

Research Note

REVISITING MARY O'BRIEN - REPRODUCTIVE CONSCIOUSNESS AND LIQUID MATERNITY

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Biographical Note

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Abstract

This research note examines feminist theory from socialist feminism through the post-structural turn associated with thinkers like Foucault, Derrida and Butler to neo-materialism, this last noted for its emphasis on the body's materiality as opposed to the subject as a socially constructed or merely linguistic practice. Tracing these theoretical developments is contextualized with respect to theories and concepts such as feminist standpoint theories of epistemology, historical materialism and Baumann's "liquid modernity". I ask: have we lost sight of the strength of feminist structuralism - particularly the effects of capital - in order to accommodate multiple and complex subjectifications associated with gender? Mary O'Brien's reproductive consciousness, her argument that women's consciousness is fundamentally shaped through the different moments related to reproduction, is re-examined in light of recent

developments in egg donation and surrogacy. This is not intended as an exercise in romantic longing for some sort of utopian society where femininity is venerated. Rather, it is an exploration of the potential for reproductive consciousness to guide political responses to contemporary problems raised by new reproductive technologies that combine capital and gender in a single dialectic.

Keywords

gender, liquid modernity, post-structuralism, socialist feminism, surrogacy

Over twenty five years ago in Britain I attended a conference on feminist responses to then emerging new reproductive technologies, commonly known as NRTs and primarily involving *in vitro* fertilization or the externalization of conception. I listened as the speaker, a well-published British socialist feminist, chided another group of feminists. She characterized these women as radical feminists for terms they used in their responses to NRTs, including “mother machines” (Corea 1985) and “test-tube women,” (Duelli-Klein and Minden, 1984) terms that drew attention to what Somer Brodribb (1992) has described as “the total mining of the female body for raw material” by and for men. It was understood, of course, that “radical feminists” was an insult, and referred to a simplistic, universalizing and essentializing rhetoric of all men dominating all women, in contrast to the rigorous theorizing that socialist feminism offered. For British socialist feminists, radical feminism focussed too exclusively on the struggles between men and women within patriarchy, overlooking the (central) importance of class struggle, including women's involvement in such as either bourgeois or working class women (for a socialist feminist discussion of this, see Eisenstein 1999). Radical feminists countered that left movements were dominated by male theorists and practically, by men, so leaving out critical issues, like violence against women, that matter to women.

My doctoral work was based on a socialist feminist approach, specifically Mary O’Brien’s reworking of Marxist thought. As I will discuss later, O’Brien’s theory draws on Hegelian dialects and Marxist historical materialism, but places reproduction – human procreation – as the ultimate materialist basis for social relationships. Despite my use of O’Brien’s Hegelian and Marxist-inspired theoretical work, I was perceived as a radical feminist by association at the conference twenty five years ago. At the time, I studied IVF dissemination in Britain alongside Sarah Franklin, Deborah Steinberg, Pat Spallone, Renate Duelli-Klein and Jalna Hanmer. These feminist scholars sought to displace male-centred theorizing and struggle with women-centered analyses. For instance, Jalna Hanmer (Hanmer and Maynard, 1987) has been concerned with men’s violence against women and the ways that it is connected to men’s authority and privilege within families as fathers, husbands, brothers and sons. But specifically with respect to the new reproductive technologies, these women identified then-new reproductive technologies using patriarchy as the primary lens, arguing that they were essentially male efforts to control women’s reproductive experiences (for a helpful summary see Franklin 2011). Many of these women

helped establish FINRAGE in 1986 or the "Feminist International Network of Resistance to Reproductive and Genetic Engineering," as a logical political consequence of this identification of NRT with male domination over women. I learned to live with the paradox of identifying simultaneously as a socialist feminist and with the theoretical and political positions developed by these so-called radical feminists around NRT. I came to the position that although the language of my friends and colleagues may have seemed florid to the British Left feminists and insufficiently "class" based as a critique, it shed light on the socio-political effects of NRTs as an expression of what O'Brien calls "male-stream thought." Such vocabulary remains valid in the assessment of current trends in reproductive politics as a combined product of capitalism and patriarchy. Or as Pat Armstrong and Hugh Armstrong stated: "Patriarchy and capitalism are not autonomous, nor even interconnected systems, but the same system. As integrated forms they must be examined together" (1985; 23).

