

AT ISSUE
**REPRODUCTIVE TECHNOLOGIES, RADICAL FEMINISM,
AND SOCIALIST LIBERALISM**

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Feminist analysis and activism against the new reproductive technologies burgeoned in the early 1980s. Recognizing that technological developments were rapidly escalating on an international scale, women from 20 countries, both first and third world, came together in 1984 to share information and shape analysis and response. At this time, few of the criticisms, whether coming from conservative or radical circles, had opposed these technologies because of their harm to women. The challenge to this gathering of international feminists was to reorient the ethical and political discussion to a woman-centered perspective. That reorientation, largely due to the efforts and activism of FINRRAGE¹ members, has begun in Germany, France, Israel, the Netherlands, Ireland, Spain, Australia, England, Austria, and Canada.

In the mid 1980s, another brand of feminist analysis of the new reproductive technologies took shape, emanating from the United States. It argued for a more "nuanced" and "sophisticated" assessment of these technologies on the grounds that women could use them with benefit (while being abused by them). Some of this mode of argumentation initially appeared in sections of the "Reproductive Laws for the 1990s" project associated with the Women's Rights Litigation Project at Rutgers University, and in Michelle Stanworth's recent volume on *Reproductive Technologies* (Stanworth, 1987). The more "nuanced" perspective claimed that women will be able to limit the abuse by gaining control of some of these technologies, and by ensuring equal access for all women who

need/desire them. The conflation of need with desire is a recurring theme in this literature. In this perspective, to oppose such needs/desires is to limit women's reproductive liberty, options, and choices.

My thesis in this column is that the proreproductive technology position is a recasting of a liberal feminist agenda, put forth mainly by U.S. and recently, by British socialist feminists. This, I call reproductive liberalism. I also claim that attacks on the feminist antireproductive technology movement are related to repeated attacks (at least in the United States and Britain) on radical feminists and radical feminism itself. In addition, I note that the new reproductive technologies "debate" replicates the so-called pornography debate of the last decade.

It is a fact that the antipornography and antireproductive technology movements have a large, radical feminist constituency, while the propornography and proreproductive technology movements emerge from a socialist and liberal feminist tradition that in the last ten years, curiously, have been wed. To be fair, not all radical feminists in the U.S. or Britain take an antipornography or antireproductive technology stance (Shulamith Firestone being the most prominent example here of a reproductive technology enthusiast, but that was before the advent of the current feminist critique). Nor are all socialist feminists propornography or proreproductive technology. But, in the main, it is socialist feminists who have coupled with sexual and reproductive liberalism. These marriages are held together by a commitment to rights,

privacy, anticensorship, equal access, the “liberating” facets of pornography and reproductive technology for women, and less abstractly, by real personal and political alliances with liberal and leftist men who have supported women’s rights when they have benefited by them (e.g., women’s rights to contraception and abortion. For example, *Playboy*, the glossy U.S. pornographic magazine, has been a consistent donor to projects for reproductive rights.

Because of their institutional and professional hegemony, socialist liberals manage the so-called feminist “debates” about pornography and, increasingly, about the new reproductive technologies in the United States, since it is they who dominate Women’s Studies Programs, the feminist media and journals, the women’s research institutes, and serve as evaluators to granting agencies. Effectively, they have become the gatekeepers of feminist knowledge. I would challenge U.S. feminists to count on two hands the number of radical feminist academics in Women’s Studies Programs in the United States and on university faculties in general. Count the number of radical feminists on editorial boards of U.S. feminist journals.

It is important to examine the liberal socialist feminist arguments used against the feminist antireproductive technology movement and, in the process, to note the resemblance they bear to those used against the feminist antipornography movement. In theory, these arguments are substantive clones of those used against the feminist antipornography movement. In person, these voices are often the same that articulated the feminist propornography position, or at least assented to it.

