

## SPECIAL ISSUE ON FERTILITY AND REPRODUCTION

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### INTRODUCTION

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#### *Background*

ALTHOUGH the significance of reproduction has always been recognized in anthropological discourse, a focus on the dynamics of the social and cultural factors involved in reproduction has emerged as an important part of anthropological theory only in the past few decades. A brief look at the evolution of anthropological thought in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries shows that anthropology has been concerned with human fertility and reproduction since its inception, and that kinship, as the social expression of reproduction, has been viewed as the social institution that is 'the most transparently structured realm of human life' (Barnard 1994: 785), one that has been treated as the single most important aspect of society in anthropological theory. In the history of anthropology, it was through the study of kinship that the variety of human conceptual systems and the internal logic of diverse social structures came to be recognized. Despite the 'obsessive'<sup>1</sup> attention paid by anthropological studies to questions of kinship, studies of reproduction remained narrowly rooted in the biological aspects of procreation. Human reproduction was viewed as a 'natural' and biological phenomenon, and kinship studies paid more attention to cross-cultural differences than to the dynamics of reproduction. Anthropological studies also focused on paternity as the focal point of social investigations of social structure, and 'the nearly exclusive anthropologi-

<sup>1</sup> Coward (1983), cited in Franklin and Ragone (1998: Introduction).

cal focus for over a century, from mid-1800 to the late twentieth century, on *knowledge of physical paternity* indexed the limitations curtailing analysis of “reproduction”.’ (Franklin and Ragone 1998: 2). These factors, which resulted in the isolation of reproduction from its broader social context, have been some of the main reasons for its marginality in anthropological theory.

The re-emergence of an anthropology of reproduction is the result of a number of marked shifts which have taken place throughout the world in the past few decades. Dramatic changes in the demographic characteristics of the world population (Sen, Germain, and Chen 1994: 3); advances in fertility and birth control techniques, with new pharmaceutical technologies offering choices to individuals, planners, and policy-makers; the rise in feminism; and the increasing intervention of the state to control population growth—all these have contributed to recent shifts in how reproduction is approached.

### *Reproduction and Reproductive Rights*

Since Carol MacCormack (1994: 5) wrote that ‘much of international literature on women’s reproductive health is based on death rates’, the world has witnessed major changes in attitudes and approaches to reproductive health. The Third International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD, Cairo 1994) marked a major paradigm shift in the formulation of international policy on the question of human reproduction. The dominant feature of this shift was to recast the concepts of family planning and population control as ones of ‘reproductive health’ and ‘reproductive rights’. The new discourse took into account the broader social and cultural context of reproduction, and formal recognition was given to the ‘attainment of sexual and reproductive health and rights of individuals’, rather than the achievement of demographic targets. This revision in population studies also suggested that reproductive health policies should consider, and understand, the social contexts of sexual behaviour, and also become part of a political agenda which is ‘conversant with the economic and social realities being faced and which challenges conventional population and development policy’ (Harcourt 1999: 8). Reproductive health has come to denote a far broader sphere of activity than mere fertility management. It covers the life-span, the pre- and post-reproductive years of individuals, and adopts a ‘reproductive rights-based’ approach. The endorsement of a reproductive rights agenda within the population and development debate marks a move away from the traditional targets of family planning and population control, in which women were the sole focus of programmes, to include other social categories such as adolescents, men, and the old.

However, an increasing amount of research over the past two decades has gradually revealed the complexity of the issues surrounding reproductive decisions and highlighted the dynamic processes involved in the negotiation, adaptation, and

manipulation of practices and rights. It has also demonstrated the multiple dimensions of reproductive health and its embeddedness in culture (Makhlouf Obermeyer 2001: 6). In-depth studies carried out in various disciplines, such as anthropology, sociology, gender studies and politics, have called into question the validity of global notions of reproductive rights and offered different perspectives by emphasizing their contextual nature. 'Rights', as approached by global conventions, effectively means the ability of individuals to make decisions about their fertility, reproductive health, and sexual freedom in isolation from their other bonds and obligations in society. In such an approach, the notions of 'owning' or 'controlling' one's body have become a favourite rhetoric with various movements that view fundamentalism and conservatism as the main opponents of such freedoms. However, opposition to such notions of 'rights' stem not only from extremist groups in various parts of the world, but also from feminist groups from the South. Women in the South, who are targeted as the ultimate beneficiaries of notions of 'rights', often find it impossible to accommodate these notions into the realities of their daily lives (Petchesky 1995: 387; Petchesky and Judd 1998: 5). Women's rights and agency are determined against other institutions which control these powers; and the key question remains, who and/or what actually manages women's sexuality and reproductive lives? (Parkin: 2001: x).

