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Reproductive Rights

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Abstract and Keywords

This article discusses feminist scholarship on three specific areas of the politics of reproduction. It first defines the concept of reproduction as the production of offspring; reproduction is also considered as a key theme of feminist theory and political practice before and after Simone de Beauvoir. The article then studies state control over the procreative choices of the citizens, specifically the eugenic population policies introduced during the first few decades of the twentieth century. The next section focuses on feminist mobilization around abortion and contraceptive rights and outlines the ways reproductive rights have been included in the political arena due to women's movements. The article concludes with a study of the impact of the latest reproductive technologies on modern politics of gender along with the feminist responses to the challenges posed by recent improvements in this area.

Keywords: reproduction, feminist scholarship, feminist theory, Simone de Beauvoir, procreative choices, feminist mobilization, abortion, reproductive rights, reproductive technologies, feminist responses

Introduction

Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex*, first published in 1949, famously blamed women's reproductive bodies and activities for their subordinate social status. Writing at a time when marriage and motherhood constituted the main horizon of female social respectability, de Beauvoir portrayed marriage, housework, and childcare as mutually reinforcing women's dependence on men. The author reserved some of her most radical language for describing the strong emotional ties linking a mother to her child as "a mutual and harmful oppression" (1976b, 389) and the fetus as "both part of her body, and

a parasite which exploits her" (1976b, 349). Echoing the trope of "voluntary motherhood" promoted by earlier, first-wave women's movements, de Beauvoir called for free access to birth control and abortion as well as collective methods of childrearing.

Reproduction, understood as the production of offspring, has constituted a key theme of feminist theory and political practice both before and after de Beauvoir. Three features of reproduction explain its importance to feminist theory and praxis. First, reproduction is conventionally considered a "women's domain." Second, and consequently, as de Beauvoir and numerous other feminist pioneers have decried, normative femininity remains to a considerable extent defined in relation to reproduction and motherhood. And third, the fact that reproduction involves the engendering of future generations turns it into an object of collective interest and anxiety. In an influential edited volume exploring the global politics of reproduction, Ginsburg and Rapp (1995) accordingly (p. 215) argue that, given its social importance, reproduction should be placed at the center not just of feminist theory but of social theory more generally.

Reproduction has been central to a great number of the political struggles of first- and second-wave women's movements, ranging from collective mobilizations around access to contraception, abortion, and childcare to controversies triggered by developments in the field of new reproductive technologies. In the context of such struggles, a new vocabulary of reproductive rights, reproductive health, and reproductive justice has emerged in recent decades and has acquired institutional anchoring through national and international legislation. At an international level, "reproductive rights" were first recognised as a subset of basic human rights in the (non-legally binding) "Proclamation of Tehran" of the United Nations (UN) International Conference on Human Rights in 1968, where it was stated that parents should have the right "to determine freely and responsibly the number and the spacing of their children" (para.16). The (also non-binding) "Cairo Programme of Action" adopted at the UN International Conference on Population and Development in 1994 contained the first UN definition of reproductive health, including individuals' right to "have a satisfying and safe sex life and...the capability to reproduce and the freedom to decide if, when and how often to do so" (para. 7.2)—notions that were further broadened at the UN 4th World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995. Indeed, the Beijing Platform for Action stated that women's reproductive rights, part of universal and inalienable human rights, required "equal relationships between women and men in matters of sexual relations and reproduction" (para.96).

However, the notion of reproductive rights has also deeply divided global feminist theory and practice. Western feminists' calls for access to abortion have been criticized for being a "luxury" concern of privileged women by activists from those developing nations where women have been subjected to coerced sterilization or forced abortion. This has, in turn, led to semantic disagreements over whether *reproductive freedom* signifies the freedom not to procreate or the freedom to have children when wanted. Feminists have been further divided over whether female sexual freedom or the protection against practices of female and male genital mutilation should be included in notions of reproductive health and whether such inclusion constitutes a feminist gain, or another expression of Western

ethnocentrism. Finally, the promotion of reproductive rights has been criticized as meaningless unless a number of social conditions are met. Provisions such as legalized abortion and contraceptives are accessible only to those who have sufficient economic resources to be able to afford them, while practices of coercion, gender violence, and racial discrimination may impede women from freely exercising such rights. As Dorothy Roberts (1997) argues, the narrow focus on abortion rights reflects the concerns of white, middle-class women about legal restraints on choices that are otherwise available to them. Integrating the particular concerns of black women, Roberts points out, “helps to expand our vision of reproductive freedom to include the full scope of what it means to have reproductive control over one’s life” (300).

(p. 216) Such critical debates have led to the emergence of the concept of *reproductive justice*, coined by the American Black Women’s Caucus in the wake of the 1994 Cairo conference. This concept problematizes the gap between legal rights and the actual usage of such rights and links reproductive rights with social justice. It thus shifts the focus from an individualist rights-based perspective to a concern with collective structures of reproductive oppression. The frame of reproductive justice has been promoted by grassroots organizations both in the United States, such as SisterSong Women of Color Reproductive Justice Collective (founded in 1997), and its member organization Asian Communities for Reproductive Justice, and elsewhere, most prominently by the Women’s Global Network for Reproductive Rights, an influential worldwide organisation founded in the Netherlands in 1984 and currently based in Manila.

