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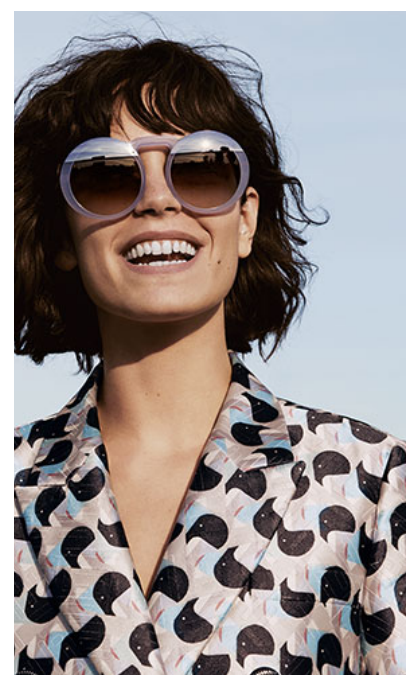
Northern Ireland's cruel abortion laws are punishing women

The Supreme Court rules that women from NI are not entitled to NHS-funded abortion services, a horrific blow to reproductive rights that shows the hypocritical, callous political system for what it is

Today, the Supreme Court delivered its ruling on a landmark case, seeking NHS-funded abortions for women who travel from Northern Ireland to England. By a narrow margin of 3-2, the judges decided to reject the appeal by a mother and daughter (known as A and B in the courts). This means that women from Northern Ireland will not be entitled to free abortion access, out of "respect" for the laws set by the NI assembly, which are some of the world's strictest rules surrounding reproductive rights.

Effectively, we've been priced out of our own body autonomy. According to Alliance for Choice, it can cost up to £2,000 to access a safe and legal abortion in England. Despite being UK taxpayers, people seeking abortions from NI still have to go and pay out of pocket to exercise their right to choose. It's appalling, and a huge matter of class and economics.

It's paramount that people in the rest of the UK listen to the ongoing plight of people there. As the Tories consult with the ultra-conservative, Christian DUP to prop up their government, the spotlight should be focused on the human rights breaches that rage across the state. Parties like the Democratic Unionist Party actively encourage forced pregnancy, and support criminalising those who deviate. In November last year, the Belfast High Court found the abortion laws in violation of human



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Table 12a: Legal abortions: non-residents of England and Wales by country of residence, 2016

	total	percentages
All non-residents	4,810	100%
Country of residence ¹		
Northern Ireland	724	15.1
Scotland	180	3.7
Isle of Man	88	1.8
Jersey	7	0.1
Guernsey	8	0.2
European countries		
Irish Republic	3,265	67.9
Austria	4	0.1
Belgium	5	0.1
Cyprus	3	0.1
Denmark	12	0.2
France	43	0.9
Germany	22	0.5
Gibraltar	5	0.1
Italy	45	0.9
Malta	58	1.2
Norway	7	0.1
Poland	40	0.8
Portugal	6	0.1
Romania	6	0.1
Spain	7	0.1
Sweden	4	0.1
Switzerland	4	0.1
Other - Europe	13	0.3
Rest of the world		
Abu Dhabi	3	0.1
Australia	7	0.1
Bahrain	8	0.2
Brazil	5	0.1
Dubai	10	0.2
Egypt	3	0.1
Hong Kong	3	0.1
India	14	0.3
Japan	3	0.1
Kuwait	6	0.1
Nigeria	6	0.1
Oman	4	0.1
Qatar	15	0.3
Saudi Arabia	12	0.2
United Arab Emirates	110	2.3
USA	15	0.3
Other - world	28	0.6

¹ Details of other countries shown under 'Other' can be obtained on request



Danielle Roberts
@DaniRNI

New stats out today. 2 women a day travelled from Northern Ireland for private abortion treatment. 9 from Ireland.

11:15 AM - Jun 13, 2017

7 See Danielle Roberts's other Tweets



Abortion Support Network @AbortionSupport Jun 12, 2017

I know I've always been impressed at how many young Irish teenagers have felt safe confiding in their mums about a crisis pregnancy



Abortion Support Network
@AbortionSupport

We hear from so many teenagers with their mum's support. If only the state offered the same care and protection.

4:52 PM - Jun 12, 2017

28 See Abortion Support Network's other Tweets

New statistics released by the Department of Health this week showed that 724 women travelled from Northern Ireland. This equates to two women travelling a day. It's a number that's probably much smaller than the real thing, given that many will provide false addresses to protect themselves. It also doesn't cover the amount of women who will be performing DIY abortions with safe but illegal

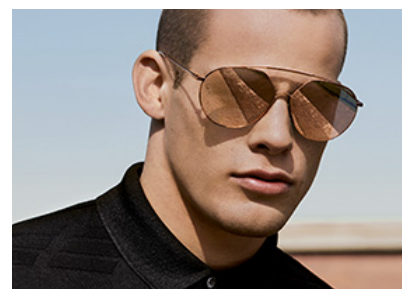
pills.