In their analysis of rights-based approaches to reproductive health, Catherine Locke and Heather Zhang examine the response of international social policy to growing understandings of the implications of social relations for reproductive behaviour, as well as to the increasingly orthodox call for rights-based approaches. They argue that, despite the consensus that reproductive health should be constructed around reproductive rights in a way that extends rather than transforms policy, such a response does not sufficiently take into account the intricate and ambivalent nature of power and its determining components in reproductive and sexual relations at any of the individual, community, societal, or global levels. Furthermore, by adopting such a universal approach to the rights-based issue, modern policies often tend to ignore the lived experiences of men and women at the grass-roots level. For Locke and Zhang, the selective inclusions and partial exclusions are not oversights: rather, they bear the mark of older political and professional interests, and reflect the continuation of the population agenda, namely the low-fertility agenda.<sup>2</sup> Biomedical perspectives remain high on this agenda, and policy-

<sup>2</sup> Evidence from studies elsewhere tends to support Locke and Zhang's argument too. For example, a recent report by the Centre for Health and Gender Equity (August 2002) draws attention to the fact that since the ICPD policies in many countries have changed dramatically, and both governmental and non-governmental agencies have worked hard to provide leadership and technical assistance to countries struggling to implement the new global approach to reproductive health. However, the report goes on, 'changes on the ground are lagging behind in part because problems created over forty years (since the first International Population and Development Conference in 1974) cannot be changed overnight, in

makers and health-planners often ignore the fact that people's reproductive decisions are shaped by their social worlds, and that the meaning and management of reproduction in each cultural context is unique to their communities. Trying to understand them in isolation from their broader context is a barren exercise, and assumptions cannot therefore be made that people across the world will follow the same set of top-down instructions on what concerns the most intimate and private sphere of their lives.

### *Reproduction and Identity*

Human reproduction is a complex and intricate process which is determined by a combination of biological, environmental, and social factors. By reproducing, humans seek to ensure continuity, to this end developing complex social organizations, beliefs, norms, and rituals that appear in a multitude of forms and interact with kinship, religion, law, economics, and politics. In Ginsburg and Rapp's view (1995: 1, 2), by using reproduction as an entry point into the study of social life and placing it at the centre of social theory, we can see how cultures are produced, contested, and transformed as people imagine their collective future in the creation of the next generation. In its interaction with other social institutions, reproduction becomes a dynamic process that goes beyond two people reproducing biologically. It becomes the concern of the wider social group, and communities devise rules and regulations to protect and preserve their reproductive practices, which are the result of 'numerous generations trying to make sense of the task of creating new life in a particular environment' (Robertson 1991: 17). To this end, communities differentiate themselves from other groups with whom they interact in terms of distinctive criteria such as language or religion, thus developing distinct identities. The negotiation of identities within and across ethnic boundaries and the links between ethnicity and reproductive behaviour are well-documented in ethnographic studies. As Kligman explains, reproduction is fundamentally linked with identity, whether of the nation, the state, the family, the lineage, or the individual (1998: 5).

Links between identity and reproduction form the overarching theme of this special issue of *JASO*. With the exception of one chapter which discusses the interconnectedness between the biological and social aspects of reproduction, the pa-

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part because of conflicting political agendas, in part because a population control agenda is re-emerging in some countries'. The report argues that the way 'Rights' have been implemented has in effect meant replacing one anti-women political agenda with another. The reference here is mainly to the recent decision by the Bush Administration in the USA to cut off aid to organizations such as the UNFPA and USAID under the pretext that these agencies are supporting family planning programmes in countries such as China and India that abuse human rights—in their words, 'a political decision made under pressure from anti-abortion lobbies in the US'.

pers focus on different phases in the reproductive life-cycle, namely life pre-birth, childbirth, menstruation, and the present global understanding of the meaning of reproduction in relation to personhood and identity. In this sense, the papers complement each other rather than adopting a comparative perspective. Two distinct but interrelated themes are addressed here: first, the importance of adopting a multidisciplinary approach by combining the biological and social in the study of reproduction; and secondly, the links of identity, personhood, and selfhood with reproduction.