Against this backdrop, the next sections of this chapter will explore feminist scholarship on three areas of the politics of reproduction, using different periodizations for each of the subsections. The first section adopts primarily a top-down perspective to examine state control over citizens’ procreative choices, taking eugenic population policies during the early decades of the twentieth century as a specific example. The second section adopts a bottom-up perspective, centering on feminist mobilizations around abortion and contraceptive rights from the 1970s onward. It will trace the ways reproductive rights have been pushed into the political arena by women’s movements and how feminist activism has in turn been prompted, as well as strengthened, by struggles over access to safe abortion and means of birth control. The third section of the chapter examines the impact of new reproductive technologies on contemporary politics of gender and explores feminist responses to the challenges posed by recent developments in this area.

State Control and Reproductive Agency

The modern state intervenes in citizens' reproductive lives and bodies in many different policy arenas, ranging from public health systems, sex education in schools, and abortion and adoption laws to population policies and natalist political rhetoric. The policy frames used in these arenas articulate ways of thinking about gender and reproductive agency, which are both reflective of modern forms of state intervention and colored by specific cultural, religious, or political contexts. In policy making, public debate, and everyday life interactions, it is tacitly taken for granted that "it's women who have children." Public anxieties about under-age sex, single parenthood, or new reproductive technologies tend to center on women and their reproductive behaviors, (p. 217) despite the increased usage of degendered language to do so. Male reproductive agency thus often remains a discursive blind spot, not just within public understandings of reproduction but also within feminist theorizations of gender and reproduction.

In stark contrast, the ancient Greek dramatic trilogy *Oresteia*, written by Aeschylus, offers a telling illustration of how different past understandings of gender and reproductive agency were, even within Western culture. The plays were first performed at the Dionysia festival in Athens in 458 BCE, where they won first prize. The only trilogy of ancient Greek plays to have survived until modern times, the *Oresteia* tells us the tragic myth of the cursed House of Atreus. In its first play, we witness queen Clytemnestra as she awaits the return of her husband Agamemnon, King of Argos, from the Trojan war after ten years of absence. The public learns that she nurtures deep hatred for her husband, whom she blames for the death of their daughter Iphigeneia. Indeed, at the start of the war, Agamemnon had prepared the sacrifice of their daughter in an attempt to placate the gods, who had sent him unfavorable winds preventing his war ships from sailing to Troy. In the course of the preparations for her death by her father, Iphigeneia, seemingly driven by the patriotic desire to allow the Greek ships to sail or, following an alternative reading, motivated by the fear that the noblewomen of Argos would end up as victims of rape by the men of Troy if Greece were defeated, ends up sacrificing her own life. Agamemnon doesn't help matters by bringing back a souvenir from Troy: the exotic Trojan princess Cassandra, whom he has made his concubine. In a climactic, bloody scene, Clytemnestra and her lover murder Agamemnon and Cassandra, using an axe. Clytemnestra's son Orestes now faces a dilemma: he has the moral obligation to revenge the murder of his father. However, he can do so only by killing his own mother, and matricide and patricide are seen as particularly "abhorrent to the gods" in ancient Greek culture. Despite these qualms, Orestes does kill Clytemnestra and in punishment is persecuted by the Furies (deities who revenge matricide or patricide). Driven to distraction by the Furies, Orestes flees to Athens, where a trial is called to decide whether his punishment should continue or not. At the trial, the male god of reason Apollo takes Orestes's side against the Furies, and the female, celibate, virgin god of war and wisdom Athena is left to cast the deciding vote. Athena, born out of her father Zeus's thigh without any reproductive involvement of a mother, is convinced by Apollo's

argument that Clytemnestra, Orestes's mother, is not really a blood relative of Orestes. Indeed, Apollo and Athena agree that Clytemnestra's body was nothing more than a vessel for Orestes's father's sperm. Therefore, the gods conclude, Orestes's blood relationship is to his father Agamemnon and not to his mother. This rhetorical twist, in turn, makes the murder of Clytemnestra morally acceptable because it is now (to borrow a modern term) an honor killing rather than a matricide.

Although the *Oresteia* narrates mythical events, it reflects prevalent views in Western antiquity in presenting the role of the mother in reproduction as only (p. 218) passive. Within a patriarchy that placed (free) men and fathers at the center of power relations within the family as well as wider society, parenthood was seen to be actively determined by male sperm, not by the female reproductive body. More generally, metaphors of female bodies as simple recipients or passive vessels for active male sperm survived well into early modern times within Western culture. To the contemporary eye, the *Oresteia* appears fascinating precisely because of its disconnection of reproduction from biology. Western modernity has developed contrary understandings of gender and procreative agency, conventionally portraying reproduction as primarily a "female business," biologically tied to women's bodies. In depicting a contrasting, distinctly male-centered view of reproduction, the *Oresteia* reminds us that reproduction and reproductive agency have been understood differently within different historical time periods or cultural contexts. In other words, it reminds us that reproduction is not a natural, biological, universal process but a culturally situated experience,—just as gender and sexuality are best understood as culturally constructed rather than natural, universal, biologically driven experiences.

In addition, the *Oresteia* also draws attention to other themes that have been of key interest to feminist political theory, such as the gendered body politics of citizenship. Through Cassandra's fate, it illustrates the ways women's bodies become sexual property of male victors of war and act as metaphors for national honor as the patriotic reading of Iphigeneia's self-sacrifice suggests, whereas patriotism for male citizens is measured by their willingness to sacrifice their bodies in war. In the Trojan case, these twin dynamics were illustrated particularly sharply, since the Trojan War was aimed at retrieving a Greek nobleman's wife who had eloped with a Trojan prince (adultery with a married woman being considered a more horrendous crime than rape within ancient Greece, given the risk to the woman's husband of illegitimate offspring). Finally, Orestes's story signals the shift from Argos's system of blood revenge to a system of legal trial by jury in Athens. The trilogy thus locates the mythical origins of formal systems of justice in a dispute over gender and parenthood, thereby founding embryonic state institutions upon a gendered model of reproduction that privileges male rather than female reproductive agency.

