

## **Feminist Perspectives on Motherhood and Assisted Reproduction**

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**Abstract:** Motherhood and reproduction have been at the core of the feminist discourse about women's rights ever since its onset. For the first and second feminist movements, the right to abortion and the public recognition of motherhood have been main issues in the reproduction discourse. Since the last two decades of the 20th century, the potentials of assisted reproductive technologies (ART) have opened up new venues of feminist discourse.

In this paper we sketch the main feminist lines of argumentation regarding motherhood and assisted reproduction since the 1970s, and we identify specific shifts in their recurrent issues. An essential contribution of feminism to the understanding of motherhood has been its insistence on the distinction between biological and social motherhood. ART has further decomposed biological motherhood and has altered the meaning of motherhood and reproduction. It has also shifted the focus from “quantum” (the number of children) to “timing” (when to have the wanted number of children). Despite the rhetoric of choice surrounding ART, it has not increased women’s reproductive freedom. The decomposition of biological motherhood, the medical, legal, and commercial development of reproduction, and the change in the social perception of motherhood have rather established new forms of control over female reproduction.

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## 1. Introduction

Reproduction and motherhood have been at the core of the feminist and women's movements ever since their emergence. And from the start, reproduction and motherhood have been highly contested issues – both within the feminist movements and beyond. Yet, over the past 30 years, Assisted Reproductive Technology (ART) has fundamentally altered the ways of reproduction and the perception of it, as ART has gained in importance not only for individual procreation, but also for population development. ART has opened up the possibility of childbearing to groups of women and men who did not have this option before, such as sub-fecund and infertile women, to women and men with other health problems, to gays, lesbians, and transsexuals, and to women beyond menopause. Since the late 1970s, about 3.75 million babies were born after ART treatment worldwide (ESHRE 2010). Despite the fact that the success rate of ART (that is the rate of live births after treatment) lies at only about 30% (Center for Disease Control and Preventions 2010), it is assumed that more than half of the estimated 9% of infertile women (aged 20-44) will seek ART treatment. This will amount to about 40.5 million women undergoing ART treatment worldwide (Boivin et al. 2007). With ART accounting for currently between about 1% and 4% of the birth rates in European countries (ESHRE 2010; Sobotka et al. 2008), some researchers regard ART as a viable method within a population policy mix that aims to increase fertility (Grant et al. 2006). The effects of ART on fertility trends have already been visible for some time: Multiple births have increased due to the practice of transferring more than one embryo to the uterus (Hoem and Strandberg 2004) and childbearing at ages above 45 and in particular above 50 has been rising (Billari et al 2007). The changes brought about by ART at the individual and the societal level have fuelled new discourses and controversies over motherhood, childbearing, and reproduction, and over the implications of ART for women and for gender relationships on the private, societal, and global level.<sup>2</sup>

In this paper we present the main lines of argument and the main viewpoints appearing in Post-World War II feminist discourse on motherhood and assisted reproduction. Our intention is to depict essential changes in the perception and reasoning brought about by the development of

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<sup>2</sup> There is much less discourse about the implications of ART for men and masculinity. In this paper, we will not review the literature on such issues systematically.

ART. With its focus on the consequences of ART for procreation, for women's (and men's) lives across the world, on the perception and social representation of motherhood, parenthood and reproduction, the feminist discourse – more than other discourses – reflect the social and gender transformations due to ART. The discourse thus points to implications of ART which reach far beyond its effects on individual childbearing behavior and population development. We maintain that it is essential for demographers (and for demography as a discipline) to recognize these implications and discourses because they point to new perceptions of reproduction, to new cleavages among women across countries and across social and economic strata, and to new aspects of reproductive and human rights.