1. THE MORE “NUANCED” APPROACH—BALANCING THE ACT

Pivotal to the proreproductive technology position is a claim to a more finely tuned

interpretation of both feminism and the technologies themselves. This claim gives priority to the question – which is really an answer – how do these technologies benefit women? How do they not only abuse women, but how can they be used by women? And following from this initial question/answer, a second one: how do “we” insure equal access to the technologies for everyone – poor, black, and lesbian women, for example? Editor Michelle Stanworth in the introductory essay to *Reproductive Technologies*, asks “whether we can create the political and cultural conditions in which such technologies can be employed by women to shape the experience of reproduction according to their own definitions” (Stanworth, 1987, p. 35). This in itself is a peculiar chronology of inquiry since, one would assume, before even deciding that such technologies *can* benefit women, one would have to prove the case. Yet the agenda is always framed by this initial question/answer, as if merely highlighting this question puts the reader on notice that this will be a highly sophisticated study avoiding the simplisms of a theory and an activism that is antiananything.

In a 1985 critical review of Gena Corea’s book, *The Mother Machine*, published in *The Women’s Review of Books*, Rayna Rapp asserts that women “want other things from reproductive technology than merely to get it off our backs” (Rapp, 1985, p. 4). Desire becomes deterministic. Hilary Rose argues that “the IVF cat is out of the bag, and—whatever else IVF does – it meets real needs for (some) real women. Consequently a feminism that accepts the diversity of women’s needs, must now work to limit IVF’s imperialistic claims over women’s bodies, and its associated claim to consume even more of the health-care budget for high-tech, curative medicine” (Rose, 1987, p. 152). While pointing to the technological hegemony, nonetheless Rose makes need deterministic.

Remember that Shulamith Firestone suggested supposed benefits of reproductive technologies as early as 1970 in *The Dialectic of Sex*. But she was page-lashed ruthlessly by the same socialist feminists who are now urging us to take a more “nuanced” view of these technologies, because they claimed she was too uncritical and naively optimistic about technology. In other words, she did not perform the recent balancing act of being both for and against which, in effect, sums up the more “subtle” reproductive liberal critique. Like all radical feminist writing, Firestone’s work was depicted as tending toward deft reasoning and facile solutions. In contrast, the socialist feminist liberals make no over-optimistic claims for reproductive technologies. Just a sophisticated rational approach to both sides of the issue. Virtue lies in the middle.

2. THE ONTOLOGICAL ARGUMENT: ALL RADICAL FEMINISTS ARE ESSENTIALISTS

Much of the liberal socialist feminist “sophistication” is obtained by caricaturing radical feminist arguments against the technologies. It is a critique that depends on stereotyping radical feminist positions and indeed radical feminism itself.

Socialist feminist liberals fault critics of the new reproductive technologies for making motherhood naturalistic, biologicistic, and almost atavistic – as radical feminism itself has been typed biologist, essentialist, and ontological. A mythical state of natural motherhood is conjured up from nowhere so that the antireproductive technology movement can be attacked as dragging women back to the days of “anatomy is destiny” and as pitting nature against technology. For example, Michelle Stanworth cautions that “the attempt to reclaim motherhood as a female accomplishment should not mean giving the natural priority over the

technological – that pregnancy is natural and good, technology unnatural and bad ...” (Stanworth, 1987, p. 34).

Radical feminist opponents of the new reproductive technologies do not pit nature against technology, nor do we extol a new version of biology is destiny for women. Opposition to these technologies is based on the more political feminist perspective that women as a class have a stake in reclaiming the female body – not as female nature – and not just by taking the body seriously – but by refusing to yield control of it to men, to the fetus, to the State, and most recently to those liberals who advocate that women control our bodies by giving up control. Reducing radical feminism to the disparaging term, “cultural feminism,” Juliette Zipper and Selma Sevenhuijsen blame “cultural feminists,” especially in the United States, for returning women to “nurturance, naturalness and love,” and for extolling “natural motherhood and natural procreation” as “the real values of feminism” (Zipper & Sevenhuijsen, 1987, p. 125). They assert that feminist analysis must “shake free from the ideological inheritance of cultural feminism” and especially from the presupposition that the mother-child bond is sacrosanct (Zipper & Sevenhuijsen, p. 126).