Scandinavian feminist political scientists such as Helga Hernes (1987) and Birte Siim (1988) have explored the consequences of the gendered understanding of reproductive agency for modern views of the relationship between citizens and the state. As they point out, notions of citizenship have been deeply gendered from the moment when they

started to emerge and formalize in modernity (see also the chapter by Siim in this volume). The affiliation of male citizens to both the state and the nation has been historically founded upon the model of the citizen-worker and the citizen-soldier, particularly focusing on their willingness to work and to sacrifice their bodies and their lives in war (which is of course why antimilitaristic objectors have been conventionally portrayed not just as cowardly but also as unpatriotic traitors toward the nation). In contrast, women's affiliation to the national body passes via their reproductive agency: (p. 219) their duty toward the national collectivity is as citizen-mothers, generating and raising the children that will form the future nation (see also Eisenstein 1983). Indeed, Adrienne Rich observed in her influential book *Of Woman Born* (1976) that terms such as *barren* or *childless* are used to suggest illegitimate female identities, whereas no equivalent terms exist for *nonfathers* (xiii-xiv). The nation is biologically replaced through reproductive sexuality, which is tacitly coded as female. As Michel Foucault (1990) famously points out, the fact that the future of our species and more specifically that of the nation is formed by reproductive sexuality has turned the latter into an arena for collective anxiety and state intervention. What Foucault failed to recognize, or at least paid insufficient theoretical and empirical attention to, however, was the deeply gendered nature of collective concerns with citizens' reproductive sexuality. Authors such as Nira Yuval-Davis (1997) and Joanne Nagel (2003) demonstrate that female reproductive sexuality historically became a particular focus of such concerns.

One of the most dramatic examples of direct intervention of the modern state on reproductive bodies and sexuality is offered by practices of coerced sterilization. For example, during its state of emergency (1975–1977), India engaged in a notorious family planning program that involved the coerced sterilization of thousands of men and women. In China, human rights activists routinely accuse the government of using coerced abortion and sterilization as part of its one-child policy program. First announced in 1978, the program constitutes a stark reversal of Chairman Mao's earlier pronatalist stance and persecution of birth control activists in the 1950s and reflects a shift of party workers' activism from production to reproduction since the 1980s (Anagnost 1995). Czechoslovakia undertook sterilization under constraints or rewarded with welfare payments of primarily Roma women in the period from 1973 to 2001.

From the late 1920s to the 1960s, several Western countries implemented coerced sterilization policies that were partly driven by eugenic concerns. Eugenics initially emerged in the late nineteenth century as a new and self-declared science, which identified the hereditary transmission of inferior physical and mental characteristics as sources of national degeneration and focused on how to encourage instead the transmission of superior qualities to the next generation. Eugenicists aimed to assist states in implementing social policies that would improve the quality of the national "breed." In opposition to the *laissez-faire* of political liberalism, they advocated active social engineering and state intervention in the most private areas of citizens' lives, including their reproductive sexuality. While some eugenic thinkers proposed so-called positive eugenic measures (such as eugenic education), defined as ways to encourage reproduction by those categories of the population who were deemed to be of superior

quality, others promoted negative measures such as marriage bans or sterilization to prevent inferior citizens from having children. Political calls for coerced sterilization or castration to exclude unfit categories of the population from the (future) nation were thus legitimized (p. 220) through the authority of eugenic science, which rapidly established itself in the context of scientific disciplines such as biological anthropology, psychiatry, and sexology. Citizens had a patriotic duty, eugenic scientists argued, to contribute to the improvement of the nation through what was termed a *conscious race-culture* (Pearson 1909, 170). In France, the cofounder of the socialist French Workers' Party, Georges Vacher de Lapouge (an anthropologist who had introduced eugenic ideas in France in the final decades of the nineteenth century), promoted the idea that male citizens should perform selectionist breeding as part of a sexual service to the nation, similar to their military service. The primary focus of eugenic thinkers, however, was on women's reproductive agency, reflecting the wider association of reproduction with women's bodies.

The eugenic concern with the improvement of the national race via the surveillance of citizens' reproductive sexuality by the state generally emerged against the political backdrop of colonial rule (Levine 2010). In colonizing states such as the United Kingdom, France, and Germany, fears about the degeneracy of the national race were intertwined with anxieties about miscegenation with colonial others. In contexts such as Switzerland and the Scandinavian countries, however, eugenic policy practices developed within an entirely different political landscape. Switzerland was never a colonial state, while the Scandinavian countries no longer had colonies (with the partial exception of Denmark) by the time eugenics emerged. A collective preoccupation with the racial hygiene of the nation nevertheless also developed in these noncolonial states (Mottier 2010).

The rise of modern social policies in the course of the twentieth century offered the institutional conditions for translating eugenic ideas into practical policy making. In the United Kingdom, the strong influence of liberal political thought with its emphasis on individual rights and attendant distrust of state intervention in private life formed an ideological barrier against invasive eugenic practices. Parliamentary attempts to pass a sterilization law foundered in the 1930s due to political opposition from the Catholic Church and the labor movement, which judged the legislation to be antiworking class (King and Hansen 1999). Political conditions were more favorable elsewhere, especially in Protestant nations such as the United States, Germany, Switzerland, and the Scandinavian countries.