To keep this paper within reasonable limits, we had to make some decisions: We restrict ourselves to presenting some of the main arguments. In our presentation we do not distinguish explicitly between the positions of the various strands of feminism (although we occasionally refer to them) nor do we strictly follow the historical development of the feminist discourse. We have abstained from organizing the feminist positions along the “classical” lines of liberal, radical, and Marxist feminism, of “second-wave” and “third-wave” feminism, or of any other types of feminisms, because such a classification would require that we also point out the differences between and commonalities within each of these lines as well. Such a complex analysis would go far beyond the scope of this paper. Moreover, it would require that we put the emphasis on differences within feminist discourses rather than on perceptions and argumentations, which were maintained or altered through ART. Yet, focusing on central categories of the feminist discourse rather than on differences between types of feminism also bears some risk, not least the risk of brushing over fundamental differences among feminism and of ignoring some essential lines. In addition, the categories which we study (motherhood and reproduction) are so closely interlinked that separating them often becomes difficult and may seem artificial. Feminist theories have insisted in separating motherhood and reproduction in order to overcome the conflation between them. ART has induced further conceptual divisions in motherhood and has enlarged the gap between reproduction and motherhood, something which many feminists view rather critically. Separating motherhood and reproduction for the purpose

of reconstructing the feminist discourse about them may thus lead us to overlook how much a development brought about by ART has already permeated our thinking about these issues.

We do not treat in detail the specific discussions of ART in developing countries where issues are often addressed with reference to a different socio-economic and cultural context. First, there is a broad discussion on the role of ART as infertility treatment in contexts where infertility is high and mainly due to genital infections rather than to women's choices of postponement. It is widely discussed whether ARTs are meaningful interventions where health resources are scarce, other more urgent public health problems are not adequately addressed, and fertility rates in the population are over replacement level. Second, there is a large body of literature on the larger social dimension of infertility treatments in contexts where infertility has often severe the individual and social consequences. In the Middle East and in sub-saharan Africa, for instance, the inability to have children, particularly for a woman, creates not only social stigma, but also economic hardship, isolation, rejection or mistreatments by the husband or his family. Third, there are wide discussions on ART as a gendered technology which multiply global inequalities across countries as well as between wealthy and poor women. The health risks and dangers women are exposed to when undergoing ART procedures to sell eggs or "rent" their womb, current practice in India for instance, is presented as another way to outsource labor, in this case, reproductive labor, to poorer countries. Fourth, since ART and its market are mostly determined by Western views and practices, there is a discussion on the cultural implications of ART, on the transformation of cultural understandings of motherhood, "gift", "altruism" and their commercialization and exploitation through ART.

## **2. Motherhood**

### **2.1. Motherhood as a contested feminist concept**

Motherhood has been one of the issues which have split feminist movements. Most women become mothers, and many feminists have regarded motherhood as a uniting element among

women and have based their claims to rights for women on it.<sup>3</sup> On the other hand, the issue of motherhood has also been one of the anchor points for denying women rights and equality and for discriminating against them. Starting from this observation, the mainstream feminist discourse up to the mid-1980s took a critical approach to motherhood and regarded the rejection of motherhood as a pre-requisite for overcoming women's subordination and for gaining equality. This position was advocated by de Beauvoir already in her seminal book *the Second Sex*. She stated that "[i]t was fraudulent to maintain that through maternity woman becomes concretely man's equal" (de Beauvoir 1953, 525). She considered motherhood as the main feature which caused women to be seen as "others" and to tie them to immanence. She felt that women are made to see motherhood as the essence of their life and the fulfillment of their destiny (de Beauvoir 1953, 484 ff.). In her view, the decision to become a mother is therefore never performed "in complete liberty", not even through ART (de Beauvoir 1953, 696). She saw motherhood as enforced maternity (de Beauvoir 1953, 724). Changing laws and institutions, or even changing the whole social context, would not suffice to change the conditions and the consequences of motherhood for women. The latter requires overcoming immanence and "otherness" through transcendence (de Beauvoir 1953, 717; 725), which in essence implies that women can only free themselves from their confines by foregoing motherhood. Although de Beauvoir's approach and positions received much criticism from feminists, particularly for being a-historic and for essentializing "woman", feminists critical of motherhood shared her perception of maternity as a means to maintain women's inferior social and economic status as "objects" and to deny them the right to determine their position. As Carole Pateman (1988 and 1989) has pointed out, the de-valuation of motherhood (and women) was a consequence of the patriarchal construction of sexual difference. Through the fraternal (social) contract men became equal as members of society. Women were relegated to "nature", with childbearing and motherhood forming the core of women's nature. Under such conditions, the relationship between women and men is determined by a sexual contract (most visibly in the institution of the patriarchal marriage contract) which surrenders women's bodies and offspring to men and to society.