Identity has been the subject of much exploration in ethnographic studies, some of which have attempted to distinguish between the concepts of person, self, and individuality, as components of identity, in different cultures. As Poole (1994: 831) puts it, 'Analytically, notions of person and self are often conflated, confounded, or seen as synonymous, and ideas about the individuals are commonly consigned to the realm of peculiarly Western cultural and intellectual biases'. Porter Poole tentatively proposes to distinguish between personhood, selfhood, and individuality as the different dimensions of identity, quoting Harris (1989: 599), who notes that 'these distinctions may help us to show how, in diverse socio-cultural contexts, various discriminations and linkages may be made among human beings as...living entities among many such entities in the universe,...[as] centres of being or experience, or...[as] members of society'. At the same time Poole warns of the inevitable drawback in such analysis, by pointing to the fact that 'cultural schemata of identity in any society will variously draw upon a broad range of other culturally embedded ideas, both explicit and implicit'.

Ethnographic studies abound in examples of societies where personhood is closely linked with reproduction, kinship, and social organization. Whereas the general tendency in the West is to mark the beginning of personhood at birth, other societies do not necessarily share this view, and anthropological literature provides evidence of cultures whereby personhood goes a long way back before birth. In such contexts, personhood is intertwined with complex moral and spiritual beliefs and practices, and makes sense in the totality of the culture in which it appears. In her contribution to this volume, Heather Montgomery explores ideas of personhood and points out that in studying such notions cross-culturally, we need to think of the notions of conception and becoming part of the world differently. In her view, we should think of the anthropology of children as being intimately connected with ideas of kinship, conception, and reproduction, an idea that should encompass the passage of children from before conception to full personhood. Birth is not the beginning of childhood but a continuation of a process, and childhood should be considered the focus of a well-established anthropological concern that addresses issues surrounding personhood and how humans are created across multiple times and spaces. For example, the complexities of defining the processes by which children become full persons and the different cosmological and philosophical views on the Spirit Children of Australia and Little Corpses *okopuchi* of

Amazon (mentioned by Montgomery) provide a strong challenge to orthodox bio-medical models that define birth as the boundary of the newborn's passage to full personhood. Montgomery argues that to look at childhood from birth to adulthood is to ignore a considerable part of the existing anthropological literature, which has looked at childhood and children from angles other than considering them as just social agents or muted voices, or products of socialization. She calls for the field of childhood studies to be broadened so that it encompasses a wide range of concepts, from children's social worlds to the unstable and problematic nature of childhood, all of which are central to personhood, kinship, and social organization. It could be argued that the new reproductive technologies, which are changing the biological landscape of reproduction, are also pushing the boundaries of the recognition of personhood to before birth (James 2000: 184–6). A new ethos has been created through these interventions, which is surrounded by newly formulated, or re-defined, ethical, legal, moral, and religious rules. Regardless of their social and cultural impact, these notions and re-adjustments are firmly rooted in, and remain predominantly informed by, the bio-medical sciences. However, the past two decades have witnessed a profusion of research by anthropologists and other social scientists in this field on the various social, cultural, legal, and ethical aspects of the new reproductive technologies and their impact on society.<sup>3</sup>

As well as affecting the Western and industrialized world, medical practices and technology are impinging on areas which fall outside the strictly medical domain at an increasing rate. Their effectiveness in dealing with reproductive health and their power to control reproduction and reproductive processes, as well as other areas of health, have allowed bio-medical models to stretch their reach beyond exclusively medical practices and influence social values (Makhlouf Obermeyer 2001: 3). However, in spite of the growth in authoritative medical knowledge and its penetration into everyday life, the question of personhood in relation to reproduction remains firmly rooted in spheres of life other than the medical and scientific in many cultures. Factors such as the influence of religious and political ideologies on perceptions, decisions, and rationalizations remain the main guiding principles for many societies outside the technologically advanced world. In general in such cultures, the meaning of procreation and ideas attached to childbirth practices and the beginning of new life on earth embody the cosmological conceptual systems that such societies have on life, both before and after birth. In their social and cultural context, these practices mainly reflect kinship rules and social organization, and can only be understood in relation to the kin group. Be-launde's analysis of unattended childbirth practices among Piro women in the Peruvian Amazon points out that the practice of unattended childbirth is closely

<sup>3</sup> These studies are too numerous to cite here, but, to name only a few, some of the leading anthropologists in this field include Edwards *et al.* (1993), Ginsburg and Rapp (1991, 1995), Franklin and Ragone (1998), Strathern (1992 and in Edwards *et al.* 1993).