In my doctoral work, I relied on Mary O'Brien's theory of reproductive consciousness, which emphasizes that the body shapes consciousness and does so in ways that are different for men and women (O'Brien 1981). At the same time, I sought to incorporate what I was learning from the radical feminists about patriarchy, especially as expressed through male medical control over women's bodies. My aim was to establish a framework of critical reflection on both the commercial and scientific interests in IVF as patriarchal; when I say "commercial" I am of course referring to the ways that capital imperatives to make profit are shaped by patriarchal interests. In her book, *The Mother Machine*, Corea (1985) wrote about such dynamics this way, but with an emphasis on the state rather than capital: "Just as the patriarchal state now finds it acceptable to market parts of a woman's body (breast, vagina, buttocks) for sexual purposes in prostitution [...] so it will soon find it reasonable to market other parts of a woman (womb, ovaries, egg) for reproductive purposes" (quoted in Mahjouri 1994). Following such leads, I embarked on my work with the support of one of Mary O'Brien's closest students, Somer Brodrigg. Brodrigg's best-known work *Nothing Matters* (1992) ruthlessly critiques the unspoken centre of postmodernism as being male-centered and misogynist texts. She argues that feminist efforts to use postmodernism to further feminism are bound to founder because postmodernism is fundamentally rooted in de-materialized male ontologies, temporalities and concerns. Brodrigg was also among the first to activate O'Brien's philosophy of birth in reproductive policy analysis, so bringing back in the maternal body that postmodernists sought to abstract from their theories.

For years, I wanted to bring together the theoretical insights of the socialist feminists who thought us so-called radical feminists' work so anti-theoretical, with the ground-breaking work of those of us who entered and sometimes worked alongside reproductive scientists and medical practitioners. I admired the rich critical heritage of the Marxist feminists such as Lynda Burke, who has long examined the materialist conditions of the biological sciences (1986). But I could see what former scientists such as Pat Spallone (1989) and Renate Duelli Klein (with Minden, 1984) meant by the objectification of femininity, as they described the transformation of women into objectified bodies subject to expert masculine (and medicalized) manipulations, within the then exploding field of assisted conception. The following is another attempt at bringing the two

sides together. My first efforts, early in my career, were wobbly; they are hopefully less wobbly this time. I start by asking: is a feminist Marxist and Hegelian historical materialism, as articulated by Mary O'Brien as reproductive consciousness, relevant in light of contemporary reproductive issues, namely egg donation and surrogacy? Does reproductive consciousness help explain what I see as a growing need for women to self-determine their maternity?

The Dialectics of Reproduction

O'Brien's theory of reproductive consciousness goes beyond developing a feminist aspect of or response to Marxist thought. She proffers a refocused dialectic materialism, but one that doesn't aim for gender equity in the theory of political economy. Instead, her approach posits gender differentiation in historical materialism, methodologically and theoretically – and O'Brien posits this difference as foundational, grounded in the differences between men and women's bodies in human reproduction or procreation. As Pfeufer Kahn (1999) puts it, O'Brien theorized "women's childbearing as constitutive of the human world" (p.6). O'Brien recognizes and *values* equally but distinctly feminine and masculine mediations of time and place; she traces these distinctive mediations back to women and men's different role in human reproduction. This profound restructuring of base and superstructure, so that it is rooted in human reproduction (the making of human life) and not in reproductive labour (required to maintain life) as in Marxist theories, is what O'Brien calls "the philosophy of birth." This philosophy of birth is "part of but separate from the historical movement of class struggle" (p. 7). More than this, a philosophy of birth is necessarily *prior to* philosophies of class struggle: "in order for there to be history at all, humans have to be born and it is to women that this generative act has fallen" (Pfeufer Kahn 1999, p. 8, summarizing O'Brien). Human history may be the history of class struggle; but for there to be any human history at all there is necessarily human reproduction first.