Once again, much of this criticism is an artifact beginning with the term “cultural feminism.” As elaborated by Alice Echols, “cultural feminism” defines a potpourri of radical feminist simplifications, reductionisms, and distortions that run the gamut from invoking “biological explanations of gender differences” to a vilification of the left! (Echols, 1984, pp. 64 & 66) Lynne Segal serves up a most recent British variant on this theme of cultural feminism in her book, *Is the Future Female?*

Mostly from North America, where it is known as ‘cultural feminism,’ it celebrates women’s superior virtue and spirituality and decries ‘male’ violence and technology

. . . feminists . . . like me recall that we joined the women's movement to challenge the myths women's special nature (Segal, 1987, p. 3).

Both Echols and Segal, for the most part, ignore the radical feminist critique of biological determinism. They quote selectively from radical feminist authors such as Andrea Dworkin, Kathleen Barry, and others including myself who have specified at great length and in great detail our own critiques of biological determinism and female essentialism. As Liz Kelly (1987) so astutely notes, the critique of biological determinism is one of the things that many radical and socialist feminists have always held in common. Many socialist feminists, especially in their theories of sexuality, ignore the dominant tendency in their own accounts of female and male socialization which "are far more essentialist than their radical feminist counterparts. By drawing on revised Freudian categories, they offer a much more determined and limited view of change" (Kelly, 1987, p. 27).

In the United States, *desire* has become the determining factor in liberal socialist feminist perspectives of sexuality. Desire is nonproblematic for such theorists, as if it is some universal, ahistorical, and generic psychic infrastructure which shapes a person's sexual "program." Therefore, it is no surprise when the sexual liberals locate this deterministic desire in age-old forms of sexual objectification, subordination, and violence such as pornography, sado-masochism and butch-femme role playing, since these are also given the status of transcultural containers of sexuality.

Another hidden determinism and essentialism in much liberal socialist feminist work on sexuality is that sex is the source of power. This, of course, is an old theme in Freud, Havelock, Ellis, and Kinsey, but this time the "new" sex reformers are women. Women's sexual desire becomes enormously

pivotal and powerful leading not only to character and behavior, as Freud claimed, but to power. Sexuality becomes a salvation of a personal and political order. Sex as a powerful biological drive reappears in this literature in sex as a powerful personal motor, driving itself to fulfillment by utilizing all of the male-power modes of sexual objectification, subordination, and oppression – especially pornography.

As with sexuality, so too with reproduction. Liberal socialist feminist writings on the new reproductive technologies portray women – especially women who are infertile – as needing certain of these technologies. This is in direct continuity with the line plied by the medical and technological progenitors who constantly present these technologies as fulfilling the desperate needs of infertile women – not their own desperate needs for scientific advancement, status, and financial gain.

Antireproductive technology feminists have recognized that motherhood is depicted increasingly as a *need* for women. Patrick Steptoe, the techno-daddy of the world's first publicized test-tube baby announced blithely at a conference in Oxford in 1987 that motherhood is the natural goal of all "normal" women. "It is a fact that there is a biological drive to reproduce. Women who deny this drive, or in whom it is frustrated, show disturbances in other ways" (Oxford Conference, 1987). The reproductive technologist turned psychiatrist! Feminist opponents of the technologies have been extremely critical of the ways doctors and the media fit these technologies into their proposed vision of women's "natural motherhood," and the ways in which women are channeled into trying yet one more invasive and debilitating medical procedure in order to become pregnant. Yet every time radical feminists cite the myth and manipulation of maternity by the medical and scientific progenitors, and *their* natural

motherhood revivalism, it is we who are faulted for perpetuating a naturalistic view of motherhood. Opposition to the new reproductive technologies is transformed into “giving the natural priority over the technological.” It is we who are accused of portraying women who use the new reproductive technologies as victims of their supposed compulsive desires to mother.

