

Same Technology, Different Policies: Feminist Perspectives on Assisted Reproduction in a Global Market Place

Lie, Merete, and Nina Lykke (eds.) *Assisted Reproduction across Borders: Feminist Perspectives on Normalizations, Disruptions and Transmissions*.
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THE VERY PREMISE for gays and lesbians forming families based in reproduction, or for any form of non-heterosexual reproduction, is that heterosexual intercourse is not the only reproductive technology available. Beyond the possibility of non-medicalized insemination of sperm, joint parental collectives, fostering arrangements or personal agreements to carry a child for someone, family member or not, outside the confines of the law and the clinic that have been around for at least forty years, on this side of the millennium, the rise of a growing international market of assisted reproductive technologies (ART) has provided new lines of reproductive flight, many of them queer. From gamete and embryo donation to surrogacy, within and beyond the nation, there are a range of possibilities for extending one's lineage into the future if one has resources and an ever-expanding legal framework in which parental

rights are extended and reconfigured to go along with it. Indeed, in the 2000s access to and use of ART has increased exponentially, at least in certain areas of the world, especially among the affluent and those who can access it via state health care. The growing demand, at least in part a result of changing patterns in the labor market, has also resulted in an ever-expanding global market for embryos, gametes, and gestational and reproductive labor. Despite frequently being cast in a rather disembodied rhetoric of rights to family and consumer choice, it is clear that highly gendered, sexualized, and racialized reproductive economy is developing in its wake.

Against this background, Merete Lie and Nina Lykke's *Assisted Reproduction across Borders: Feminist Perspectives on Normalisations, Disruptions and Transmissions* (2017) is a welcome edited volume that offers a wide range of perspectives on a phenomenon that is not only both timely and temporal, but highly technological, deeply affective, intensely commercial, and complexly ethical. From the onset, this anthology is concerned with a classic feminist question, namely that of reproduction, and is thus one of a growing number of new books that seek to capture and analyze the diverse effects of ART (cf. Kroløkke et al. 2015; Riggs and Peel 2016; Andreassen 2018), in this case by offering a range of feminist perspectives from multiple geopolitical settings. To that end, the book also extends the growing trend of placing ART and their regulations in a framework of biopolitics; or as a way to regulate the population and its reproductive patterns and by extension of analyzing the reproduction of race and nation. In this respect, the volume makes clear that a nuanced and intersectional feminist analysis based in an understanding of transnational dimensions of power is crucial, in that it serves as a reminder that reproductive freedom, birth control, and family planning are not universal feminist questions, but rather position us in increasingly global "reproflows," to use Marcia Inhorn's (2010) phrase. With a distinct aim to unsettle the continued "Euro-American" focus of much of the research in the field of feminist science and technology studies, the volume offers distinct case studies from a range of European nations, as well as from Iran, Palestine/Israel, and India. Focusing both on the

providers of bodily and reproductive labor and the historical, political, and economic structures in which such “services” are embedded, and on those who seek them out in order to realize dreams of reproductive futurity and the at times paradoxical moral positions they find themselves in, the book serves as a reminder both of the importance and difficulties of articulating ethical guidelines for what is undisputable an increasingly transnational phenomena.

Each of the five parts of the ambitious volume consists of three to five articles. Part 1 focuses on transnational reflows and global perspectives, and in particular transnational movements in search of gametes and gestational laborers. Contributors here show how a range of historical and contemporary discourses around race, citizenship, modernity, and morality, among other things, are negotiated in these transactions, as well as how consumers negotiate the moral dimensions of realizing reproductive dreams through the labor of poor women. To those of us interested in kinship, these chapters provide a useful framework for comprehending how contradictory ideas of who belongs to the family and of how we are related are negotiated in transnational reproductive arrangements, as well as how LGBTQ dreams of reproduction that rely on these ART cannot be disentangled from global relations of inequality.