linked with concepts of self-reliance and notions of kinship, agency, and the assertion of personhood. Childbirth practices incorporate women's identity and their belonging to their kin group. The experience of the delivery also serves to embody authoritative knowledge, thus strengthening a woman's bonds with her close female relatives. The control and distribution of knowledge concerning reproduction is shown to be one of the linchpins of unattended childbirth practices. Older women from the kin group are the custodians of knowledge concerning fertility and childbirth, and conformity with traditional methods of childbirth establishes the credibility of the young woman as an accomplished member of the group. This may explain the fierce resistance of Piro women to the intervention of outsiders, especially doctors and midwives, who are perceived as a threat to this authoritative knowledge.

The ideas of body, self, and society in relation to reproduction and identity are also discussed by Rosemary McKechnie in her work on menstruation among women in east London. The cases she studied were selected on the basis of menstrual irregularity, and the research was set up to explore the social meaning of these irregularities for women. As Knight (2002) remarks: 'The human female menstruates considerably more copiously than any other primate. Since ovulation in the human case has become concealed, this bleeding is one of the few indicators of fertility to have remained externally detectable. This may help explain the extraordinary attention focused upon it in virtually all hunter-gatherer and other traditional cultures.' Viewed cross-culturally, beliefs and practices related to menstruation represent a wide range of variations. Ethnographic research shows that almost every culture outside the industrialized West has rituals and taboos attached to menstruation that go beyond its biological aspects and relate to other social and/or religious practices. These practices are as varied as the cultures themselves. For example, among the Beng of the Ivory Coast menstruating women are considered to have creative spirituality (Buckley and Gottlieb 1988), Kalahari San women are ritually most powerful when menstruating, and in some parts of Africa menstrual blood is considered cleansing rather than polluting. By contrast, in many societies, including most Muslim ones, menstruating women are stigmatized and considered polluting. As Ginsburg and Rapp (1991: 318) put it:

the symbolic elaborations of menstruation have long received scholarly attention in anthropology [and are] considered by some to be a central component in human social organisation. A critical appraisal of both early and current work on menstruation points out that only recently has such work attempted to fully contextualise menstrual rituals into larger cultural systems.

In their view, in Western societies women are increasingly trapped in the medical discourse on menstruation, and

bio-cultural work reveals that frequent, regular menstruation patterns common to women in contemporary industrialised societies are anomalous. Historical and cross-cultural evidence suggests that female life-cycles have typically been characterised by late menarche, frequent pregnancies, and prolonged lactation that suppresses menstrual cycles. Such research has profound implications for the politics of reproduction, for example, by calling into question the wisdom of a contraceptive pill that mimics the Western pattern, and by reminding us that biomedical research paradigms often miss important data when they regard women's bodies as biological constants. (Ibid.)

Other anthropologists have also questioned the validity of such generalizations, arguing that the notions of pollution and of the subordination of women should not be the sole or predominant framework in the analysis of menstruation universally. In Buckley and Gottlieb's words, 'the significance and value of menstruation in any given culture must be determined *in situ* and cannot be ascribed on the basis of an a priori scheme' (1988: 51).

While in Western societies menstruation has been regarded as a biological matter exclusive to women for some time, ethnographic evidence provides multiple examples of societies that do not consider menstruation an exclusively female concern, and where men become directly involved in women's reproductive cycles. In her account of menstruation among the Airo-Pai of the Amazonian Peru, Belaunde (2001: 131–2) illustrates that 'menstruation ideas do not exist in isolation but rather occur within religious, political and reproductive contexts'. The Airo-Pai's menstrual ideas are inscribed in their mythology and cosmology, which views women's fertility as the responsibility of men and caring for wives during menstruation as the duty of husbands. For the Airo-pai, fertility is ultimately inseparable from the cultural construction and expression of emotions between the couple. Menstruation becomes an important organizing principle in social and interpersonal relationships among a population with low fertility, and menstrual taboos and rituals act as pro-natalist incentives.