In the recent surrogacy controversy in the United States that centered on Mary Beth Whitehead and the court decisions about this case, many feminists worried that banning surrogate contracts would reinforce biology as destiny for women. Few noted that father essentialism and male genetic destiny were writ into the language of “surrogate mother.” Few noted that the term privileged the male immediately, reinforcing the man as the real, natural, biological parent while the real, natural, biological mother was rendered a mere “surrogate.” While worrying about how religious and conservative opponents used the language of maternal-infant bonding to oppose surrogacy, and the dependence of some women used in systems of surrogacy and even some feminists on this language to justify the woman’s right to keep her child, these same feminists did not worry about whose essentialism really prevails. These feminists never pointed out that the only essentialism that has legal standing is that of the father.

The lower New Jersey court originally validated surrogate contracts by using a variation on the theme of paternal natural law. As Judge Harvey Sorkow so boldly phrased it, “but for him there would be no child” (Superior Court of New Jersey, 1987, p. 103). The higher New Jersey court’s decision overturning the lower court ruling fortunately steered clear of any essentialist legal philosophy (Raymond, 1988b).

Much of the caricature of the radically feminist antireproductive technology movement is achieved by the fiat of language. One critic faults Gena Corea for “following

the work of Mary O’Brien, Janice Raymond, and Andrea Dworkin, that men as a group have a *compulsive desire* to control and take over women’s reproduction” (Rapp, 1985, p. 3). Implicit in this patronizing critique, is that all three of these authors have stated somewhere that men have a “‘compulsive desire’ to control and take over women’s reproduction,” a claim that has not been made by any of them; and that feminists such as Corea are passive “victims” of others. Rosalind Petchesky also attacks Gena Corea’s *The Mother Machine* and “most articles in the anthology, *Test-Tube Women*” for portraying women as “the perennial victims of an *omnivorous male plot* to take over their reproductive capacities” (Petchesky, 1987, p. 279). Petchesky also tells us that “feminist critiques of ‘the war against the womb’ often suffer from certain tendencies toward reductionism” which she of course will correct. Michelle Stanworth, “following the work of Rosalind Petchesky and Rayna Rapp, uses their exact terminology in asserting that anti-reproductive technology feminists reduce the technologies “to a mere weapon in a *male war against the womb*” (Stanworth, 1987, p. 5). Would that matters were that simple!

3. THE CAFETERIA OF CHOICES APPROACH

The feminist antireproductive technology movement is vilified for its supposed claims that “infertile women and, by implication, all women [are] incapable of rationally grounded and authentic choice” (Stanworth, 1987, p. 17). Stanworth adds, as if we didn’t know, that “‘shaped’ choices are not the same as ‘determined’ . . .” (Stanworth, 1987, p. 17) choices. And it is in this discussion of what constitutes choice that the grossest distortions take place.

Radical feminists have been criticized for being “condescending” to women in the pornography, prostitution, and surrogate

industries, and now to women on IVF programs. For highlighting the political construction of women's choices, radical feminists are branded simplistic and deterministic. Radical feminists stress how men channel women into pornography, prostitution, surrogacy, and the wider gamut of reproductive technologies, and liberal socialist feminist critics charge that radical feminists make women into victims. To expose the victimization of women by men is to be blamed for creating it.

As Liz Kelly has written in a recent issue of *Trouble and Strife*

I am becoming increasingly furious at the repeated moralising socialist feminist comments on how radical feminists focus on 'women's common and inescapable victimisation'. It is we, not men, who are accused of terrorising women, by our documentation of reality. By doing this, they argue, we are guilty of undermining the possibilities for change (Kelly, 1987, p. 25).