In *The Politics of Reproduction* (1981), O'Brien engages with Hegel's analytical insight into family formation (contraction) under capitalism. Like Hegel she maintains that human consciousness resists alienation but O'Brien goes further and distinguishes female alienation from male alienation and treats alienation as a process that extends beyond the bounds of political economy. She draws upon Marx's analytical method to examine social structures in terms of economic ontology, that is the ways that our experience of "being" are rooted in historically contingent social (class) relations and ultimately the prevailing mode of production and his related argument that biological needs are socially mediated. O'Brien combines all three of these powerful historical materialist insights about family life and social relationships into a new theory of reproduction. O'Brien acknowledges the ways that "reproduction becomes commodity production just as the social relations of reproduction have become property relations" (p.10). That is, various aspects and processes of reproduction may be bought and sold, like any other commodity, echoing the ways that private ownership has transformed

reproduction relations to serve the needs of capital. But O'Brien's main point "is that [the] reproductive process is not only the material base of the historical forms of the social relations of reproduction, but that it is a dialectical process, which changes historically" (p 21). Reproduction and our social mediation of the reproductive consciousness that arises through the gender-differentiated physical, material and bodily acts of reproduction creates social structure and changes over time. This is a typical historical materialist insight into the ways that social relations are historically contingent and changing rather than eternal, but posits the embodied experience of reproduction and resulting consciousness as the bases for social change. However, O'Brien insists, we have, for a very long time, allowed for a masculine dominant structuration -- to borrow from Giddens' development of Marxist thought in late modernity -- by ghettoizing or denying reproductivity from the dialectic of sociality. As O'Brien puts it, "Reproductive process is not a process which male-stream thought finds either ontologically or epistemologically interesting" (1983, p.21). How relevant is this insight today?

On re-reading O'Brien after years of teaching postmodern social theory, which is striking for the ways it reprises a pseudo-universalistic "view from nowhere" that is actually profoundly masculine (again see Brodribb 1992), I am struck by her epistemological self-reflexivity. She acknowledges that "feminist theory has to be biased because it is anti-bias" (p. 12). Of course, this reflexivity may be familiar to many Marxists, never mind socialist feminists, who recognize the ways that knowledge is shaped by historically contingent social relationships and the relative social location of the knower; the standpoint of working class consciousness developed through struggle is privileged epistemologically. Such Marxists too, claim that historical materialist and socialist feminist theory will "look biased" within a social class structure that marginalizes and denies revolutionary knowledge that challenges a status quo. This knowledge will be marginalized and denied in the interests of the dominant, capitalist class; O'Brien similarly claims feminist knowledge about reproduction will be marginalized within male-dominated science. Indeed, here, O'Brien is recognizing the ways that dominant male social science -- and much leftist and socialist social science -- has tried to dismiss feminism as essentialist and monolithic.

Many socialist feminists will be less pleased that I do not see O'Brien's theory of reproductive consciousness as incompatible with poststructuralism. I can even imagine her acknowledging the unhinging of desire from sex to consumption; from the political to the libidinal economy (Lyotard, 1974). Yet I can also imagine her explanation of the poststructural shift, which was so strong in Western academia in the 1990s, as yet more examples of the dominant masculine (lack of) reproductive consciousness and a social dialectic redux (historical materialism based on the social conditions of production and without regard to reproduction). To twist Frederic Jameson's (1991) insights into postmodernism as the "cultural logic of late capitalism" (1991), poststructuralism is symptomatic of a late capitalism that is increasingly clever and fluid, engaging us individualistically through desire. In the current phase of capitalism, insatiable desire is promoted over that which produces; including reproduction processes that produces people, produces mothers (and fathers, sisters, brothers and all aspects of our kinship systems). Although poststructuralism can provide useful and insightful descriptors of

late capitalism, post-structural discourse continues with the disavowal of reproductivity as consciousness, as dialectic and as ontologically important. But historical materialism doesn't have to repeat such disavowals -- this is clear when examining the material dialectic of NRTs or the reproduction of reproduction.

