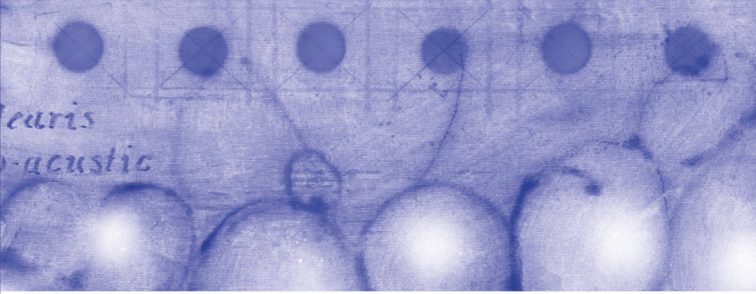

Michi Knecht, Maren Klotz, Stefan Beck (eds.)

Reproductive Technologies as Global Form

Ethnographies of Knowledge, Practices, and Transnational Encounters

campus

Contents

Reproductive Technologies as Global Form: Introduction

Michi Knecht, Maren Klotz, Stefan Beck

A few years after the British Government had made ova and sperm donation non-anonymous in 2005, one of the editors of this volume spent a series of rainy summer afternoons in a sperm bank in Northern England. Maren Klotz was shadowing the practices of the two young female biologists working in the laboratory and the administration office. She was shown how to count sperm cells under the microscope following WHO standards to determine semen quality. The staff told her that the interlaboratory testing rounds to establish a high level of standardization within these quality measurements, existent both in Germany and Great Britain, were "fun in a geeky scientist kind of way." And she tried to understand how the minute guidelines of the British Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority (HFEA) were actually playing out in the English clinic. When biologists Rose Daffyd and Canelle Ukwu quizzed her about the German regulatory situation they could not believe that in Germany ova donation was illegal while sperm donation was allowed and actually hardly regulated at all. One afternoon Ukwu, who was mainly in charge of donor recruitment and administration and who was spending a gap year before going back to a prestigious university to pursue postgraduate studies in cell biology, showed this editor how to centrally register sperm donors with the HFEA. The main bulk of information was filled into an Electronic Data Interchange (EDI) document and electronically transferred to the HFEA computers. "How is that handled in Germany?," Canelle Ukwu asked. "We have also had a change in regulations," Maren Klotz said. "It is non-anonymous donations in Germany now as well, but what kind of data needs to be stored and how it could actually become accessible is quite unclear to German experts." Klotz added she would next be interviewing British donor-conceived persons who had used the service UK Donorlink to potentially find half-siblings and donors via DNA testing. Ukwu shook her head and said that she did not understand at all what was motivating these searches or why the HFEA should make available the information she was just punching into her keyboard in 18 years: "My family is from Cameroon and my father, the man who raised me, my mother's partner, also isn't my biological father. Why should I care about that?" Ukwu asked. "Where my family is from," she added, "it's normal that children are raised away from their biological parents. Don't people in Britain have more important things to do than look for their sperm donor or half-siblings they have nothing to do with?" She shook her head in a gesture as if she viewed such endeavors as English extravagance. Then she offered her view as a biologist: "Medical histories of family members have become less important nowadays anyhow; you can simply use genetic testing if you want to know something about risk susceptibilities." The donor-conceived adults Maren Klotz met later that night were of a different opinion: They mourned the absence of identifiable donor information for them and cursed that they had been born before the comprehensive regulations on reproductive technologies had come into force in Britain. One of them had spent years being monitored for a hereditary condition prevalent on her father's side before finding out she was donor- conceived.

Ukwu's casual commentaries in the ethnographic vignette above capture quite pointedly some of the contemporary questions raised through reproductive technologies within a period of increased globalization, questions which have motivated the compilation of this book: Reproductive technologies have spread across various kinds of boundaries and into socially and culturally diverse settings, situations and regions. However, while people, technologies, human gametes, knowledge and

ideas about appropriate regulation circulate widely, the legislation of reproductive technologies is still primarily implemented in territories, whose borders are duly policed by a nation state. Furthermore, local articulations of assisted reproduction in their uneven technological spread across the globe never take place in a social or economical vacuum: They instead become part of emergent national styles of reproductive governance shaped in interaction with local understandings of kinship, the role of "biologies and the biological" , legitimate family forms, prevalent gender asymmetries and economic considerations. As a result, the proliferation of reproductive technologies into different contexts of appropriation does not lead to homogenous forms of deployment. Rather, it has led to a wide range of very different forms of regulation, bans, and approvals as well as to considerable differences in clinical practice, public or private financing, and moral or ethical reasoning. A multi-local configuration has emerged from the multitude of practices that are generating, transferring, acquiring, imagining, and regulating reproductive technologies across and beyond regional and national borders: a transnational or even global "assemblage" that constantly re-defines and re-produces reproductive technologies and its contexts, both locally and globally.