This oft-repeated accusation that radical feminists make women into victims reappears in socialist feminist critiques of the antireproductive technology movement. Again faulting Gena Corea's work, Rayna Rapp states: "The assumption of universal female victimization at the hands of a womb-snatching patriarchy is a compelling one" (Rapp, 1985, p. 4).

In this kind of stereotyping, the fact that women can be victimized but still active is never elucidated. And the real violence that the new reproductive technologies inflict on women is ignored lest women are reinforced as passive essential victims of the patriarchy. Or note this variation on the same theme from Michelle Fine and Adrienne Asch in a review of *Test-Tube Women* (Arditti, Klein, & Minden, 1984). "Women who might choose *in vitro* fertilization are portrayed as victims of a

'compulsion' to mother, but women who pursue their own genetic transmission (through turkey-baster insemination, for example) are solidly supported" (Fine & Asch, 1985, p. 9). No words from Fine and Asch about the differences between submitting to experimental, intrusive, invasive, and violent medical procedures – often five or six times at \$5,000 a shot – vs. the harmlessness of a turkey baster. No nuanced differentiation between institutional medicalized control of body and person vs. technical self-control. No delineation of the lengths to which some women will go in submitting themselves and their bodies to the most debilitating procedures in IVF compared to the innocuous turkey baster procedure.²

Once upon a time, in the beginnings of this current wave of feminism, there was a feminist consensus that women's choices were constructed, burdened, framed, impaired, constrained, limited, coerced, shaped, etc., by patriarchy. No one proposed that this meant women's choices were *determined*, or that women were passive or helpless victims of the patriarchy. That was because many women believed in the power of feminism to change women's lives and obviously, women could not change if they were socially determined in their roles or pliant putty in the hands of the patriarchs. But in the hands of the liberal socialist feminists, this truth is distorted, and what we have instead is a return to prefeminist rationalizations and romanticizations of male violence – only this time coming from women (FACT, 1985).

Pornography is portrayed as necessary to women's sexual freedom; surrogacy to women's "procreative liberty." Lori Andrews in her paper for the Rutgers *Reproductive Laws for the 1990's* project, caricatures the basic radical feminist insight that choice occurs in the context of a society where there are serious differences of power between men and women as "a presumed incapacity of women to make decisions" (Andrews, 1988, p.

14). In contrast, Andrews, like many of the contributors to *Reproductive Technologies*, fosters “enhanced decision making” to assure that women make “informed, voluntary choices to use reproductive technologies,” and “enhanced participation of women in the development and implementation of reproductive technologies ...” (Andrews, 1988, p. 14). In one sentence, she has let the new reproductive technologies in the social door as necessary to women’s enhanced decision-making.

To U.S. feminists, this rhetoric is too familiar. In addition to surrogacy and the new reproductive technologies, we have also been told that women need the “freedom and the socially recognized space to appropriate for themselves the robustness of what traditionally has been male language” [translate pornography] (FACT, 1985, p. 31). This idea of pornography as liberating to women appeared most prominently in a document called the FACT (Feminist Anti-Censorship Taskforce) brief. (FACT organized for one purpose: to defeat a feminist antipornography law drafted by Andrea Dworkin and Catharine MacKinnon that would make pornography a violation of women’s civil rights.) Throughout the FACT brief, this rhetoric of pseudo-choice prevails. For example, FACT attacks the feminist antipornography ordinance because “it implies that individual women are incapable of choosing for themselves what they consider to be enjoyable sexually arousing material without being degraded or humiliated (FACT, 1985, p. 4). It continues to state that the feminist anti-pornography ordinance “perpetuates beliefs which undermine the principle that women are full, equal and active agents in every realm of life, including the sexual” (FACT, 1985, p. 18). Thus, it attacks the first legal definition of pornography that was developed specifically to address the real ways in which pornography harms women. It does so on the basis that the *proposed* definition of pornography harms

women more than the pornography itself because it implies that women are incapable of choice.