The emerging welfare state also added an important additional motive to the eugenic project of preventing degeneracy of the nation: limiting public expenditure. Indeed, the inferior categories of the national population were soon to become the main recipients of the expanding welfare institutions. Sterilization of indigent single mothers came to be promoted on the grounds that it was cheaper for the state than long-term financial support. In Sweden, the eugenic sterilization of citizens labeled as *work-shy* and *asocial*,

such as prostitutes and vagrants, was portrayed as a way of strengthening the social-democratic welfare-state itself, by limiting the number of future welfare dependents.

(p. 221) Following Indiana's introduction of the first eugenic sterilization law in the world in 1907, 33 U.S. states introduced similar legislation. The majority of coerced sterilizations under eugenic statutes across the United States took place after World War 2, in the 1950s and early 1960s. By the early 1960s, the total number of recorded sterilizations had reached over 62,000, most of these performed on individuals labeled as *mentally deficient* or *mentally ill* (Largent 2008). The last known case was recorded in 1981 in Oregon, which became in 1983 the last state to repeal its sterilization law (see Kevles 1985). The Swiss canton of Vaud became the first European setting to adopt a eugenic sterilization law in 1928, a law that was officially abrogated only in 1985 (though no eugenic sterilizations have been documented since the 1960s). The Vaud law was representative of that of other countries in allowing the sterilization without consent of the mentally ill, while its 1931 criminal law included a clause allowing for eugenically motivated abortions. This is a remarkable point considering the intense political struggle to widen access to abortion several decades later. In practice, the main targets of governmental restrictions on reproduction were those categories of the population who were thought to be carriers of degenerate hereditarily transmissible characteristics: the mentally ill, the physically disabled, and those members of the underclasses whose behavior had transgressed social norms, such as unproductive "vagrants" or unmarried mothers. Denmark, Norway, Sweden, Finland, Iceland, and Estonia all passed eugenic sterilization laws in the late 1920s and early 1930s. Eugenic sterilization was applied on a particularly large scale by Nazi Germany, following the passing of the notorious 1933 Sterilization Law, which introduced compulsory sterilization on eugenic grounds. As a result, since WW2, eugenics has come to be associated with Nazism in public debate. However, eugenic state intervention found support across the political spectrum in the 1920s and 1930s. Switzerland, Sweden, and other Scandinavian countries were among the pioneers of eugenic policy making and eugenic practices in the European context, often with social-democratic as well as right-wing support.

Eugenic policy making was deeply gendered, as scholars such as Mottier (2000), Kline (2001), Schoen (2005), and Stern (2005) point out. First, the majority of those subjected to coerced sterilization were women, particularly of the underclasses. In Sweden, for example, the number of sterilizations performed on eugenic/social grounds between 1935 and 1975 is currently estimated at around 18,600, over 90 percent of which were performed on women (Broberg and Tydén 2005, 109); this is a gender proportion echoed in many other countries for which data are available. Second, eugenic policies in turn produced gender, strengthening normative models of femininity and masculinity. Indeed, it is important to emphasize that the categories of mental illness and feeble-mindedness, which were mobilized in eugenic sterilization laws, were notoriously vague at the time. They could include any kind of behaviors that deviated from social norms. The narratives used to justify eugenic sterilization of women routinely portrayed them as deviating from

(p. 222) the social norms of female respectability, in particular in terms of their sexual morality. Underclass women who had had children out of wedlock (thereby demonstrating

loose sexual morals as well as the risk of welfare dependency) thus represented particular targets of coerced sterilizations in democratic states, while women whose behavior deviated from respectable femininity in other ways were also targeted on the grounds of promiscuity, nymphomania, being oversexed, disorderly house keeping, or the inability to financially support children. The numbers of men who were subjected to eugenically motivated castrations were often already institutionalized in psychiatric or penal institutions on the grounds of sexual misbehavior. Although men labeled as sexually abnormal, such as exhibitionists or homosexuals, similarly risked so-called therapeutic castration, not all of these were eugenically driven. Such interventions also reflected the therapeutic aim of moderating deviant sex drives or were accepted voluntarily (with the pressure of long-term internment offered as only alternative). In the United States, where the gender gap in the actual numbers of sterilizations was, until the early 1960s, much less pronounced than in countries such as Sweden or Switzerland, justifications used to legitimize coerced sterilizations were similarly gendered (Kline 2001, 53). More generally, the original eugenic emphasis on the prevention of the hereditary transmission of defective characteristics became diluted in wider state measures against antisocial behaviors that were not necessarily attributed to strictly hereditary factors. This further blurred the boundaries between eugenic scientific rhetoric and its translation into concrete policy measures.