A bit of background into the horrors that led to a battle in the UK's highest courts, [informed by Amnesty International](#): in 2012, a 15-year-old woman from Northern Ireland (known as A) sought out an abortion. She visited a clinic in England with her mother (known as B) to access the private services. The total cost, including travel, was £900. She reasonably believed that abortion services in NI were unavailable, and neither was England's NHS services as an NI resident.

“The government continues to use the uterus as a political pawn, women no more than choiceless vessels”

The Abortion Act 1967, which applies to England, Scotland and Wales, does not extend to NI. It's within the power of the Secretary of State to see through more liberal abortion policy, but they haven't pushed this. A, fronting her own case, appealed that the government's refusal to extend liberal policy on reproductive rights was unlawful. As abortion and healthcare provider Bpas asserts, Jeremy Hunt's refusal to grant this care is astutely political, rather than financial. The government continues to use the uterus as a political pawn.

NHS-funded abortion services should absolutely be a legal and human right for pregnant people in NI, but the politicizing of bodies continues. This case was rejected out of “respect” for the NI government, but where is the respect for women? Where is the recognition of abortion access as important healthcare, denied to no one residing in Liverpool, or Newcastle, Devon or London?



“While FPA are disappointed with the overall decision, we gain strength from the dissenting opinions of Lord Kerr and Lady Hale, and will continue to advocate on behalf of our clients for a remedy to end this discriminatory two-tier system.”



- Ruairi Rowan
Senior Advocacy Officer
FPA Northern Ireland



FPA - the sexual health charity
@FPACharity

Supreme Court just upheld ban on Northern Ireland women having NHS-funded abortion care, with 5 judges divided 3:2 - bit.ly/2ruQ6YY

11:43 AM - Jun 14, 2017

8 19 people are talking about this



And it's the poorest women who suffer under these medieval laws: people who can't afford the trip across the water, people who have to choose between their weekly food shop and booking a plane ticket, putting their jobs at risk when they need to take days off, time running out as the price of treatments go up the longer you wait. The law asks them to impoverish themselves, put their daily lives at risk. Without the help of Abortion Support Network, who help to fund travel, treatment and accommodation, many more would be backed into a terrifying corner. As any country's statistics with restrictive abortion laws show, abortions will always happen. What we can do is make sure they're free, safe and legal.

The abortion policy as it stands also forces women to break the law, who procure WHO-approved, but illegal pills to end pregnancies. This is where life-saving services such as Women on Web and Women on Waves come into play, but we absolutely see women punished. Last year, a 21-year-old received a sentence for buying such pills and self-inducing, and there are other pending cases.

The Supreme Court today ruled that such "discrimination" was "justified" – the emotional trauma they force onto people who just don't want to be pregnant, the financial strain pushed upon them, to betray two women from NI a day who seek body autonomy.

There's hope and strength to be pulled from Lord Kerr and Lady Hale, who dissented against this decision. But in the wake of the ruling, we witness Westminster continue to cast a blind eye over major human rights breaches in the UK. It's deliberate, dangerous ignorance. We must support the campaign by women in Northern Ireland for reproductive rights that's been, for so long, ignored by the rest of the UK, and amplify those important voices. A and B have vowed to fight this decision. Follow along with the ongoing cases that see women in court for accessing a fraction of healthcare, and support integral organisations fighting to make it free, safe and legal, like Abortion Support Network, Alliance for Choice, Bpas, Amnesty International and London Irish Abortion Rights Campaign.

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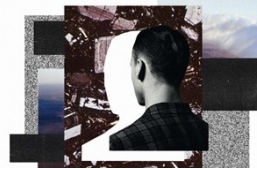
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A promotional image for *Collective Rage* by Jen Silverman

The unashamedly queer, feminist, and intersectional play you need to see

Jen Silverman's *Collective Rage* explores what can happen when women of all kinds reject the categorisations so often thrust upon them

Collective Rage

25 IMAGES

"Let me just put it this way: there are a lot more plays about straight men trying to figure out how to be happy than there are plays about queer women trying to do anything. I wrote *Collective Rage* because I

was tired of waiting for someone else to write the thing I needed to see.”