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<sup>3</sup> For historical studies on motherhood as a means of claims to rights, see Bock and Thane (1991), Koven and Michel (1993). For a recent example of "mother-centered" claims, see *Müttermanifest* (Erler et al. 1987). The latter split the German feminist movement.

A large body of feminist research demonstrated that this linkage between motherhood and nature was historically, socially, legally, politically, and philosophically constructed (Bock and Duden 1977; Badinter 1981; Okin 1979; Fineman 1995; Bock and Thane 1991). Feminists refuted the common assumption of motherhood as something innate to women. They showed that the association of maternity with woman's "nature" conflates biological and social motherhood, and denies that motherhood is work. When motherhood is framed as "nature", social motherhood (that is the care work done by mothers and the rearing of children) appears as women's "natural" responsibility and at the same time as performed out of "natural" love. Mother's work is „Arbeit aus Liebe, Liebe als Arbeit“ (Bock and Duden 1977).<sup>4</sup> Feminists argued that the conflation of biological and social motherhood, the association of both forms of motherhood with nature, and the idealization of mothers' work as love meant to create, maintain, and legitimize women's subordination. They insisted on the distinction between biological and social motherhood. Only such a distinction can help reveal how the social perceptions of motherhood are constructed so as to allow the exploitation of women as bearers of children and as rearers of children.

The radical, Marxist, and colonial feminist discourse linked motherhood to social, economic, and racial structures, that is, to patriarchy, capitalism, and colonialism (von Werlhof, Bennholdt-Thomsen and Mies 1983; Mies 1986). These were conceived as interlinked systems of production. The common perception of production excluded biological and social motherhood and saw them as part of the sphere of reproduction. By contrast, feminists insisted that biological and social motherhood were specific forms of production which complemented and maintained the modes of capitalist, patriarchal, and colonial production and the hierarchical power structures inherent in them. The relegation of women and of motherhood to the ostensibly unproductive sphere of reproduction gave men control over women's lives, their (biological and social) reproduction, their children and their work, and allowed them to exploit women for their private, economic, demographic, political, nationalistic or other purposes (Ginsburg and Rapp 1995; Rothman 1994; Yuval-Davis 1997).

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<sup>4</sup> Bock and Duden (1977) formulated this in relation to women's domestic work, but it can easily be transferred to the perception of motherhood.

It was argued that under all these circumstances, becoming mothers implies complying with systems which deny women the right to self-determined motherhood and which exploit their maternity, while refraining from motherhood and motherly work becomes a means of resistance against these systems.

Linking maternity to the gender, racial, social, and economic structures also challenged the assumption of a universal concept and experience of motherhood, and it called attention to the special discrimination and exploitation of mothers which were not termed “true mothers”, in particular single mothers, stepmothers, mothers of color, and mothers of a different ethnic or national background (Rothman 1994, Yuval-Davis 1997; Fieldes 1992; Ladd-Taylor and Umansky 1998). Studies showed that legal and welfare systems not only denied these mothers the “normalcy” of (married, white, national) mothers, but also facilitated their exploitation by and for the benefit of other mothers (see, for example, Pawlowski 2001). This contributed to the debate about to what extent differences among women – in our case: differences between childless women and mothers, and differences among different groups of mothers – supported gender inequality in society and in the world.<sup>5</sup>