In sum, eugenic sterilization policies were heavily gendered as well as raced and classed, reflecting states' concern with control over female bodies and female sexuality as reproducers of the future nation as well as the gendered dimensions of policy making more generally that have been highlighted by political scientists such as Bacchi (1999), Stetson and Mazur (1995), and Kantola (2006). Yet it would be a mistake to assume that women were only ever victims of eugenics. While underclass women were the main social group targeted by eugenic sterilizations, middle-class women were important agents in eugenic policy making. Women's political organizations such as social purity groups were instrumental in promoting eugenic ideas in the context of wider public debates on the regulation of sexuality between the 1890s and 1930s (Gerodetti 2004). By the 1930s and 1940s, bourgeois women were actively engaged in the implementation of eugenic policies, employed as doctors or as state officials in eugenic marriage advice bureaux or carrying out voluntary work in women's charitable organizations employed with the poor or in church organizations that set up homes for unmarried mothers. Recognizing the importance of gendered models of reproductive agency is not to say, therefore, that states engaging in eugenic policy making exercised male power over its female citizens in any straightforward way. Women were often important agents in the implementation of eugenic measures, while (p. 223) men were sometimes its victims, as we have seen. Furthermore, the picture of state coercion over female reproductive bodies is further blurred by the fact that eugenic ideas could be instrumentalized by women who actively desired sterilization or abortion at a time when few alternative methods of birth control existed, as Schoen (2005) points out. Even in arenas of extreme reproductive oppression

of women such as eugenic sterilization, possibilities of subversion, resistance, and creative reappropriation of eugenic rhetoric can thus be identified.

In more recent decades, organizations defending the reproductive rights of women and men have sprung up in many countries across the world. Compensation claims and other demands for reparative justice toward past victims of coercive sterilizations have been successful in some contexts, for example, in North Carolina and Sweden, while countries such as Switzerland have rejected such demands on the rather spurious grounds that they concerned previous governments. But it is fair to say that, at least in the Western world, the most intense feminist activism has not occurred in resistance to practices of coerced sterilization but rather in defense of abortion rights.

Feminist Mobilizations and Reproductive Freedom

Access to abortion was a central claim of second-wave Western women's movements in the 1970s and 1980s. It was, arguably, instrumental in mobilizing such movements in the first place. First-wave feminist pioneers such as Marie Stopes in the United Kingdom, Margaret Sanger in the United States, or Alexandra Kollontai in the USSR had already defended the importance for women to freely make their reproductive choices in the 1920s and 1930s, promoting reproductive autonomy as a precondition for the social and political emancipation of women more generally. As Sanger, the founder of the American Birth Control League (which later became Planned Parenthood) wrote in 1919, "No woman can call herself free who does not own and control her body. No woman can call herself free until she can choose consciously whether she will or will not be a mother" (6). Like many birth control activists at the time (including Marie Stopes), however, she combined this stance with enthusiastic support for negative eugenics, advocating segregation, mandatory contraception, or compulsory sterilization of the "unfit."

The provision of sex education and contraceptive information had been promoted through the somewhat euphemistic slogan of *voluntary motherhood* since the 1870s in countries such as the United States, the United Kingdom, Germany, and Switzerland, though early first-wave feminists generally rejected (p. 224) abortion or even unnatural contraceptive devices (other than the rhythm methods) for encouraging (particularly male) promiscuity. Indeed, early birth control activists linked their claims for female bodily autonomy to a critique of male sexuality and patriarchal marriage norms more generally. Women's rights over their own bodies were primarily understood by late nineteenth-century bourgeois suffragists and sexual morality campaigners in terms of the right to refuse sexual relations with their husbands unless ensuing offspring were welcome rather than in terms of access to contraceptive devices or abortion. The right to refuse a husband's sexual demands thus became an important political claim of late nineteenth-century women's movements, in a historical and legal context that promoted the sexual

submission of women within marriage. Early first-wave feminists such as Victoria Woodhull or Angela Heywood attacked marriage laws for legalizing marital rape (Gordon 1999, 7). Sexual violence and the sexual slavery of married women were frequent tropes of Free Love activists, who advocated the abolition of the institution of marriage altogether. Claims for female bodily integrity were thus intertwined with views of male sexuality as aggressive and predatory, while women's sexual needs were seen as primarily driven by reproductive instincts rather than sexual lust. Both suffragists and Free Love activists developed a strong pro-motherhood rhetoric, with the latter arguing for the separation of motherhood and legal marriage in the interests of women as well as children (*ibid.*, 13). Women's natural mothering instincts were thus politically instrumentalized to argue women's moral superiority over men's natural sexual impurity. Birth control was consequently premised on temporary or indeed permanent sexual abstinence between spouses.

In stark contrast, the political mobilization around abortion rights that galvanized Western second-wave feminism in the 1970s (with Simone de Beauvoir playing a prominent activist role in the French context) took place in a postsexual revolution climate that generally considered female sexual agency, rather than its absence, as natural. As in first-wave feminism, political claims around abortion continue to be intertwined with debates over sex education, motherhood, femininity, and female sexuality more generally today, whereas men and masculinity are little thematized in contraceptive and abortion rights controversies.

Ongoing threats to past political achievements in this area have ensured that abortion rights continue to make cyclical reappearances on feminist agendas worldwide, against the backdrop of the rise of religious fundamentalist actors in politics since the 1980s. In the United States, abortion rights have been particularly central to recurrent attacks on political achievements in the domain of gender equality more generally by the antifeminist New Right. In reality, the identification of abortion rights with the women's movement by its opponents perhaps overstates the importance of feminist support for freedom of choice within the U.S. legislative process. Scholars such as Joffe (1995) and Kellough (1996) suggest that the support of the medical establishment, (p. 225) motivated by the desire to protect itself from governmental intrusion, was in fact crucial for passing abortion reform in the early 1970s. The so-called pro-choice movement partly overlapped with the women's movement, but they were not identical. Complex alliances arose with medical groups as well as other political actors, such as the population control organizations that had sprung up in the 1950s and 1960s (Joffe 1995; Stetson 2001, 248). Such political alliances (and resulting framing strategies) were developed by self-styled pro-life as well as pro-choice groups both within and outside of the state (Lovenduski and Outshoorn 1986; Ginsburg 1998; Stetson 2001; Ferree 2003). While not denying the importance of feminist activism, Joffe and Stetson thus suggest that the policy trajectory of abortion rights reflects the specific ways feminist claims have been intertwined with other political agendas in the U.S. context (see also Bacchi 1999, 152).