Jen Silverman's play, fully entitled *Collective Rage: A Play in 5 Betties; in essence, a queer and occasionally hazardous exploration; do you remember when you were in Middle School and you read about Shackleton and how he explored the Antarctic?; imagine the Antarctic as a Pussy and it's sort of like that*, is about to be staged in London for the first time, at the Southwark Playhouse.

It's a queer epic of sorts, and that epic is led by five totally different women – each with the same name, a reference to a classical femme persona such as Betty Boop – on a mission to get in touch with “the source of their power”. Whether that's their own vagina, their somewhat hidden queerness, their understanding of love, their class and self-worth, or their physical strength – as played out by a wealthy upper-side woman beating the shit out of a punch bag – *Collective Rage* explores what can happen when women of all kinds reject the categorisations so often thrust upon them.

“Living in the US right now, it's clear to me that we can't afford to be invisible when our civil rights are at stake” – Jen Silverman

It's unashamedly queer, feminist, and intersectional: viewpoints which mainstream theatre so obliquely lacks. “I think it's crucial to have queer female stories onstage and onscreen,” Silverman tells us. “We are so often erased. A space has been carved out (to a degree) for the gay male experience, aided by brilliant plays like *Angels in America* or TV like the seminal *Queer As Folk* – but queer women have for so long been folded into other people's stories, if we get stage or screen-time at all. I think we've reached a moment in which visibility is key to justice – for protagonists of colour as well as queer female protagonists, and all the many intersections of queerness, femaleness, and colour.”

But the characters in Silverman's play don't just perform expected notions of rejected femininity. The whole point – from the casting, which very specifically asks for women of different ethnicities and gender presentations, to the journey each character goes on – takes the audience from the macro stereotypes we are all guilty of applying to different women, eventually exposing the nuance of each woman's experience, revealing totally new aspects of each one along the way. *Collective Rage* destroys our world and sets out to reimagine a new one, one in which these five women are at the centre, and are allowed space to totally blow open their roles within society.

Genesis Lynea – a queer butch woman of colour – who plays Bettie 5 – a genderqueer, masculine of centre, black lesbian who owns a boxing gym – explains how rare it is for a role to even exist which is any bit like her. “I love it. I love it. It's what I wish I could be like – I wish I could have tattoos and be so cool, and I wish I could be a boxer and have this cool boxing gym, I wish I could identify as a gender-nonconforming female-bodied masculine individual. But she's close to me really, and it's so rare to feel like you can be celebrated for playing a part who is just like you.”

The radically queer play is being set in a mainstream space for a purpose. “Living in the US right now, it's clear to me that we can't afford to be invisible when our civil rights are at stake,” Silverman adds. “If the mainstream doesn't see us, how can it care about our rights being taken away? People care about

injustice when they have seen and acknowledged the people it's happening to. There are so many reasons for queer artists to make queer work right now, but this is one."

Collective Rage | Southwark Playhouse | 24 January - 17 February 2018



Collective Rage is not necessarily just for the consumption of queer people – something which Silverman, the cast and Antic Face – the theatre company who are staging the run – are quick to assure. "This is a play about female-bodied experience written by a queer woman – and it's for everyone to engage with. This should not be a radical statement, and the two are *not* mutually exclusive," Emma Hall, the producer bringing the play to this side of the Atlantic, explains.

While, like so many industries, theatre is having somewhat of an upheaval in the wake of Weinstein, it's often the case that people pay lip service to the idea of diversity, with very little action materialising. *Collective Rage* takes everything you know about classic theatre, fucks it up and flips the table.

"Every woman I know has had a box checked for her by someone else: 'This is who you are based on what you look like.' Myself included" – Jen Silverman

While so much mainstream theatre is so often afraid to tread near the lines of work that is outwardly feminist or queer, *Collective Rage* refuses to shrink – asking more of its audience rather than less of the material. On the production side of things, the cast mirror the Betties – with queer people, people of colour, and women of different body types and ages embodying these manifold characters and their experiences. As a queer person it's so uncommon to see respect for casting characters who are supposed to reflect a queer experience – look at Timothee Chalamet and Armie Hammer, or any other film or play featuring a gay or queer lead and you'll most often find a heterosexual person playing your experience (not so) bravely.

But Silverman, her Betties, and Antic Face are asking their audience to see past their categories and into

the nuance and subtext of these queer women from five wildly different vantage points.

“Every woman I know has had a box checked for her by someone else: ‘This is who you are based on what you look like.’ Myself included,” Silverman finishes. “The play is about what happens when we started questioning the boxes into which we’ve been put – boxes we’ve perhaps complicity (or naively) operated within.”

See Collective Rage at the Southwark Playhouse Large from 24th January – 17th February 2018



Collective Rage Images courtesy of Antic Face

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