Since the mid-1980s, feminist theories which stress differences and reject standpoint feminism and its assumption of a universal category of “woman”, of defining women in relation to men, and of conceptualizing them as oppressed by and victims of patriarchy, have shifted the feminist discourse away from regarding motherhood as an ordering principle of societies. In rejecting the notion of a fixed category of “woman”, postmodern and poststructuralist feminist approaches also reject that “mother” is a fixed category. Being a mother is rather seen as part of a woman’s identity, equal to many other identities which a woman might acquire. It neither implies being the “other”, the “second sex” (in relation to men or to non-mothers) nor does it imply subordination per se. It rather opens up the possibility for agency, for a great diversity of (self-defined) “motherhoods” and for a positive identification with maternity. The emotional, intellectual and often spiritual rewards of motherhood are stressed and the desire for caring and

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<sup>5</sup> For example: The *Müttermanifest* blamed childless women and their politics for the fact that mothers’ interests were not sufficiently recognized in Germany. While criticizing the ostensibly essentialist standpoint of the German feminist movement (which was regarded as representing only the interests of childless women), the authors of the *Müttermanifest* essentialized motherhood (Erler et al. 1987).

mothering is seen as a strength which women should try to re-legitimize in their life rather than deny it (de Marneffe 2004). Post-structural feminists no longer rebuff motherhood in order to overcome power structures, but they seek for means to overcome power structures in order to allow motherhood.<sup>6</sup>

This reasoning was not new among feminists. The claim that women speak “in a different voice” (Gilligan 1992) and that motherhood and women’s care ethics (Ruddick 1989; Tronto 1994) are a source of power had been proposed by maternal feminists earlier.<sup>7</sup> While the rhetoric of ethics of care essentialized mothers and maternal care (even though care was often assumed to be gender neutral, see, e.g. Tronto 1994), postmodern assumptions of motherhood put the emphasis on diversity – and thus broadened the perceptions of motherhoods<sup>8</sup> to include new forms of motherhoods which were made available through ART.

## **2.2. Motherhood as a concept fractured through ART**

Since the early 1980s, an increasing body of feminist literature on motherhood has reflected on the potentials and the constraints of ART for “liberated” womanhood. However, in feminist analyses of ART, motherhood is almost exclusively reduced to biological motherhood.<sup>9</sup> Consequently, the ways of feminist reflections on ART and of feminist reflections on “social motherhood” have parted. “Social motherhood” and the economic, social, and political circumstances of mothers as carers have almost completely disappeared from the feminist literature on ART. As Rowland (1992) and Stanworth (1987a) noted, reproductive technologies

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<sup>6</sup> The aim to change systems in order to facilitate parenthood and to reach equality is also pursued by the large body of feminist literature on welfare state, citizenship, and social rights. “Care” is a central category in this literature, but it is not biologized in the way the feminist literature on “maternal thinking” and “ethics of care” does (for an overview over this feminist literature, see Hobson 2005).

<sup>7</sup> For a historical overview of maternalist feminism, see Koven and Michel 1993.

<sup>8</sup> We deliberately use the plural term “motherhoods” in order to capture the diversity of motherhood, but also to cover the postmodern and poststructuralist rejection of one uniform type and perception of motherhood.

<sup>9</sup> The same applies to the general, non-feminist literature on ART. But since feminism has insisted on making social motherhood visible, the absence of social motherhood in the feminist literature on ART is noteworthy.

contributed to the “deconstruction of motherhood”. Mothers become decomposed into “ovarian mothers” (those who provide the eggs), “uterine mothers” (those who carry out the pregnancy and give birth), and “social mothers” (those who raise the child) (Stanworth 1987a, 16). This fracturing of motherhood corresponds to what many feminists regard as the ultimate goal of ART: to “disembody” women (Duden 1991; Rowland 1992) and to obliterate their integrity and sovereignty (see contributions in Arditto, Klein, and Minden 1984, and in Stanworth 1987b), to make biological motherhood redundant (Corea 1985), and to place the reproduction of human beings and of humanity in the hands of medicine and technology (Corea 1985; Arditto, Klein, and Minden 1984; Rowland 1992; Ginsburg and Rapp 1995; Wichterich 1994).

