

**Merete Lie and Nina Lykke (eds.) (2017) *Assisted Reproduction Across Borders. Feminist Perspectives on Normalizations, Disruptions and Transmissions*. London and New York: Routledge. 315 pages. ISBN: 978-1-138-67464-6**

Nelly Oudshoorn

*n.e.j.oudshoorn@utwente.nl*

Whatever happened to New Reproductive Technologies? Whereas the birth of the first ‘test-tube baby’ in the UK in 1978 was the topic of heated debates it now has become part of medical history books. Once in a while we may meet friends or family who tell us about their experiences with in vitro fertilization or other technologies for the treatment of infertility, or we may undergo these procedures ourselves, which suggests that these once new technologies have been integrated into routine medical practices and are no longer considered as controversial. Interestingly, these technologies are no longer referred to as New Reproductive Technologies but as Assistive Reproductive Technologies (ARTs). What does it actually mean when technologies are no longer described as new? Does it imply that they have developed into standard medical procedures that are accessible worldwide and integrated into the general perceptions of human reproduction? Does it imply that they are no longer contested? Have ARTs reached a phase of normalization? In *Assisted Reproduction Across Borders* the authors argue against the idea that ARTs can be considered as normalized technologies.

Compared to most other edited volumes on reproductive technologies, the major strength of this edited volume is that it extends the scope of research to the Global South, most notably India, Iran, and South Africa and includes countries in

the Global North that were largely invisible in previous feminist studies, including Israel and Palestine, Ukraine and Russia. The adoption of a global North-South perspective has resulted in a very important and rich book on the many faces of ARTs in different cultural contexts, revealing geopolitical inequalities in access, controversial practices of surrogacy, fierce political debates, disruptions of legal frameworks, and changing cultural norms of reproduction, gender and the family. *Assisted Reproduction Across Borders* is a must read for scholars interested in social, cultural and economic processes of the integration and normalization of reproductive technologies. But, as I will elaborate at the end of my review, some critique of the notion of normalization mobilized here is needed if analyses pointing to disruptions and transmissions are to be generative.

The book consists of 5 parts and 21 chapters. In Part I, *ARTs in a Neoliberal World of Transnational Reproflows*, the contributors describe the transnational movements of what Marcia Inhorn (2010) called ‘reproductive exiles’: people who cross borders to get access to assistive reproductive technologies. Indeed, ARTs have no borders. The chapters describe the transnational traffic in embryos, human gametes and related gestational labor in which India and South Africa have become global hotspots for respectively surrogacy arrangements and egg donation (chapter 1 and 5).

These transnational 'reproflows' introduce novel geopolitical inequalities and paradoxes in which people from the US and Europe benefit from ARTs at the expense of women in India and South Africa who have become providers of gametes and are doing the gestational labor.

In Part II *Perplexed State Regulations, Legal Inconsistencies and Cultural Tricksters*, the authors describe how ARTs introduce legal inconsistencies and contradictions because these technologies enable alternative family-building practices thus disrupting existing legal frameworks. I particularly liked chapter 7 by Kristin Spilker in which she theorizes the paradoxes and tensions in ART policies in Norway by using Donna Haraway's notion of the 'trickster'. Whereas Haraway introduced this concept to capture the surprises and ironies of knowledge production, Spilker demonstrates how the trickster figure is extremely useful to understand that processes of adaptation and normalization of technologies are not linear or predictable. In Part III, *Religious Fundamentalism, Humanist Values, and State Dilemmas in an Era of Technological Monsters*, the focus of the book shifts from studying ARTs in more secular states to national contexts in which state policies are shaped by fundamentalist religions, including Catholicism and the Islam, which resist 'unnatural' conception and restrict access to ARTs. Interestingly, more restrictive regulations do not necessarily imply that people will adhere to the morality imposed on them by the state. In Italy, for example, where the Catholic Church has a strong impact on the framing of ARTs regulation, many people escape the restrictive regulations by traveling to other countries to get infertility treatment (chapter 10).

In part IV, *ARTs as Entangled in Demographic Agendas and Biopolitics*, the authors address the different ways in which demographic policies are intertwined with nationalisms. The most intriguing chapter in this part of the volume is chapter 15 by Sigrid Vertommen in which she describes how ARTs have become part of political conflicts between Israel and Palestine. To promote Jewish-Israeli births, Israeli citizens receive full economic support for an unlimited number of IVF treatments. In contrast, Israel tries to prevent Palestinian births by denying political prisoners

conjugal visits in Israeli prisons, although women and men resist these suppressive regulations by smuggling sperm. Finally, Part V "*New Normals*" and *their Discontents* discusses cultural contexts in which ARTs have become accepted as uncontroversial methods to have children. Intriguingly, the 'new normals' described in these chapters, such as lesbian families, create new troubles and discontents again.

In sum, the editors and contributors of this fascinating book have succeeded in demonstrating the wide variety in regulations, controversies and in/exclusion processes in many different cultural contexts. However, the question that remains unanswered is whether ARTs will ever cease to be controversial. At the end of the introductory chapter, the editors conclude that "normalization is not an apt term" (p.17) because there are many contexts in which ARTs are not accepted and made accessible as normal ways to have children. I expected to find a further discussion of what concepts would be better to capture the dynamics of the implementation of ARTs.

The way in which the editors frame normalization reminds me of earlier debates within STS on the concept of closure. This key notion of the SCOT approach has been criticized because it reifies a linear approach to technology thus neglecting the role of users in appropriating technologies. This criticism has resulted in a re-conceptualization of closure from a static approach in which technologies stabilize during the design process to an open, ongoing process in which users are engaged in (re)defining and (re)designing the meanings and functional purposes of a technology in all stages of technological development (Tosoni and Pinch, 2017: 91; Oudshoorn and Pinch, 2003). As the early approach to closure, the perspective on technology developed in this book considers normalization as a process that happens during a specific stage of technological development, in this case the integration into standard, routine practices in healthcare and legislation. However, the chapters of the book illustrate that normalization may better be understood as an ongoing process in which controversies that have disappeared in one specific cultural context may emerge again in other contexts. To avoid an approach to normalization as a fixed, final phase of the integration of

technologies in society, it may be useful as well to refrain from applying ARTs as an overall term because it suggests a misplaced coherence and unity to theorize infertility treatments. As many chapters illustrate, embryo transfer, egg-freezing, gamete donation, and surrogacy each have their own dynamics of reifying or disrupting regulations, values and practices at the intersection of reproduction, family and gender. So, as Kristin Spilker has argued in chapter 7, it is not neces-

sarily the novelty of technologies that triggers controversies but new combinations of infertility treatments, regulations, value systems and people that may destabilize established alliances and introduce controversies again. The concept of trickster is a useful first step in developing an alternative approach to normalization that accounts for the unpredictable ways in which technologies become integrated in society.

## References

- Inhorn M (2010) Assisted motherhood in Global Dubai: Reproductive tourists and their helpers. In: Maher JM and Chavkin W (eds) *The Globalization of Motherhood: Deconstructions and Reconstructions of Biology and Care*. New York: Routledge, chapter 9, pp. 180-202.
- Oudshoorn N and Pinch T (eds) (2003) *How Users Matter. The Co-construction of Users and Technology*. Massachusetts: MIT Press.
- Tosoni S and Pinch T (2017) *Entanglements. Conversations on the Human traces of Science, Technology and Sound*. Cambridge, Massachusetts, and London, England: MIT Press.