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Ideas and Perspectives on Reproductive Rights

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FROM THE EDITOR

Ideas and Perspectives on Reproductive Rights

This issue brings together a bristling array of ideas and perspectives on the burgeoning developments in reproductive ethics.

Maya Unnithan's opening article addresses the global face of infertility and the increasing availability and use of Assisted Reproductive Technologies (ARTs) in India. Drawing on her fieldwork in Rajasthan, Unnithan's discussion focuses squarely on a critique of the Indian government's *Draft ART Bill* (ACMR, 2005; MOHFW, 2008) and shows how understandings of identity in the reproductive body as embedded in law, culture and morality might facilitate or constrain the market for reproductive services, and individual desire and agency in relation to having children.

Roslinda Ofreneo, in highlighting the International Labour Organisation's statistics on the alarming growth of vulnerable employment in Asian countries, points to the material basis of reproductive choice, and adduces an argument for paying heed to "reproductive justice" — a framework of concerns that extends beyond conventional reproductive rights, and embraces "the totality of women's lived experience". Such provision would include "universal healthcare, access to birth control, maternity and sickness benefits, pre- and postnatal care, shared parenting and housework, sex education for young people". By linking women's economic labour with reproductive justice, Ofreneo stands alongside other advocates who believe that the gender reforms in the past two decades have failed because the key principle of justice for women is missing.

Equally gripping is Vibhuti Patel's report on preferences for sons in South-east and South Asian countries and the role of sex determination and sex pre-selection technologies in India. She focuses on the "dangerous turn" in the problem of missing women as well as the subjection of women's bodies to

scientific manipulation, citing events that are causing renewed violations of women's health, security, bodily integrity and freedom in India.

Patel's and Unnithan's papers both highlight the fact that while assisted reproductive technology may be improving the life situation of a few women (e.g. having their own babies even when incapable of carrying a pregnancy), it has a different impact on the lives of millions of poor women. Those who are materially deprived oftentimes become the source of oocytes or the surrogate womb for those who can afford to pay — illustrative of the many facets and layers of the burden of women in poverty in Asia.

Two pieces from the *Hastings Center Report* take up issues that are also linked to new reproductive technologies. Bernard Prusak focuses on parental responsibility in the context of the freedom of women who, for example, act as surrogate mothers. Prusak's engagement with questions of the rights of children as the analytic template of his discussion of parental freedom and responsibility is a fresh angle to the longstanding debate on maternal surrogacy.

Also from the *Hastings Center Report* is Aaron Levine's review of oocyte donation practices in the US. Levine's research reveals that self-regulation of the fertility industry in the US has to be reviewed in view of practices that are clearly in violation of guidelines. Young, female university undergraduates are particular targets of business interests which are making money out of the so-called egg donation, but could actually be in practice, for some cases at least, nothing but commercial transactions.

Marita V.T. Reyes' fascinating case on a dilemma of reporting an incidental finding that appears to involve a tangle of implications for stakeholders, and for the integrity of researchers, receives a robust appraisal by Neha Mahiwalla and Godofreda V. Dalmacion.

This collection serves well the kind of reader who enjoys changeable weather, and the clearing of the horizon. These articles together carry a sense of action, a respect for factual accounting, and a good shot of imagination. They supply first a vision, in advance of practical proposals.

Jacqueline Chin Joon Lin and Fatima Castillo