of Color Reproductive Justice Collective, also known as SisterSong, is an activist organization based in the Southern United States that focuses on reproductive health issues. It was founded in 1997 by Black women and other women of color activists. SisterSong prioritizes the needs of the most marginalized in their communities, including young and single mothers, low-income individuals, people living with HIV, as well as sex workers, and queer and trans individuals. For more details, see the SisterSong website at <https://www.sistersong.net/>.

<sup>2</sup> A group of Black women, who called themselves the Women of African Descent for Reproductive Justice, created the framework as a response to the healthcare reform proposed by the Bill Clinton administration at the time that dismissed the intersectional reproductive health concerns in the Black community. The full list of women involved

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in developing the framework was Toni M. Bond, Alma Crawford, Evelyn S. Field, Terri James, Bisola Marignay, Cassandra McConnell, Cynthia Newbille, Loretta J. Ross, Elizabeth Terry, Able Mable Thomas, Winnette P. Willis, and Kim Youngblood. For more detail, see Loretta J. Ross (2017), “Conceptualizing Reproductive Justice Theory: A Manifesto for Activism,” in L. J. Ross, L. Roberts, E. Derkas, W. Peoples, and P. B. Toure (eds.), *Radical Reproductive Justice: Foundations, Theory, Practice, Critique*, (pp. 170–232). New York: Feminist Press.

<sup>3</sup> Terms to describe whether one is against abortion access or for abortion access.

<sup>4</sup> In previous accounts, Ross recalled the date as June or September 1994 as she did not access her archives to find the actual month. When they celebrated the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary, Dr. Toni M. Bond (one of the co-creators) researched the actual month.

<sup>5</sup> Asian Communities for Reproductive Justice (ACRJ) is a social, political, and economic justice organization working for the liberation of Asian women and girls through the lens of reproductive justice. For more details, see the ACRJ’s website at <https://apirh.org/>.

<sup>6</sup> For more details of ACRJ’s reproductive justice analysis, see their article “A New Vision for Reproductive Justice” at [https://apirh.org/download/ACRJ\\_A\\_New\\_Vision.pdf](https://apirh.org/download/ACRJ_A_New_Vision.pdf).

<sup>7</sup> A grassroots women’s campaign for the recognition and payment for all care work, both in the home and outside.

<sup>8</sup> For further information regarding the purple economy, see Ipek Ilkcaracan (2016), “A Feminist Alternative to Austerity: The Purple Economy as a Gender-Egalitarian Strategy for Employment Generation,” in H. Bargawi, G. Cozzi, and S. Himmelweit (eds.), *Economics and Austerity in Europe: Gendered Impacts and Sustainable Alternatives* (pp. 27-39). London and New York: Routledge.

<sup>9</sup> The Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA) is a federal law in the US that allows eligible workers to take up to 12 weeks of unpaid, job-protected leave per year for various reasons, including bonding with a new child, recovering from one’s own serious illness, or caring for a seriously ill loved one.

<sup>10</sup> The US, which was under George W. Bush administration at the time, was voted off the United Nations Commission of Human Rights (UNCHR) in 2001 by other members of the commission.

<sup>11</sup> American feminist writer Betty Friedan’s book *The Feminine Mystique* is often credited with kicking off the second-wave feminist movement in the US. In the book, Friedan coined the term *feminine mystique* to describe the societal assumption of the time that “truly feminine” women would find fulfillment in their lives through housework, marriage, and taking care of children, and would not yearn for getting an education, having a career, or involving in politics. Based on interviews, observations, and secondary research, Friedan debunked this assumption to show how suburban housewives were often unhappy with their lives, feeling trapped in the idealized “feminine roles.”

<sup>12</sup> Achille Mbembe is a Professor of History and Political Science at the University of the Witwatersrand. He is the author of numerous books, including *On the Postcolony* (University of California Press, 2001), *Critique of Black Reason* (Duke University Press, 2016), *Necropolitics* (Duke University Press, 2019), and *Out of the Dark Night: Essays on Decolonization* (Columbia University Press, 2020).