The landmark case *Roe v. Wade* (1973) signaled the Supreme Court's decision to grant women the constitutional right to abortion, though this was conditional upon their physician's support (and limited to the first trimester of pregnancy). It thereby restricted the power of the state over women's reproductive choices—if only indirectly, by protecting the autonomy of doctors (who could refuse to perform abortion on the grounds of moral objections) and doctor-patient privacy (Kellough 1996). *Roe v. Wade* has been subjected to endless legal challenges in a wide variety of U.S. states since, as documented by authors such as Luker (1984) and Solinger (1998). Over the past decade, there has been a revival of increasingly vocal antiabortion activism in the United States as well as elsewhere, which has strategically employed new medical technologies for visualizing fetuses to great emotional effect, as Morgan and Michaels (1999) and Palmer (2009) demonstrate. Yet the worldwide trend has clearly been toward an extension of abortion rights since the adoption of a recommendation to reform punitive legislation of abortion at the UN 4th World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995 (Corrêa, Petchesky, and Parker 2008, 48). Countries such as Nicaragua, El Salvador, and Poland, where access to abortion has been severely restricted in recent years, constitute exceptions that have triggered national as well as international protests.

Political mobilizations around abortion rights were central to feminist contestations of the traditional separation between *public* and *private* spheres, as expressed in the famous second-wave slogan *the personal is political*. There have been many debates within feminist scholarship about the exact meaning of this slogan. Some understood it as a call for the abolition of the family, seen as a source of women's oppression. Phillips (1998) points out that it was originally aimed at male socialist or radical activists, to remind them that their theoretical focus on capital and labor ignored the gender inequalities at home. She argues for the integration of private issues such as sexuality and reproduction into political science analyses rather than restricting the focus of the latter to conventionally public domains. Pateman (1988) calls (p. 226) for an end to the distinction between public and private spheres to facilitate greater politicisation of issues previously defined as private. In contrast, Elshtain (1981) vehemently rejects such collapsing of the private into the public as totalitarian, since it would leave no area of social life outside of politics. Political theorists such as Petchesky (1984), Okin (1991), and Phillips (1991) similarly use abortion rights to argue for the importance of maintaining a separation between the public and the private. They think that reproductive choices should remain part of a private sphere, based on principles of privacy and individual decisionmaking. Such principles have been central to the defense of constitutionally guaranteed individual abortion rights by liberal legal theorists such as Ronald Dworkin (1993), as well as feminist liberal political theorists. Phillips, for example, argues that whereas the public sphere has conventionally been associated with male political agency and the private sphere with childrearing, sexuality, and the family—traditionally considered a female domain—the distinction between the two spheres should be detached from gender roles and based instead on a right to privacy, itself best seen as degendered.

Reproductive Rights

This position has been criticized by radical feminists, most prominently by Catherine MacKinnon (1983, 1987), who argues that the appeal to liberal notions of privacy and “a woman’s right to choose” reflects male interests. Echoing Adrienne Rich’s (1977) views, MacKinnon conceptualizes abortion as another sign of what she believes to be the generalized male sexual exploitation of women rather than in terms of women’s reproductive control. As a feminist strategy the appeal to women’s individual rights is particularly misguided, she believes, since it leaves the foundations of male violence against women unchallenged. Petchesky’s ([1984]1990) influential work *Abortion and Woman’s Choice* argued for a critical rethinking of the limits of principles of privacy and personal choice, which rejected MacKinnon’s theorization of women as agencyless victims of male domination for its reductionism. Instead, Petchesky undertook to salvage rights-based politics around abortion by emphasizing the need to address concrete inequalities in the conditions in which different categories of women make their individual reproductive choices and by calling for state-funded social supports to help decrease such inequalities for example around race and class. Abortion rights should not be seen as individual rights, she argued, but rather as social rights, requiring a cultural revolution in our understanding of sexuality and reproductive freedom (396). From a different theoretical angle, Drucilla Cornell (1995) revisits abortion rights discourse to develop a defense of abortion rights that proposes to rethink the liberal notions of rights and privacy. Drawing on the work of John Rawls, Cornell argues that these categories should not be treated as takenforgranted or preexisting but rather as future possibilities and aspirations.