Part 2 focuses on legal regulations and the paradoxes that emerge within and across different national frameworks. One focus here is on the kinds of bonds that are created, as well as denied, between different actors as they travel for ART. Here Kristin Spilker’s proposal that ART policies work as a kind of trickster that moves between different understandings of relatedness and family is particularly thought provoking, and the stories of babies born through surrogacy and the kind of “in-betweenness” they end up in, given citizenship law and family law raise crucial ethical questions. To regulate transnational phenomena within national legal frameworks or whether it is possible to articulate a joint framework remain questions to be asked. As in other parts of the book, this section makes clear that ART in the service of reproducing the heterosexual nation face fewer obstacles than those coming from same-sex couples, but also that gay consumers of reproductive technologies, at

least in Western countries are more frequently cast as “pioneers,” than as privileged consumers.

Part 3 is clustered around how religious and political values shape state policies around the same technologies and it provides a crucial dimension for understanding how legal frameworks unfold so differently in different geopolitical settings. Showing how Catholic, Muslim, and Jewish ideologies of family, blood, and lineage fuse with national biopolitics in different settings to open up for, or deny use of, ARTs, these chapters show how the fantasy of heterosexual intimacy as reproduction is connected to ideas about national and racial purity and transgression, how they are enacted and regulated in different contexts and how they get tied to familial ideals and reproductive futurities.

Part 4 hones in on demography and biopolitics, both by deconstructing the idea of birth rate crises in the EU as well as Russia and Ukraine and by examining how these ideas shape uses and meanings of ART. Sigrid Vertommen’s contribution concerning the smuggling of sperm from Palestinian political prisoners as a form of resistance to Israeli occupation serves as an especially important and stark reminder of how state policies on reproduction remain integral to both national identity and to genocidal practices. It also serves as a reminder that while to some lesbian family-makers for instance, sperm and its origin is not relevant or included in family and kinship, for others it can be a matter of literal and biopolitical life or death.

The final part 5 returns to the question of what counts as normal with regards to the use of ART. Here we learn about how ART in some cultural settings is the “normal” way to conceive children and at the same time, how such normals are only available to a limited part of the population; frequently the affluent and self-aware.

Providing rich ethnographic data as well as comparative analyses, put together, the anthology’s five sections and twenty-one individual chapters takes stock of the now and provides a substantive and timely overview of what is going on in different national settings. It is also a contribution to multiple fields, such as medical anthropology, science and technology studies and feminist studies of kinship and gender.

Above all, a key insight of this book is that it shows how the very same technologies of procreation take on very different symbolic meanings and thus have different effects in different settings and to differently positioned people who wish to become parents. This to my mind is a reminder that what we reproduce when we reproduce is not always the same. That is, we must tend to the specific ideas and fantasies of futurity, family, and kinship as well as ideas of property, personhood and labor that shape the circulation of flesh, knowledge, and labor in this economy if we are to understand the meaning of this particular set of technologies of human procreation. To simply demand, as many do, that this form of reproduction should be “normalized” does not suffice.

Indeed, the emphasis on “normalization” is particularly effective here. On the one hand, contributors point to how using ART is becoming less stigmatized within majoritarian populations and the paths that individuals and states take to incorporate such practices/technologies into heteronormative stories of reproduction. It also shows how under particular circumstances, such as concerns for population decline, users are called upon to perform reproductive duty or are able to mobilize a range of “naturalizing” discourses around reproduction in their deployment of these technologies. On the other hand, contributions show how ART also become technologies of normalization for precarious parts of the population who have historically been denied reproductive service in the nation, such as LGBTQ people or single people. There is more to be said on the latter subject, especially pertaining the degree to which lesbians and other non-heterosexual women are willing to comply with certain kinds of biopolitical regulations in order to access these technologies, or how the absence of sperm that is not white in some nations makes lesbian reproduction literally contribute to a whitewashing of the nation.

This volume is an excellent introduction to both a range of European dilemmas regarding this transnational issue and to a range of theoretical and methodological approaches in the study of ART in their transnational, queer, and normative travels. What remains an issue in this volume, as in many others, is the way in which the nation as a unit of

analysis at times collapses intersectional analyses of populations, even if it is frequently pointed out that access to these technologies is costly and privileged and that it is frequently poor women who perform reproductive labor. What is gained is a truly transnational and global framework that, along with a consistent multifaceted feminist analysis, points to the inequalities inherent in the desire, practice, and coercion to reproduce the nation.

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