The choice which radical feminists defend is substantive. We ask what is the actual content or meaning of a choice which grows out of a context of powerlessness. Do such “choices” as surrogacy foster the empowerment of women as a class and create a better world for women? What kind of choices do women have when subordination, poverty, and degrading work are the options available to most? The point is not to deny that women are capable of choosing within contexts of powerlessness, but to question how much real power these “choices” have. To paraphrase Marx and apply his words here, women make their own choices, but they often do not make them just as they please. They do not make them under conditions they create but under conditions and constraints that they are often powerless to change. When Marx uttered these thoughts, he was acclaimed for his political insight. When radical feminists say the same, they are blamed for being condescending to women.

The reproductive liberals fail to recognize that women’s victimization can be acknowledged without labelling women passive. Passive and victim do not necessarily go together. It is the sexual and reproductive liberals who equate victimization with passivity. It is they who devise this equation. Jews were victims of the Nazis, but that did not make them passive, nor did the reality of victimization define the totality of their existence. Blacks were victims of slavery, yet no serious person would equate this fact with making Blacks into passive victims. It seems obvious that one can recognize that women are victims of pornography, surrogacy, and the new reproductive technologies without depriving women of some ability to act under oppressive conditions. Else how could any woman remove herself from such conditions?

It also seems obvious that one can move beyond a one-dimensional focus on women's oppression (e.g., to the ways in which women have subverted patriarchy and empowered themselves) without relinquishing the critique of women's oppression. This is the most serious failure of recent socialist feminist liberal commentary on sexual and reproductive issues – *the relinquishment of the critique of the oppression of women*. The result of this relinquishment is that while lip service may be paid in minimal ways to the “possible” abuses of surrogacy and the new reproductive technologies, the real ways in which women get “beyond” sexual and reproductive violence are never addressed. Instead we are urged to examine the ways in which these systems are “useful” to women. But we are not asked to examine the ways in which women in systems of prostitution, pornography, and surrogacy have resisted these institutions and become some of the systems' most powerful critics (see, for example, Kane, 1988).

Finally, it seems obvious that one can recognize women's victimization by these institutions without shoring up the institutions themselves. Yet the latter is what happens when the sexual and reproductive liberals give prominence to how women are agents in this “culture” of sexuality and reproduction. New approaches, they say, must examine the ways women create, use and infuse pornography and surrogacy, for example, with meanings unintended by the patriarchs. Women may be used, but women in turn use the new reproductive technologies in their own interests. Therefore, the conclusion is that pornography and the new reproductive technologies can benefit women as well.

Why find evidence of women's agency *within* the very institutions of pornography and surrogacy and then use that agency to bolster those institutions? Why locate women's agency primarily within the “culture” of male dominance? Why shift attention from an analysis and activism aimed at destroying

these systems to a justification of them? By romanticizing the victimization of women as liberating, this viewpoint leaves women in these systems at the mercy of them.

4. THE HOW DARE WE DEFINE FEMINISM APPROACH

Rayna Rapp in a review of *Made to Order* appearing in *The Women's Review of Books* (a U.S. feminist publication whose coverage of both pornography and reproductive technologies has tilted in the socialist liberal direction) criticizes the book for equating

feminism with opposition to the new reproductive technologies, as if there were a unified category called ‘woman’ whose natural ability to bear children now stands under the threat of total male, mechanical medical take-over . . . Labelling a single oppositional stance as ‘feminist’ and anything else as ‘not’ prematurely forecloses the strategies we need to develop (Rapp, 1988, p. 9).

The equation is Rapp's; not that of any of the authors in *Made to Order*. But beyond this false equation is another more troubling concern.

“Don't call your position feminist” has become one of the ten commandments of sexual and reproductive liberalism. Feminists are enjoined not to do this for various reasons. First, it is insulting to women who disagree with you and who either call themselves feminist or do not. Those who call themselves feminist feel excluded because you call yourself and your position feminist; those who do *not* call themselves feminists also feel excluded because they do not see themselves as feminist and thus the term is off putting. Either way, those who identify as feminists lose. And second, how dare any individual feminist or group of women speak in the name of feminism?