(p. 227) **The Gender Politics of New Reproductive Technologies**

Whereas feminist mobilizations around abortion and contraception have generally portrayed the latter as individual technologies and their access framed in terms of women's individual rights, as we have seen, the emergence of new reproductive technologies in recent years has triggered debates questioning the scope for individual choice. New reproductive practices such as in vitro fertilization, artificial insemination, sperm and egg donation, genetic engineering, and ultrasound screening have given rise to new areas for feminist thought and practice over recent decades. In the early years of second-wave feminism, Shulamith Firestone (1970) argued that the problematic linkage of female identity to nature and especially to women's reproductive functions should, in future times, be dissolved through new technologies of artificial reproduction and contraception. For Firestone, as for de Beauvoir (to whom Firestone's book was dedicated) before her, women's biology and central role in reproductive work were largely to blame for women's subordinate position within society. Firestone's classic and influential text *The Dialectic of Sex: The Case for Feminist Revolution* called for cybernetic technologies that would release women from the burden of giving birth. Allowing for reproduction to take place in laboratory settings would free women from the "barbarity" of both childbirth and pregnancy, that "temporary deformation of the body of the individual for the sake of the species," Firestone (188) argued. To escape the constraints of motherhood, Firestone advocated the abolition of the nuclear family, proposing to raise children instead in communal settings. The utopian cybernetic communism that she outlined would require four sets of revolutionary transformations, which Firestone theorized as intricately intertwined with each other: (1) the "freeing of women from the tyranny of reproduction by every means possible, and the diffusion of the child-rearing role to the society as a whole, men as well as women" (193); (2) "political autonomy, based on economic independence, of both women and children" (194); (3) "the complete integration of women and children into society" through the abolition of institutions such as schools that bar children from adult society—instead, relationships between adults and children should become equal and intimate, based on free choice rather than material dependency (195); (4) "the sexual freedom of all women and children" (195). Indeed, reflecting the author's borrowing of Freudian views of children as inherently sexual beings, Firestone argued against sexual repression, promoting sexual freedom for women as well as children. In Firestone's protechnology, antinatalist work, the futuristic reproductive technologies that she called for were thus portrayed in positive terms as a tool for women's liberation and societal progress more generally.

(p. 228) However, by the time such technologies became a reality, feminist responses to the developments of reproductive (and genetic) medicine were initially characteristically suspicious. In this, they echoed early hostile reactions to the invention and distribution of the contraceptive pill in the 1960s. Rather than interpreting the pill as a tool for women's

sexual liberation (which it later was blamed for being), 1960s feminist activists criticised the perceived increase in medical control over female bodies as well as the health risks involved, which at the time were indeed much stronger than today. In a similar vein, authors such as Ann Oakley (1987) feared that those in control of reproductive technologies, doctors and the state, would gain unprecedented control over women, treating them as “walking wombs,” a vision that was also central to Margaret Atwood’s dystopian novel *The Handmaid’s Tale*, which was published in 1985 and triggered much public debate at the time. Concerns were also voiced about the political accountability of reproductive science and medicine. Andrea Dworkin (1983, 183) predicted a future of “reproductive brothels,” where women’s wombs would be sold by male doctors or scientists, “a new kind of pimp,” in the same way as female bodies were already being sold for male sexual pleasure. “Motherhood is becoming a new branch of female prostitution,” Dworkin (181) argued.

The Feminist International Network for Resistance to Reproductive and Genetic Engineering (FINRRAGE), founded in 1984, emerged as the most prominent voice in the feminist critique of reproductive technologies (and technology more generally). Regrouping authors such as Gena Corea, Renate Klein, Raymond and Robyn Rowland, Maria Mies, and Janice Raymond, FINRRAGE adopted a strongly antitechnological stance. They declared that reproductive technologies are, by definition, patriarchal and detrimental to women and aim at male control of female bodies. As Raymond (1993, xxxi) put it, “Technological reproduction is first and foremost about the appropriation of the female body,” whereas Mies (1987, 43) wrote that “any woman who is prepared to have a child manufactured for her by a fame- and money-greedy biotechnician must know that in this way she is not only fulfilling herself an individual, often egoistic wish to have a baby, but also surrendering yet another part of the autonomy of the female sex over childbearing to the technopatriarchs.” For Corea (1985, 303), “in controlling the female generative organs and processes, doctors are fulfilling a male need to control woman’s procreative power.”

The role of men as fathers received little analytic attention in FINRRAGE’s writings. To the extent that fathers do appear, they are accused of sharing the general male envy of women’s child-bearing capacity and of intending to use the new technologies to wrestle women’s procreative power away from them (e.g. Rowland 1984; Corea 1985, 9; Raymond 1993, 29–75). As Raymond (1993, 30) put it, “Fatherhood, not motherhood, is empowered by the new reproductive techniques” that create new norms of fatherhood grounded in male gametes and genes rather than child-rearing work. Rowland used powerful language to warn that new reproductive techniques might lead to the “final solution to the woman question,” rendering women “obsolete” if control over childbearing, that “last (p. 229) power,” was wrestled away from them by men (368). In this she echoed Dworkin’s (1983) warning of a new kind of holocaust, a “gynocide” where reproductive technologies such as artificial insemination and IVF, in combination with “racist programs of forced sterilization,” would give men “the means to create and control the kind of women they want:...domestics, sex prostitutes and reproductive prostitutes” (188). Raymond (1993, 32) argued that surrogacy practices create a

“spermocracy” in which “male potency is power, exercised politically against the real potency of women, whose far greater contribution and relationship to the child is rendered powerless.” In this analysis, the new reproductive techniques thus produce a shift in gender power that puts fathers back in patriarchal control over their offspring, echoing the gendered model of procreative agency that I have highlighted as characteristic of Greek antiquity earlier in this chapter. The ensuing political economy of a “spermatic market” is ruled by men’s “liquid assets,” involving the creation of a “breeder class of women sanctioned by the state” (ibid., 35). FINRRAGE feared that the political power of what Raymond calls “father essentialism” and “ejaculatory fatherhood” would further increase the power of the fathers’ rights movements that emerged since the 1970s, against a backdrop of controversies around child custody and family law more generally in countries such as the United Kingdom, United States, Canada, Italy, Greece, and Germany. Organizations such as *Families Need Fathers* or *Fathers 4 Justice* have engaged in increasingly vocal political activism over the past decade.