Unhinging the Dialectic: Postmodernities and the Desire for Life Itself

O'Brien relies on a steady state of gender and makes a distinction between natural human needs and the social mediation of such needs. Of course, the latter is familiar to Marxists, who emphasize the historically specific nature of needs. But her conceptualization of gender includes no reference to distinctions among women based on race, global positioning, sexual orientation and ironically, class. This does not, however, mean that her theory cannot be reconsidered to take into account the complexities of women's relationships with men and with each other across the world political economy and a global patriarchy – indeed, I will return to these issues shortly. O'Brien also assumes a steady state of economics and never considered nor analysed the social shifts resulting from emerging social media systems, the domination of consumerism and the risk society. She did not consider the advent of what some have referred to as neoliberal forms of capitalism and the associated expansion of the market nexus, which has surely shaped the development of reproductive technologies, medicine and related concerns. She certainly did not discuss the agency of ultra sound machines, nor agential realism, following Barad (eg., 2003) who argued against linguistic social constructionism and for a new form of materiality that takes into account the ways that "human" and "nonhuman" agencies are intertwined in their *becoming* and *knowing*. Although O'Brien was unable to entertain these social and theoretical developments, I argue that there is value to her theory of reproductive consciousness, especially in light of recent developments in new reproductive technologies. But first I would like to revisit Bauman's concept of liquidity and apply it to the reproductive technology sphere.

Liquid modernity is Bauman's (2000) explanation of the capitalization of ambivalence and chaos characterized by amorality. Liquid modernity is thus contrasted with a more "solid" Weberian modernity, in which chaos and change is contained through predictable bureaucratic structures, sometimes with horrific results as in the Holocaust's bureaucratic manufacturing of death. But in liquid modernity, it is not just the processes of society that have become more fluid, due to new media and communication technologies, but the purposes of life, that to which we dedicate ourselves. Need no longer drives consumption; although it should be recognized that this does not mean that sometimes desperate need does not exist – certainly, these needs do exist among the world's underclass and working poor. But for much of the First World, the need for human reproduction has been replaced by a chaotic ambivalence of north western consumerism driving "life itself" (Franklin, 1997). There is constant flux since, in principle, such consumer drive can never be satiated. In the world of NRT, specifically, the advent of liquid modernity is characterized by the harnessing of pluripotent stem cells for medical, pharmaceutical and

industrial applications as well as the unbridled business of reproductive medicine in the First World. In other worlds on this planet, Second, Third and Fourth Worlds that are not only geographically in the global south but also in the ghettos of the First World, organs, gametes and reproductive capacities, including gestation, birth and lactation, are all for sale on an open and barely unregulated market.

How does liquidity relate to political life? It has become difficult to articulate social issues as social says Bauman. There is no readily-available political means nor readily available political language for translating individual problems into shared and common goals for social change. Our problems are now constructed so that we must face them individually. Life appears to be complicated and highly inter-related, especially in terms of security and risk but life is simultaneously atomized. We are encouraged to self-improve constantly and on every level of being: Our appearance, our sexual performance, our parenting, our work, our retirement from work and so on. At least this is true in the North and West. "Organization" has lost its political connotations. Rather, "organization" is more often devoted to individualized activities of self-improvement such as Weight Watchers where there is never any conclusion to the problem of being overweight; indeed, a profitable business model depends on perpetual dissatisfaction. Here the individual is not transformed into a political person, but is kept as an individual struggling against their own, constantly specified (weight) problem. Added to this is what Thomas Mathiesen (1997) calls synopticism or the reversal of Foucault's panopticon, where we are becoming the many who delight in the watching of the few. Political, joint, common or shared issues are replaced by public confessionals, especially TV talk shows, reality shows and the Internet (Bauman, 2013). And to this I add that in the West, reproduction has been equally atomized and synopticized while simultaneously flowing through globalized pathways of capital that maintain Othered populations as such. The reproductive collectivity on which O'Brien's theory of reproductive consciousness depends has also become unhinged in the globalized market that is assisted conception, banked gametes, and surrogate mothering.

Reproductive Consciousness (I) - From Maternity to Paternity

O'Brien describes the family as

... a historical development with its roots in a natural necessity... biological continuity... the helplessness of the newborn, the socialization and education of the child and the sexual relations of men and women... The necessity itself is invariant, and women's place in the social relations of reproduction is therefore circumscribed by her childbearing function [however the] reproductive process is not only the material base of the historical forms of the social relations of reproduction, but that it is also a dialectic process, which changes historically. (1981; 19-21)

Reproductive consciousness is first acknowledging the historical materialism of reproduction and then improving and expanding on the valuing of the feminine component – which is today scarcely recognized in social theory, and much less in political action. I would add today, feminine “components,” because women do not experience reproduction equally. In what socialist feminists might call a global political economy of reproduction, women's experiences of reproduction are shaped by class, race, disability and other relations of social inequality. But first let's look at the current state of NRTs, while not forgetting their predecessors, or the so-called old reproductive technologies, by which we typically mean abortion, contraception and the medicalization of pregnancy and birth.