Attacking the claim of those who clearly assume their right to describe themselves and their positions as “feminist” is rather muddled. This effectively says that feminists cannot dare to articulate what feminism means because if we do, that’s mouthing a single, correct-line, exclusionary feminist position. Articulating what feminism means, however, seems not exclusionary but honest. If we do not dare to articulate what feminism means, what does feminism mean? Presumably, any real feminist challenge challenges other women to take upon themselves the challenge of defining feminism too. Anyone can do the same. And then we can debate what feminism means, rather than how dare we think we can say what feminism means!

It would be much more fruitful to talk about the issues and the content of our differing positions rather than about relative postures of authority. The authority that anyone asserts in defining a position that is for or against, or somewhere on the so-called more “nuanced” spectrum, should come from an informed and reflective assessment as well as her belief in the Tightness of what she is saying. It is a challenge to others to take responsibility for their positions and to argue the issues.

5. THE ACCUSATIONS OF ABSOLUTISM APPROACH

The book, *Made to Order*, has also been criticized for taking a ‘single oppositional stance’ to the new reproductive technologies. “Discourses of totalizing morality persuade at high price” (Rapp, 1988, p. 10). Rebecca Albury, in an article in *Australian Feminist Studies*, attacking, among other things, the position of well-known Australian feminist critic Robyn Rowland states: “Rowland has tended to enter the public debate with an absolutist moral position ...” (Albury, 1987, p. 64).

Increasingly, *opposition* is translated as absolutism. “Absolutism” is becoming one of

those abused words that is used frequently to discredit the position of those who take a strong and often passionate stand against something, in this case the new reproductive technologies. “A single oppositional stance” is out of fashion in feminism, as is outrage, passion, and explicit political activism. Heaven help you if your writing “often reads like a communique from the front lines” (Rapp, 1988, p. 9). Of course, you may be on the front lines – as are many of the contributors in *Made to Order* – but that seems negligible to the reproductive liberals. There was a time in this wave of feminism when it was honorable – not caricaturable – to be on the “front lines.”

It became apparent to many German FINRRAGE members that they were on the front lines during last year’s staging of 33 simultaneous raids by the Bundeskriminalamt (the German equivalent of the FBI) in the Federal Republic of Germany. The raids were directed overwhelmingly against feminist critics of genetic and reproductive technology. Many of these women had worked together in a coalition which successfully stopped Noel Keane, the U.S. woman and baby broker, from setting up a branch of his surrogate business in Frankfurt. Files, research, radio and video recordings, address lists, and personal documents were seized by heavily armed police (200 in Essen alone) and, during the raids, women were forced to undress in order for police to note “non-changeable marks” on their bodies for future reference. Two women were jailed and one has been kept in solitary confinement since December 1987, charged under the terrorist act.

It is instructive to see where this label “absolutist” gets used and to whom it gets applied. From a liberal and leftist perspective, are proponents of divestment in South Africa labelled “absolutist” because they will not settle for a more “balanced” approach that takes into account the “benefits” of foreign investments to Black South Africans, as

feminists are enjoined to consider the “benefits” of the new reproductive technologies to some women? Yet Rosalind Petchesky would caution feminist critics of the new reproductive technologies to recognize “complex elements” . . . [that] cannot easily be generalized or, unfortunately, vested with privileged insight” (Petchesky, 1987, p. 280). Consistently, radical feminist critics of pornography, prostitution, surrogacy, and the new reproductive technologies are faulted for their uncompromising and oppositional approach, and their failure to ask the “more complex” question of under what conditions these systems might be useful to women.

Terms like “absolutist,” “totalizing,” “universal” conjure up images of simple-mindedness and a lack of thinking on the part of those who oppose the new reproductive technologies. Supposedly, those who do more tough-minded thinking would emerge with a more balanced position. And supposedly, those who are more attentive to race, culture, sexuality, and class will always take a provisional position on any women’s issue. This critique is always applied by liberals to *women’s* issues — not Nicaragua, not South Africa certainly. If you are not a moral relativist on women’s issues, you are by definition an absolutist.