More generally, FINRRAGE theorized new reproductive technologies as male tools for propping up patriarchy, pointing at the formal or informal exclusion of single and lesbian women from practices such as artificial insemination with donor, access to which was, until recent years, often made conditional on being married. FINRRAGE thus developed a strongly binary theorization of reproductive medicine as an arena of male power over passive, female bodies, where women-hating male scientists or “pharmacrats,” to borrow Corea’s vocabulary, perform invasive, expensive, and risky interventions on women’s bodies (see also Klein 1989). Additionally, similarly to Stanworth (1987), FINRRAGE warned that techniques such as artificial insemination represented a slippery slope toward eugenics (Finger 1984; Corea 1985; Spallone 1987; Steinberg 1987). This argument was put particularly vehemently by Corea (1985), whose book *The Mother Machine* started with an outline of the ways artificial insemination could be used in eugenic programs to improve the quality of the human race by selecting who would be allowed to reproduce. Corea warned that while sterilization and birth control had, in past times, been tools of “negative eugenics” (which aims to prevent breeding by “defective” individuals), reproductive technologies such as artificial insemination, embryo transfer, IVF, cloning and “artificial wombs” offered dangerous new possibilities for “positive eugenics” (increasing reproduction by those categories of the population that are considered superior) (Corea 1985, 20). Other authors criticized the formal or informal exclusion of disabled women from such practices (e.g., Steinberg 1987). FINRRAGE’s founding resolution thus included opposition to “eugenic population policies, in particular the (p. 230) fabrication of ‘perfect babies’” as well as the fight against the “expropriation” and “dissection” of the female body by new reproductive practices (ibid., 329).

Today, both the extreme antitechnology and antinatalist stances have faded into the backdrop in feminist thought. The role and impact of reproductive and genetic medicine on gender relations and politics of the body tend to be debated in considerably less hostile terms, despite the fact that some of the worst fears of FINRRAGE, including the commercialization of new reproductive technologies and inequalities in access to the possibilities that they offer, have long since become reality. Instead, recent scholarship

explores the ways practices in these fast-moving fields are profoundly transforming ideas of parenthood, kinship, and nature and the subjective meanings that women and men who undergo fertility treatments give to their experiences (e.g., Franklin 1997, 2007; see also Edwards et al. 1993; Farquhar 1996). Whereas feminist debates on reproductive medicine in the 1980s and 1990s had tended to center on the Western contexts in which the new techniques first emerged, recent anthropological studies have done much to enrich current understandings of the ways reproductive rights and politics are subjectively experienced by citizens in non-Western as well as Western contexts and to identify interactions and negotiations between state institutions, private businesses, and religious authorities in such settings. Nowadays, the highest rate of IVF treatments in the world is found in Israel. As Susan Kahn's (2000) book *Reproducing Jews* highlights, assisted conception has been enthusiastically embraced in this country, where it is promoted by ultraorthodox and secular forces alike. New reproductive techniques have also been welcomed in various Muslim countries, as demonstrated by Marcia Inhorn's series of studies of practices of egg and sperm donation in Egypt, Iran, and Lebanon (Inhorn 2007; Inhorn et al. 2009); Irène Maffi's (2012) research on state policies around childbirth in Jordan, which discusses the ways state-promoted obstetric techniques have transformed the relationship of Jordanian women with their reproductive bodies; and Zeynep Gürtin's (2012) analysis of IVF practices in Turkey. While these authors importantly remind us of the cultural specificity of local experiences, other scholars have called for political and research strategies that explore transnational structural inequalities in the politics of reproduction, emphasizing the need to identify possibilities for global political alliances (Ginsburg and Rapp 1995).

Concluding Comments

To conclude, reproductive rights have been one of the central arenas in which feminists have creatively questioned conventional understandings of politics and problematized previously taken-for-granted divisions between the public and the private spheres. Abortion rights in particular continue to act as a yardstick for women's rights and gender equality more generally. They consequently continue (p. 231) to be the target of renewed political attacks from religious fundamentalist and other conservative forces in many national settings today. Gender scholarship in this area has produced a rethinking of the boundaries of the political, emphasizing the importance of the body, sexuality, and normative models of masculinity and femininity for political theory as well as practice. Such research has demonstrated how some categories of citizens are encouraged to reproduce, while others are disempowered from doing so, in ways that reflect power relations around gender. It has also highlighted the importance of exploring what Colen (1986) calls *stratified reproduction*, that is, the ways gender power intersects with sexual identity, social class, disability, race, and other identity markers in reproductive activities. Men and (heterosexual or gay) fathers still remain somewhat of a blind spot in much theoretical and empirical research on reproductive rights and politics, however. For

example, a review of anthropological research on women's reproductive agency and health carried out in 1996 identified over 150 volumes dedicated to these topics, but only very few studies of men's reproductive experiences (Inhorn 2006; see also Inhorn et al. 2009) or of gay men as fathers, caregivers, or sperm donors (but see Mosegaard 2009).

More generally, contemporary political theorists have importantly shown the implicitly male-centered bias of much of political thought (Coole 1987; Pateman 1988). Traditional political theory has relegated themes conventionally associated with femininity such as reproduction, childcare, and sexuality to the private sphere and therefore outside of the scope of both politics and political theory (see also Mottier 2004, 281). Themes such as men's procreative activities, male sexualities, or the role of men in childrearing have thus been neglected in (mainstream as well as feminist) political debate and theory, as political theorists such as Pateman (1988) and Carver (2004) point out. In this sense and despite FINRRAGE's gloomy warnings of a male war against female procreative prominence, men remain the second sex in reproduction.¹

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Notes:

(1.) I borrow this expression from Inhorn et al. (2009).

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