As with most western and northern states, Canada sought to legislate NRTs during the 1990s. However, the United Kingdom was the first to provide an umbrella legislative format for both new and old technologies, based on the 1985 Warnock Report. Here social ideals of reproduction are laid out -- who has access and who pays, for example-- and a role for national legislation and monitoring of the NRTs is provided. In the United Kingdom this was met immediately with varied feminist criticism (Duelli-Klein, 1984; Corea, 1985; Stanworth, 1987; Spallone, 1989), among other voices. Briefly, access was denied non heterosexual couples and there were concerns over the commercialization of reproduction, including the selling of gametes and reproductive services, especially in surrogacy. Feminist critiques thus immediately observed that in such legislation, all women are not equal, as, for example, in Gena Corea's reference to a “caste of childbearers” (1988; 272) and Janice Raymond's analysis of NRTs in terms of “reproductive neoliberalism” and the international trafficking of women, children and fetuses. (1993) In response, Michelle Stanworth characterizes these perspectives as essentialist and as running the risk of returning women to a passive and fixed position in the private sphere. (1987) At the same time, fears about commercialization are clearly concerns about the commodification of human body parts; these arguably combined with recognition that racialized, working and under-class women are more likely to face pressures to “sell” reproductive services given economic precarity and racial discrimination affecting income. Which, as we will see below, is precisely what is happening in India with surrogacy for western clients.

Canada followed the United Kingdom with its own legislation, albeit after a much longer deliberation over the details. After almost a decade of debates, the Canadian Assisted Reproduction Act was passed (2004). As with abortion law in Canada, however, it was repealed, struck down by the Supreme Court of Canada in 2010 as an infringement on provincial rights to regulate the practice of medicine. Unlike the United Kingdom, the 2004 legislation in Canada initially allowed for single women – a group also presumably including women in same-gender relationships -- to access NRTs and older technologies of assisted conception such as artificial insemination. Like the United Kingdom, the Canadian legislation forbade commercialization of gametes and reproductive services, including surrogacy. The legislation also provided for federal-level monitoring of NRTs and the use of human gametes and now stem cells. Since this legislation was passed, monitoring has been off-loaded from the state and is now self-directed by

professional associations.

Let's step back a moment to consider the path of reproductive rights in countries with stable political life and sufficient, if unequal economies. In the later 1960s, chiefly due to the development of the hormonal contraceptive, The Pill, most countries in Northern Europe and some in the communist states of southern Europe, along with Canada, the United States and Australia passed legislation allowing women access to effective contraceptives and reliable contraceptive information. Many included the legalization of abortion in this move. Undoubtedly women's rights movements, which were predominantly middle-class and white, had a lot to do with this. Of course, mainstream feminism has since learned what African American women and other racialized women have known all along – that they were and are more interested in safe places to raise their children and food security than contraception and abortion. Indeed, Black women, immigrant women, poor women and Third World women are assumed to be poor because of their "uncontrolled" fertility; so that considerable research funds, state interventions – often coercive – have been mobilized to limit the number of brown babies being born (Petchesky, 1995). And then there is that uncomfortable information about the testing of hormonal contraceptives on so-called Third World women; these women have long resisted having their reproduction subject to surveillance and control, including by non-governmental 'aid' organizations (Akhter, 1995). So what are "hard-won" reproductive rights for white middle class women are sometimes seen as irrelevant or even inscribed in state disciplining mechanisms among non-white – and disabled -- and other marginalized women.

Since then, there have been significant erosions of hard-won reproductive rights in the North and West, particularly regarding abortion. We have also seen the meteoric rise of medical, scientific and pharmaceutical interests in the application of stem cell research; this echoes business-driven models of health that direct resources to the problems of the wealthy and away from population health measures that will improve health and wellbeing for the unprofitable poor (Coburn, and Coburn 2007). And also relevant are struggles for protections of family formation non-medically: the rights of gay, lesbian, trans and two-spirited people to form families and to be recognized as such from synagogue to internal revenue.