Since the 1970s, socialist feminists have been accusing radical feminists of not having a class and cross-cultural analysis. They have consistently plied this line even in the face of evidence to the contrary. When the evidence could no longer be ignored, then the rhetoric changed. Radical feminists did not have the “right kind” of class and/or cross-cultural analysis. For example, Robin Morgan’s book, *Sisterhood is Global* (Morgan, 1984) was roundly criticized by socialist feminists for its radically feminist cross-cultural perspective — from the pens of indigenous women from 70 different countries. Yet because these women did not repeat the liberal relativism that subsumes every nationalistic women’s struggle

to the male dominant cultural context in which it occurs — thereby excusing or at best explaining away much of the oppression of women by men in these countries — this collection of international and multi-cultural authors was dismissed as not representative of women in their respective countries.

Rayna Rapp uses a similar tactic in her comparative review of *Made to Order* and *Reproductive Technologies*. She attacks *Made to Order* for “Simply asserting solidarity with Third World women and including essays that portray their condition ...” (Rapp, 1988, p. 9). Being unable to chastise the collection for *not* including a cross-cultural analysis, she now finds the analysis *merely* “included.” This is one of the most patronizing and arrogant assumptions yet devised by reproductive liberalism. The essays of women from Brazil and Bangladesh are not simply included; they are an integral part of the analysis of the book — as integral as the international spectrum of essays by women from France, Germany, Australia, the United States, England, Switzerland, and the Netherlands. Rapp’s logic is all the more ludicrous given her enthusiastic accolade for the second volume under review, *Reproductive Technologies*, which is almost completely authored by Anglo and U.S. women. Yet Rapp totally ignores the ethnocentric bias of this volume which has little international analysis, never mind even the “inclusion” of a Third World perspective.

The do’s and don’ts of sexual and reproductive liberalism constitute the canon of academic and professional feminism in the United States today. Fortunately, this does not equal feminism outside the academy and the professions. U.S. sexual and reproductive liberalism has been narrowly focused on individual “rights,” “needs,” and “desires.” In the surrogacy context, for example, the constant talk about rights has deceived many U.S. women into thinking that we have more of them than we possess. One thing that I have found refreshing about working in an

international context is that women from other countries, particularly in the developing world, have no illusions about their so-called rights. International feminism is not terribly liberal. Surrogacy could never be defended as a woman's right to control her own body in Bangladesh. It would be recognized immediately that surrogacy only gives women the "right" to give up control of their bodies, and promotes a traffic in women from the developing countries to the west. By focusing on a rarefied and reductionistic realm of rights, U.S. reproductive liberals are circumscribing the new reproductive technologies to the U.S. domestic arena, when the issues of the reproductive use and abuse of women are being played out on an international marketing and medical stage.

It has been a fundamental tenet of international law that human rights must be grounded in human dignity. Human dignity precedes human rights, as Kathleen Barry has pointed out (Barry, 1986, pp. 16–17). No individual rights for women can be separated from the rights of women as a class. The commodification of women's bodies in surrogacy and the new reproductive technologies in general is a gross violation of women's dignity. Women are increasingly treated as reproductive environments and receptacles utilized in medical science as matter to be experimented on, without bodily integrity – in short, without dignity. That many women do not see this is part of the problem, not part of the solution.

ENDNOTES

1. FINRRAGE is the acronym for the Feminist International Network of Resistance to Reproductive and Genetic Engineering. Originally called FINNRET, it was organized in Groningen in 1984.

2. I am not extolling the craze to have babies by artificial insemination – especially as it exists among lesbians (see Raymond, 1988a, pp. 71–75). My comments here are directed to the very real differences between artificial insemination and IVF, a difference to which Fine and Asch seem oblivious.

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