

BOOK REVIEW/ COMPTE RENDU

Yasmine Ergas, Jane Jenson, & Sonya Michel (Eds.). *Reassembling Motherhood: Procreation and Care in a Globalized World*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2017, pp. 320, hardcover (9780231170505).

What is a mother? What do mothers do? Who can be a mother? Who cannot (and who must)? In the context of changing technological, legal, political, and social contexts, these are just some of the questions that *Reassembling Motherhood: Procreation and Care in a Globalized World* discusses.

In this edited interdisciplinary collection, Ergas, Jenson, and Michel understand motherhood as being practiced in two distinct ways: child-bearing and child-rearing. They explain that traditionally a mother is understood to be a person who both bears and rears a child, “today, however, the status of mother may be conferred on a person who fulfills only one or even neither of these roles.” (1). The authors begin with the understanding that motherhood is changing and that processes of child-bearing and rearing are being restructured as reproductive labor and care work are being reshaped around the world. Through this process, they observe the breakdown of what it is to mother and the reassembling of what it means to mother in myriad ways. The book’s contributors emphasize how changing norms, advances in technology, and the availability of global reproductive and care services affect these shifts. The authors point to ‘chains of procreation’ and ‘chains of care’ to begin to consider the complex and numerous roles played by various parties in the conception and raising of children today, from individuals who donate gametes, to those who provide surrogacy services, to the agencies, clinics, and other third parties that facilitate the processes. While these chains of procreation and care aim to fulfill different needs for their clients, “they are both based on the segmentation and commodification of functions once associated with “mother.”” (5). Further, when these stages are broken apart it permits an understanding of the fetus and maternal body as separate from one another, which supports the understanding that childbearing is a marketable service (one can essentially ‘rent-a-womb’) and so too, we also see care itself becoming the paid labor of specialized work forces.

Through interrogating multiple issues including the use of assisted reproductive technologies (ARTS), transnational adoptions, and international care work, this volume demonstrates how complex chains of procreation and care are simultaneously stretching understandings of motherhood and increasing the freedom for choice in motherhood, while also seeing the reproduction of old forms of constraint and (through new technologies and new markets) the development of new forms of constraints. These changes broaden who has access to becoming a parent and who may have the choice to opt out of having children, but also constrain choice for groups of people who are excluded from having children or having access to services that would enable them to have children.

While motherhood is increasingly fragmented and reassembled through these chains of procreation and care, policy and law are struggling to catch up to these rapid changes. The book also considers how this may leave gaps where vulnerable parties may be especially subject to exploitation. The contributors also consider how private institutions, states, and global governance do, and might better, engage in these processes to better facilitate and regulate them.

The book raises a number of far-reaching questions given the topics at hand. For example, what are the implications of surrogacy arrangements which understand a fetus during pregnancy to be *in* a woman's body but not *of* it. In the context of surrogacy, Ergas discusses how this rationale allows for surrogacy to be provided as a service to commissioning parents without legitimizing claims from surrogates to the rights of the eggs they gestate and birth (since the fertilized egg implanted in a surrogate belongs to the parents and the surrogate is merely keeping it to grow until it is born). However, she further explains that this logic places surrogacy on a "crash course" with abortion rights, which utilizes the opposite framework for understanding pregnancy (that a fetus is *of* a woman, not simply *in*) to justify women's rights to abortion in the interest of maintaining their own liberty.

The book opens with chapters that take different approaches to understanding how ARTs fragment and reassemble motherhood. Milanich first presents how the historical understanding of knowing maternity as a simple and certain process (that is, if a woman birthed a child, she was its mother) has been rendered less useful in light of new technologies that open understandings of who a child's mother is to the egg donor, or a cytoplasm donor, or surrogate, or the woman who organizes and commissions all of these parties but may herself have no biological relationship to the child which is ultimately produced. Other authors consider where an infant's citizenship belongs should

it become a ward of the state after it is born of complex transnational reproductive processes which have the potential to leave a child 'motherless' if a commissioning parent no longer wishes to claim them or cannot due to existing legislation.

As the book shifts from technology to adoption practices and care work, the authors consider how birth mothers may attempt to maintain some of their maternal ties when relinquishing a child for adoption through practices such as post adoption visitation contracts. They find however, the maternal social position may be a significant factor in how these contracts are made and if they are enforced. Discussing an ethnographic study with birth mothers in Tamil society, Bos explains another perspective on mothering that understands birth mothering to be 'true' mothering; mothering these women will continue to carry with them throughout their lives, despite the loss of their child.

Inequalities based in class, race, and nationality are discussed across multiple chapters including the experiences of black mothers with foster care and prison systems that complicate and restrict their rights to mother, temporary foreign care workers who come to developed nations from developing nations to nanny the children of the middle and upper classes which challenges their ability to mother their own children and the 'care deficits' this export industry can create, as well as the wrath migrant worker mothers can be subject to for choosing to leave their own children. In each of these cases, who is allowed to mother and how they (are allowed to) mother reveal complexities about how motherhood is understood in law, policy, and practice. The final chapters discuss new rationalities in policy that conceive of mothers as secondary to the goal of lifting up their children, and also placing the idea of motherhood within a broad historical context to evaluate its trajectory.

The authors in *Reassembling Motherhood* do not attempt to solve the complex issues they raise, but they provide a broad overview of some major issues in understanding the conceptualization and practices of motherhood today. In particular, the book examines how these are shifting in light of social, technological, legal, and political changes; creating choice and freedom for some, and constraint for others. As a broad overview of topics that destabilize and re-establish what motherhood can be, this book is an important read for academics, as well as law and policymakers working in the fields of reproduction, families, and care work.

REFERENCES

Ergas, Y., Jensen, J., & Michel, S. (2017). Introduction. Negotiating “Mother” in the Twenty-First Century: Between Choice and Constraint.

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