Feminists maintain that this decomposition of motherhood devalues motherhood and women, and creates new and unprecedented cleavages and exploitative hierarchies among women (Corea et al. 1987; Arditto, Klein, and Minden 1984; Rothman 1994; Ginsburg and Rapp 1995; Wichterich 1994). They emphasize that there is no equality between women who donate eggs or who become surrogate mothers and those who become mothers through their services. Egg donors and surrogate mothers are often in need of money (Rothman 1994), but the payments they receive are far from any adequate re-imbursement for the interference into their body or for an entire pregnancy. Some feminists even maintain that the relationship between buyers of surrogate motherhood and/or of other women’s eggs resembles prostitution, because a woman’s body or part of her body are traded for money (Corea 1985, Pateman 1989). They warn against the global market, which has developed in the ART business. Like the trafficking in women for prostitution or for marriage markets, the worldwide trafficking in eggs and surrogate motherhoods strengthens the economic and racial exploitation of (poor) women for the benefit of other (mostly white, married, well-off) women and men (Rothman 1994; Klein 2008; Yavena 2009). It produces new forms of commodification of women through the commodification of the female body or, more precisely, of women’s reproductive organs and reproductive capacity (Gupta and Richters 2008; Sharp 2000).

The hierarchies between buying and selling mothers are not only produced by the ART market alone, but they are reinforced by the legal regulations concerning ART. Current legal practice gives egg donors and surrogate mothers no right to their offsprings. Through contractual

agreements they surrender parts of their bodies or the control over their pregnant body to the requesting party. According to feminists this practice marks a return of the ideology of patriarchy (Rowland 1987), in that in major legal cases of surrogate motherhood and in-vitro-fertilization, men's claims to their "seed" have been given priority over women's claims to be mothers (Rothman 1994). In addition, feminists see a further devaluation of mothers through the shifts in the legal relationship between the embryo and the mother, brought about by ART. The embryo is personalized and bestowed with the rights of a legal entity, while the maternal body is reduced to a nurturing machine, to a vessel which merely contains the embryo and the fetus (Franklin 1995; Hartouni 2007). The contractual and legal practices surrounding ART constitute a new form of "sexual contract", which we can call a "procreational contract". It constructs and legalizes fractured motherhoods by determining who is the biological mother, who is the social mother,<sup>10</sup> and who – despite contributing parts or processes of her body to the life of the child – is not a mother, but merely the donor of a product, be it the egg or the womb, which is owned by those who are favored by the procreational contract.

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<sup>10</sup> It is important to note that if the contracting person(s) are men, for example, a gay couple, the „social mother“ can be male. This is a specific dimension added to the relationship between motherhood and fatherhood.

### **3. Reproduction: from the struggle for rights to the naturalization of technological reproduction**

While the meaning of motherhood for women has long been contentious within feminism, reproductive politics have been a bonding issue across the various types of feminism. The struggle for reproductive rights and reproductive freedom, for control over their own reproduction and against the expropriation of their body, has bridged differences among women's movements and feminist discourses. Feminists have regarded women's acquisition of control over their own reproduction not only as a necessary step to individual freedom and autonomy, but also as a fundamental condition to overcome patriarchal control and to improve the situation of women as a group (Petchesky 1995; Gordon 1976). The struggle for access to free and safe abortion and for the possibility to decide their number of children without outside interference has formed the core of feminist reproductive politics for centuries. The emergence of ART has added new dimensions to this struggle. Firestone (1970, 193) welcomed ART as a means to free women and humanity from the "tyranny of biology". She saw it as the mission of the feminist movement to demand the development of ART in order to "provide an alternative to the oppression of the biological family", which has forever oppressed (fertile and infertile) women with its request that they reproduce (Firestone 1970, 202 and 200). Most subsequent feminist accounts have taken a different stance towards ART and voiced more nuanced and critical positions. With the foundation of FINRRAGE (Feminist International Network of Resistance to Reproductive and Genetic Engineering) in 1984/85, part of the feminist movement turned against the proposal by Firestone and made it its mission to form a feminist resistance against ART with the ultimate aim to stop it (Klein 2008, 157).<sup>11</sup> For (liberal and postmodern) feminists, this resistance against ART creates a new "fault line" among women (Sandelowski 1990). Liberal and postmodern feminists maintain that ART provides the possibility to overcome biological limitations to conceive and to reproduce. It offers the opportunity of motherhood to previously infertile women and it enlarges women's choices of voluntary and "willed" motherhood, that is, to have as many children as they want at the time when they would like to