How does reproductive consciousness relate? Well this potted history of reproduction in the modern northwest is an excellent example of O'Brien's main thesis: reproduction is historical, material and dialectic. For instance, what reproductive technologies emerge depend on historically specific configurations, including pharmaceuticals pushing business model agendas within capitalist medicine but also struggles by middle-class women for various reproductive rights, including safe and effective pharmaceutical contraceptives. These are material, because, for example, birth control allows heterosexual women to control family size and helps women participate in the public labour force as wage earners. They are dialectical since not only as effective birth control technologies are a fairly recent development (the Pill became widely available in the north and west in the 1960s), but their dissemination worldwide is spotty and flows according to divergent interests. Typically in the north and west they flow according to individualized rights to reproductive control, whereas in other places and among poor and other

undesirable populations, they are required or hinged to financial incentive programs.

But what of the other main part of O'Brien's argument: the devaluing of feminine reproductive consciousness in favour of a dominant masculine one? Also, are there only two such aspects of reproductive consciousness? In terms of both the old reproductive technologies and the new ones, legislation reflects dominant reproductive consciousness in assumptions about female reproductivity as natural and expected in ideal social contexts ("stable, heterosexual couples" is how the Warnock Report worded it, in language that is both racially and class loaded – whose families are "stable"? -- and explicitly heteronormative). Brodribb describes the advent of assisted conception in terms of historical materialism in that it "steals" children from their (surrogate) mothers (often poor, often racialized, often Third or Fourth world) and reinforces paternal rights through genetic essentialism (1986; 423). Meanwhile the business of assisting reproduction is estimated one decade ago in the United States alone at \$3 billion annually while saying nothing about the value of the gametes and stem cells gathered in reproductive procedures for pure scientific research and non-reproductive medical and pharmaceutical applications (Spar, 2006).

Reproductive Consciousness (II): From Patriarchal Materialism to Liquid Maternity

Catherine Walby and Melinda Cooper (2010) have recently referred to what they see as the shift from reproductive work to "regenerative labour" in the stem cell industry. Also in the last five years it became possible to freeze human eggs, which has given rise to terms such as "egg banking" (young professional women hyperovulate and freeze their eggs for IVF and implantation once their careers are established), "egg donation," and "egg adoption" (the giving and receiving aspects in NRTs). The practice in Canada drew the attention of investigative science reporter, Alison Motluck, who unearthed disturbing details of physical side effects from the hyperovulation of women involved in the face of various pressures in the emerging market in human eggs. In the meantime, surrogacy, especially commercial surrogacy grows, including in Canada where it was initially prohibited but is now in legal limbo. Surrogacy is expanding mostly in places like India where a 2012 article in *The Lancet* reports that:

Commercial surrogacy was legalised in India in 2002, as part of the country's drive to promote medical tourism, an industry that the Confederation of Indian Industry predicts now generates US\$2.3 billion annually. Estimates are hard to come by, but more than 25 000 children are now thought to be born to surrogates in India; 50% of these are from the West (Shetty, 2012; 1633).

All of these developments represent a new rupture between a woman and her child and unhinge reproductive labour from the female body. These recent developments confirm and enhance what Brodribb argued in the mid-1980s when conception was first externalized from women's

bodies: what was once difficult to know, the paternity of a child, can now be confirmed; and what was once certain, maternity, is now uncertain (1986). In the almost three decades since Brodribb applied reproductive consciousness this way, maternity and reproduction have become even more fluid; extending through an international and commercially vibrant reproductive medical practice that includes surrogacy and replicative processes that produce no children but capitalize on a regenerative capacity at the cellular level. This maternity also flows through globalized routes of capitalization on the body and its products caught by the almost pleasant term, “medical tourism.” It hereby creates populations of faceless women “willing” to lease their wombs in one part of the world for highly individualized women (desperate in their desire to reproduce their own and or the genes of their partner) in another.

