

This topic is a long-awaited one, and something that not everyone will understand immediately. That's okay. **This post is here for you to learn from, even if you have to return to it more than once and do your own independent research in the meantime.**

Before you read this, it's probably relevant for you to know that I was raised in an anti-capitalist household. My mom has a PhD in Sociology, and her dissertation focuses heavily on the way that female re/productive labor is exploited under capitalism. She has been heavily influenced by the academic work of Silvia Federici, and Chris Knight (an anthropologist).

**For over a decade, I've been in constant conversation with her on these issues.** It has taken me an incredibly long time to fully understand everything, but now I have an understanding deep enough to debate her, educate her, and sharpen both of our knowledge. One of the key things I've educated her about is the way that disabled and autistic people fit into the big picture of capitalist exploitation. Now, I will do the same for you.

I think the best thing to do is to give you the general framework for understanding, and then provide you with specific examples that fit into the big picture. That way, you'll know what you're looking at when I give you the examples.

**First, you need to know what capitalism is, and how it relates to every other system of oppression.** Capitalism is an inherently authoritarian, patriarchal economic system, characterized by private ownership of the means of re/production, and the exploitation of re/productive labor to create surplus product/profit for the owners of an enterprise. Under capitalism, everyone is expected to reproduce, to create new workers. Additionally, economic growth (the creation of surplus/profit) has to be exponential, constantly increasing, in order for the system to survive. This means that the ecological boundaries of the planet are exceeded, because the Earth (coded female, of course) is assumed to have an infinite amount of resources to extract and create profit from.

This economic structure necessitates a binary reproductive class system, with reproductive females as the "working class," and pregnancy as the labor required to produce the end product, new workers. This is why abortion is often heavily criminalized in patriarchal/capitalist societies. **It is also why same-sex attracted and gender nonconforming or trans people are criminalized and stigmatized: we don't conform to the re/productive expectations associated with our sex at birth.**

Ethnicity has also been weaponized as a tool to create class categories that we now refer to as "race." People racialized as white are afforded economic benefits. People racialized as Black are severely economically exploited. In order to fully understand the way that American capitalism developed, you have to understand slavery as the origin point. **You**

**must also understand that “race” is a tool that the ruling class employs to keep the working class divided.** Because they know that if working-class white people joined forces with Black people and other POC, it would be over for them. MLK understood that, and was **assassinated right after the Memphis Sanitation Strike**, which was a major part of the the multiracial **Poor People’s Campaign** (which still exists today, btw!).

**It is also important to realize that capitalism, characterized by private ownership, is not the only predatory/authoritarian/patriarchal economic system out there.** There were older forms, like feudalism. And the USSR, China, and North Korea are good examples of the way that States can co-opt the role of private ownership and turn an entire country into one large corporation. It is therefore much more accurate to describe those countries as demonstrating a system called “state capitalism” rather than “communism.”

**So what does all of this have to do with disabled people? And what does it have to do with autistic people specifically?**

Well, under capitalism and other predatory economic systems, everyone is expected to be able to work in a manner that serves the ruling class by producing surplus/profit. If someone is not able to work at the same pace as everyone else, or perform the work required of them, they are no longer of value to the system. **In an economy like this, people’s productivity is the only measure of their worth in society.**

This has obvious and far-reaching implications for disabled people. So now, let’s get into the specifics that I told you I’d talk about earlier. I can’t think of a way to do this chronologically, and I don’t know how to organize everything I’m about to tell you. But hopefully you’ll be able to pick these pieces up and put them into the framework I’ve provided.

Disabled people are often killed, discarded, and left to die. This is a problem that exists worldwide, because patriarchy/capitalism are systems that exist worldwide. One notable example is the **Aktion T4 program** in Nazi Germany, which ended up being the precursor to the Holocaust. In this “euthanasia” program, which started in 1939 and continued until around 1945 (even though it technically ended in 1941), around 300,000 disabled people were killed across Germany, Austria, and Poland.

During this program, Hans Asperger (the man who gave Asperger Syndrome its name), saved autistic people he deemed “valuable” to society (for their ability to work under capitalist expectations), and sent other autistic people (who he saw as “unworthy of life” bc of their inability to work in the ways desired by the Third Reich) to die in gas chambers and death camps. **This dark history is why the vast majority of autistic people despise the term “Asperger Syndrome,”** as it promotes the idea that autistic people who conform to

capitalist notions of productivity and intelligence are inherently superior to (and more worthy of life than) autistic people who can't or don't conform to those standards.

And you know how I talked earlier about how patriarchy/capitalism want everyone to reproduce? Well, the main exception to that rule is disabled people, because disability is often genetic and inheritable. **The system hates it when more “defective” workers are produced.** So, beginning in the United States around the 1910s and continuing into the present day, **forced sterilization** of disabled people became commonplace. Between 1909 and 1963, there were around 20,000 forced sterilizations *in California alone*.

**The main reason given for these eugenics practices was to save money and limit the amount of resources spent on caring for “undesirable” people.** Because after all, caring for people who won't in turn produce surplus for you is just an impractical drain on resources /s. Now, I want you to turn this critical lens to these modern issues:

**It is still legal in the United States to pay disabled workers below minimum wage.** For example, Goodwill pays its disabled workers as little as 22 cents an hour. (Because even when we do work, our work is not seen as valuable)

**Disabled people often lose all of our disability benefits if we get married,** even if our spouse doesn't have the financial means to support us. This means that many disabled people who rely on social security are completely unable to get married. (Because someone else should be taking care of us, we shouldn't be wasting the government's money with our existence /s)

**The main focus of ABA therapy is on molding autistic children into employable adults.** This means making them perform as many neurotypical “skills” as possible, in the hopes that they will be hired to work as “productive members of society.” Regardless of the methods used to try and achieve this goal, it is misguided to try and force autistic people to conform to the expectations of an exploitative system that was not built for us.

There's so much more that I can and should talk about, but for now I'll leave you with some things to Google and research:

- Murray Bookchin and Abdullah Öcalan, Rojava / The Federation of Northern Syria, Democratic Confederalism / Liberterian Municipalism
- Cooperation Jackson
- The Zapatistas in Chiapas, Mexico
- Crip Camp / the American Disability Rights movement
- Extinction Rebellion
- The Poor People's Campaign
- 10 Principles of Disability Justice by Sins Invalid

- “Ancient Bones That Tell a Story of Compassion,” from the New York Times
- Mutual Aid as a political and economic theory & strategy
- Matrilineal societies and the “gift economy”

Thank you for listening and learning with me. In love and solidarity,

Eden 🐢