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<sup>11</sup> FINRRAGE was originally founded in 1984 under the name of FINNRET (Feminist International Network on the New Reproductive Technologies) but changed its name in 1985 (Klein 2008, 157).

have them.<sup>12</sup> While most feminists concede that ART may indeed help (some) women to become mothers, many nevertheless question the promise which ART supposedly holds for women's individual and collective freedom. They argue that ART has changed the practice and the meaning of reproduction, in particular that of reproductive choice and reproductive freedom (Franklin and McNeill 1988; Franklin 1995).

Feminists' view on reproductive choice has been closely linked to their perception of women's control over their own reproduction and of their body as their own property (Petchesky 1995). "Mein Bauch gehört mir", "l'utero è mio e me lo gestisco io" (My belly is mine; the uterus is mine and I manage it myself) were the slogans with which the feminist movement of the 1970s demanded the right to abortion, to the control over their own body and reproduction. The concept of choice, which is so central to liberal feminist thinking, insinuates equality among the options, full autonomy to choose and unrestricted individual agency. Not only are women still far from having reached this, but many feminists argue that ART has seriously curbed women's choices to self-determined motherhood, despite its ardent proclamation of enlarging women's procreative choices. The availability of ART may impose a new pressure on women to become mothers (Hartouni 1997), in particular in societies in which women are (still) expected to reproduce (Vayena 2009; Inhorn 2002; Inhorn and Birenbaum-Corneli 2008). The ostensibly universal access to ART may weaken women's struggle against social sanctions of infertility. In addition, research and governmental attention may be directed towards furthering ART instead of eliminating the most common causes of infertility (Ryan 2009). Limited resources for health provision for all women may thus be channeled to ART for some.

The promise of ART that every woman can become a mother restores the assumption that every woman wants to become a mother, irrespective of her health, her age, her life-course (Hartouni 1997). This reinstates the assumption of a universal maternal desire as part of women's nature. It may result in a "normative" situation, in which women find themselves questioned at any stage in their life if they abstain from motherhood. Despite the fact that, for example, the technology of "freezing eggs" for future use is far from making it a safe technology, it is advertised as allowing women to safeguard themselves against potential future infertility and to keep their attraction as

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<sup>12</sup> To demographers this would mark a shift from women's interest in "quantum" to "timing".

prospective mothers for men (Martin 2010). ART is stylized as supporting the “empowerment” of women by allowing them to overcome nature and plan their lives at their own pace and will, while in essence it subjects them to conform to reproductive requests over their entire life-time (Martin 2010). Martin cites an advertisement for “egg freezing”, in which women’s “empowerment” through overcoming the biological clock is symbolized by a woman’s hand which holds an enormous clock over her pelvic area (Martin 2010, 539). It suggests that ART frees women of the constraints of time and that freezing eggs at the prime of a woman’s reproductive years gives her the freedom to pursue her career and have her child(ren) after she has reached her professional goals, even if this point in time is far beyond her reproductive years. In our view, the ad is a cynical twist on the symbol of the feminist movement of the 1970s, when women underlined their claim to liberalize abortion and to the right to freely determine the course of their pregnancy, by holding large signs with the “feminist symbol” (often with a fist in it) over their pelvic areas.