In April of this year, a meeting of multi-generational feminists, some of whom have long worked critically with the issues surrounding reproductive technologies, met in Toronto to discuss egg donation and surrogacy. Present were various academics involved in the establishment of Canadian NRT legislation, including Francois Baylis, legal scholars who continue to provide policy and legal analysis in or near the reproductive law area (Karen Busby), various community-level health-care and social service providers (some of whom seek access to surrogacy for non-heterosexual families), academics who examine the social and political implications of NRTs (Lorna Weir, Abby Lippman, Alana Cattapan) and Alison Motluck, the journalist who brought the problematic experience of egg donation to public attention.

Reflecting the disintegration of feminist thought and politics today (not necessarily a bad thing) was the lack of any single or coherent stand on the fluidity of gametes, pregnancy and birth represented in contemporary egg donation and surrogacy markets. Some present at the workshop were critical of the inherent class exploitation in commercial surrogate arrangements, others wanted access of marginalized groups to surrogacy and other NRTs for non heterosexual family formation and for those without the means to bear private medical costs of assisted reproduction. Some argued to establish clear, legal protections for parentage in commercial surrogacy contracts in the current Canadian legal vacuum. Others pointed to the lack of non whites in the room and the failure to speak to the global politics of reproduction.

But then it became clear to me that there is an inherent recognition of a complex valuation of maternity within a historical materialist analysis at work here. Very recently (April 2014) it was announced that the Province of Ontario in Canada shall pay for a single cycle of one-egg IVF “treatment,” through the public health care insurance (OHIP). Cattapan responded in the press (2014) pointing out that although, « helping Ontarians build their families [note : Cattapan has written defending the rights to social citizenship of transgendered people in Canada, 2009] and improving health outcomes are incredibly important goals, » such a move is expensive, and will be largely ineffective in terms of addressing infertility (two out of every three women undergoing IVF require more than a single attempt). Cattapan then put the move in context of a “cash-strapped medical system where elder care, home care and pharmacare are grossly underfunded.” She also points to the hidden private, commercial interests that drive NRTs and characterizes the move to public payment of a partial infertility procedure that will be

provided by private practitioners in private clinics with self-determined protocols as a “subsidy.” There is also the matter that IVF procedures produces so-called spare embryos. With the limits of a one-time attempt with one embryo, there will be more of these spares that are highly valuable commodities for stem cell research and application.

From the point of view of O’Brien’s reproductive consciousness I see a scramble to articulate reproductive rights because of the alienation of maternity from the dialectic of historical materialism. Let me be clear, this is not an argument for a Wican return to a feminine divine principle, although that would be nice for a change! It is a call to recognize the value of reproduction as well as production in the formation of political consciousness. The need for such seems particularly obvious in how we currently mediate life as genetic essence and reproduction as cellular replication. What is disappearing in this liquid libidinal economy which emphasizes the plight of the infertile one among the cash-rich, and targets « problematic » populations for reduction, is the valuation of sociality of reproduction as anti-alienation that inspired O’Brien as a mid-wife in mid-20th century working class Glasgow. Nor, as Stanworth claims, is this a call for women to abandon hard won battles for our place in the public domain and return to the kitchen and nursery. But how do you craft parentage provisions that recognize a value of pregnancy and birth beyond patriarchal and capitalist ideals? Do you create a jurisprudence for the pregnant body, something Zillah Eisenstein thought impossible in today’s legal ontology that protects the individual and his rights? (1988) Or do you accept reproductive “choice” within the confines of a capitalist patriarchal mediation of reproduction where property rights are applied to the gametes and child, and joint custody means hiring a surrogate mother as well as a housekeeper and nanny?

Conclusions: Towards Possibilities for Pregnant Personhood

I see a host of individualizing practices as we north westerners of means currently mediate reproduction: gamete donation, womb leasing, genetic testing, stem cell or cord blood banking. What – who – remains hidden from the atomized world of NRTs and fertility rights are the populations within flows of the global capitalization in human parts, especially reproducing and replicating ones.¹ This interplay of individualization and “population” appears clearly in another presentation I witnessed when Francoise Baylis (2013) came to Queen’s University to make her argument that pregnant women should be included in drug trials. Baylis offered a convincing presentation where she noted that 64% of pregnant women take one or more prescribed medications, although most drugs are not studied on pregnant women nor are they