The availability of ART, especially prenatal diagnostics, has also increased the pressure on women to produce the “perfect baby”, of the desired sex or quality. Feminists point out that while ultrasound and prenatal diagnostics may be to the benefit of some women, they have now become an inevitable procedure for all women.<sup>13</sup> Choice has turned into a eugenic obligation which women cannot forego without being termed irresponsible towards themselves and towards society (Hubbard 1984; Saxton 1984). This has reduced women’s confidence in their own body and curtailed their autonomy with regard to childbearing (Rowland 1992; Duden 1991).

ART, the wide-spread use of ultrasound and genetic screening, and the medical monitoring of procreation from conception to delivery have increased medical control over women’s bodies and have added new dimensions to the long ongoing medicalization of reproduction. The possibility to decide about one’s own reproductive process is often limited by the selection of options which medical authorities offer to women (Rowland 1992; Holm 2009). As Donchin (2009) points out, this asymmetrical relationship is disguised by the policy of informed consent, which assumes that women have full information and unrestricted conditions to arrive at an

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<sup>13</sup> Ultrasound is now standard procedure in many countries, and may even be required in order to draw maternity benefits.

autonomous decision, while in reality autonomy is narrowed to the options laid before women. Franklin (1995) argues that ART “de-naturalizes” reproduction and “naturalizes” ART simultaneously. It reduces infertility and natural conception to the same level of insufficiency. Infertile women’s nature is insufficient because of their limitation to conceive; natural conception is insufficient because it cannot guarantee the aspired outcome, which is the birth of a (fit) child. In both cases, nature needs “the helping hand” of medical and technical assistance to overcome its deficiency. This does not only legitimize ART, but it “naturalizes” it (Franklin 1995, 334). The importance of this shift in the perception of nature lies precisely in that it depicts women and their reproductive functions as inferior to technology and subjects them to it.

#### **4. Conclusion**

Although most of all children in the world are still born without the use of ART, ART is spreading rapidly. Some techniques, such as ultrasound and amniocentesis, have become standard procedures in prenatal care in many countries, financed and often required by public health care. Likewise, many public health care systems recognize infertility as “illness” and subsidize its treatment, although mostly only for selected groups of women and men (married, young, and healthy). While acknowledging the benefit which some women (and men) have from this development, feminist analyses have tried to assess the impact which ART has on the social and economic situation and the cultural and legal recognition of all women. Most feminists view ART with criticism or at least ambivalently. They point to the factual changes in conception, pregnancy, and birth which ART has generated and to the shifts in the cultural, legal, and medical perception of women, reproduction, and motherhood. Reviewing the conditions of both fertile and infertile women, they doubt that ART contributes to empowering women and to granting them more control over their body, reproduction, and motherhood. Many warn against the consequences of the ART-induced dissociation between reproduction and motherhood, and about the split of the maternal body into different “deliverers” of products and services. They maintain that these developments have not reduced society’s power over women, but have induced new and global power structures at the gender, the social, and the economic level. The feminist answers to these trends demonstrate the challenge which the development of ART and

its consequences poses to the feminist struggle and the feminist discourse. Many feminists call for stops to or restrictions of ART and its commercialization, and for the re-allocation of funds from ART to reproductive and health services which benefit all women. They argue for a stronger integration of ART issues in the discourse about human rights, for a more equal inclusion of feminist advocates in ART debates, and for a general politicization of ART to subject its development and application to more democratic procedures (Klein 2008; Ryan 2009). The development of ART has posed unsettling questions to many feminist principles and approaches. As we have mentioned, feminists have long insisted on the separation of biological and social motherhood, and have rejected associations between motherhood and “nature”. The medical practice of ART and subsequently the legal systems have drawn new boundaries and instituted previously unknown power imbalances between different biological motherhoods, between the embryo and the mother, and between different biological mothers and a father. The fact that one does not know the long-term consequences for women treated by ART and for their children has further aggravated cleavages between social motherhood and the various forms of biological motherhood (Klein 2008). Feminists find themselves in a situation where they must strive to bind the social back to the biological, to re-define “nature” in a way that grasps all forms of fractured motherhood and to make claims on such re-definitions without supporting perceptions of reproduction and motherhood which they have fought against for so long.

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