¹ Arguably, this mirrors other ways in which bodies and body parts become commodified with the flows of body parts following worldwide flows of capital and labour. See Scheper-Hughes (for example, 2001) for a chilling account of the ways that human organ trafficking sees organs moving from the poor and working class to middle and upper classes, from the global South to the global North, from racialized bodies to white bodies and from women to men. The bodies of the poor, of women, of racialized others are merely there to be ‘harvested’ to prolong and improve the quality of life of well-off white men and some women.

labeled for use with pregnant women. (The most common of these drugs are anti-depressants). By contrast, Baylis assumes pregnant women are intelligent and capable of exercising due caution in regard to themselves and to their fetus and should be fully informed about and invited to take part in drug trials.

Immediately following Baylis' presentation, two men who identified themselves as doctors (the talk was at the medical school) spoke. The first proudly noted that there are indeed drug trials involving pregnant women in the Kingston area. These trials test for risks associated with environmental exposure to potential toxins. This doctor and researcher's lament was that pregnant women were the problem in recruitment for such studies – they tend to not participate with the implication that pregnant women are overly protective of their fetus, overly emotional and less rational. Here, women's resistance to medical control over their bodies by refusing to participate in such trials is perceived as an obstacle in responding to the pressure for medical research rather than as the act of a reasoning individual.

The second physician asked whether the father of the child should be required to provide permission for drug testing in pregnant women. Baylis responded, "no." Her view was quickly affirmed by several female doctors in the room, and by so doing asserted maternal rights in the face of pressures to promote paternal ones over the so-called unborn child. The question evokes the continued struggle for women's reproductive rights, including to abortion and safe, affordable and effective contraception.² What both interventions show is that the morality, intelligence and rights granted a pregnant woman depend on the reproductive consciousness of the time; they materialize and change over time and so help form the dialectic of being (reproduction and production). Moreover, they are contested. In this snapshot of the valuation of reproduction, we get a clear picture of woman-as-environment, woman-as-mother-of-my-child as well as woman-as-intelligent-caring-and-informed pregnant person. And it is this last potential of reproductive consciousness, pregnant personhood, which is what is missing from a now free-flowing, liquid maternity between contracting parents and donors and surrogates, and between fertility medicine and genetic industries. And that maternal personhood should carry rights to full citizenship, as well as the advantages of collective identity and political association without running the risks of being reduced to an essentialist position that denies the material realities of various women globally and forgetting the life-altering developments in women's emancipations.

I believe that the distinctions emphasized between political positions of socialist feminists and radical feminists as NRTs emerged in the 1980s are largely false. Over two decades later, we so-called differing camps, can probably agree that the baby business and its limitless markets among the cash-rich are well established. We can also agree that there is a disturbing relationship between the fetishization of the fetus among the wealthy and population controls among others. And, as both Baylis and Cattapan demonstrate, we are capable of arguing for both an

² The province of New Brunswick in Canada closed its only free-standing abortion clinic in April, 2014 – now women in New Brunswick must convince a panel of physicians of the merits of their abortion request

emancipated and active maternity as well as for contextualizing fertility « treatment » within broader social health care needs. O'Brien's theory of reproductive consciousness does not logically support divisiveness, but relationality. Despite the liquid appropriation of human fecundity worldwide, and the continued denigration and denial of maternity, I believe that a politic of reproductive consciousness is not only possible but is in play.

Of course, the language of contracts and freedom, when used between parents, donors and surrogates is another problematic that has to be interrogated. Where is the freedom when the contracting parties are, so often, radically unequal – as when middle class women find donors and surrogates from among working and underclass men and women across the world? This links back to the classical concerns of socialist feminists within a radically unequal world political economy. There is ground for common concern among socialist feminists and radical feminists. But I would like to conclude by suggesting the problematic is a broad one and in a way that I hope suggests to historical materialists the ongoing relevance of insights by those too often dismissed as "radical feminists": "The 'right to choose' means very little when women are powerless... women make their own reproductive choices, but they do not make them just as they please; they do not make them under conditions that they themselves create but under social conditions and constraints which they, as mere individuals, are powerless to change" (Petchesky quoted in Franklin 2011). Women's power and powerless are critical – fundamental – questions about the social structures that contain and constrain us and that need to be transformed so that we can free ourselves.

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