As mentioned earlier, in general societies outside the industrialized world surround menstruation with some form of ritual and taboos to distinguish it from the everyday routine of life. McKechnie's study of women's biographies provides a different picture, in which women make every effort to hide their menstruation from the public eye. McKechnie's study confirms that, while the pollution beliefs of other cultures are rooted in their cosmological conceptual systems, those of Western society appear to be dissociated from morality and religion. Whereas the irregularity of menstruation is not considered an anomaly in most of the cultures studied by anthropologists,<sup>4</sup> in the Western biomedical model it is viewed as a lack of fertility, a condition that has to be treated. The experiences of menstruation loss

<sup>4</sup> In many societies, delayed menstruation is induced by prolonged breast-feeding and other practices pursued as a means of contraception. See Ginsburg and Rapp 1991: 318 and the article by Catherine Panter-Brick below.



of east London women show that public attitudes consider menstruation a part of women's private lives, as a syndrome that should be controlled and should not interrupt the routine of daily life. Menstruation belongs to bio-medical models of feminine hygiene, self-care, and self-control, and the way women deal with it in public demonstrates their ability and efficiency. In other words, women are expected to live a 'normal' life during menstruation as if there is nothing different about them, even though it may be irregular and happen unexpectedly. The sense of being 'different' and the intensely private nature of menstruation, which makes it invisible to the public eye, creates a feeling of being marginal from 'normality'. In such a situation it is the responsibility of women to keep their bodily functions private and away from the public gaze. In McKechnie's view, the whole experience of menstruating is wrapped in embarrassment, shame, muteness, something that cannot be talked about, and is engendered without having been articulated. While menstruation is seen as a matter of the management of an 'out-of-place' situation by society, women's biographies reveal that their private and personal feelings and experiences are far from ordinary and matter-of-fact. The perception of women of themselves, however, is that the management of menstruation is linked with their agency and expressions of personhood. Acting on their own in a difficult situation and bearing the pain silently in a disciplined fashion strengthens their sense of identity and belonging. The ability to cope with menstruation in public and knowing how to deal with discomfort gives women a sense of self-reliance and confidence which resonates with Belaunde's Piro women. However, while Piro women's proof of their personhood is recognised publicly, for east London women the hard-won qualities of endurance, self-reliance, and capacity are not permitted to be made public.

The treatment of menstruation as an intensely private matter also creates barriers for communication between mothers and daughters, between women and their medical advisers (doctors, midwives), and between friends. While externally society provides all the equipment women need to cope with menstruation and to protect themselves during it, there is little mental preparation or information provided for young girls reaching menarche, or afterwards. It seems that very few east London women had received clear prior information about menstruation, and many were left to cope as best they could with a situation of which they had limited previous knowledge or none at all.

### *The Social and the Biological Components of Reproduction*

Reproductive behaviour is clearly shaped by the interaction between biological, environmental, and cultural factors that determine the variety and complexity of patterns of human reproduction. Although a full examination of the extent to which social behaviour and biological factors mutually affect each other and the

reasons they do so is beyond the scope of this discussion, a brief glance at the increasing awareness of the necessity of a synthesis between the biological and social in anthropology may be helpful. The divergence between biological and social or cultural studies of human behaviour has been wide, and biocultural syntheses have not been a central concern of anthropological theory for several decades. As Levin and Lewontin (1998: xi) have put it, 'anthropology, properly construed, is not separable into the physical and the social. Anthropology is at the nexus of the biological and social', and yet 'the struggle between biological and social explanations of human life is nowhere more pronounced than in anthropology'. The increase in the specialization of sub-disciplines in anthropology has also been responsible for further increasing the gap between the two disciplines. Social anthropologists have remained inattentive to the biological consequences of changing cultures and environments. Likewise, biological anthropologists have not included the effects of the interaction between large-scale political and economic processes and local-level ecologies in shaping biologies: 'while socio-cultural anthropologists have been too introspective, biological anthropologists have not been reflexive enough' (Goodman and Leatherman 1998: 4).

The dialogue between biological and social anthropology has broadened the theoretical scope of both disciplines in recent years. In addition to the scientific and academic value of such an approach, the alliance between biology and culture may also prove to be of practical value in opening up new and unexpected horizons for the understanding of intensely complex areas of enquiry, and for helping the successful implementation of policies where necessary. In spite of considerable improvements in the lives of people, especially in the developing countries, many of the major problems faced by vast numbers of people around the world remain unresolved. Health, including reproductive health and HIV/AIDS, malnutrition, infectious diseases, environmental degradation, and poverty remain crucial issues. Policies devised to deal with them are not producing the expected results. Global decisions do not match local realities, and as Goodman and Leatherhead remark 'with its broadly holistic and bio-cultural approach, anthropology is seemingly well-positioned to help address these challenges' (1998: 4).

Catherine Panter-Brick's article in this issue provides a good example of a perspective that takes account of the interaction between ecological factors and the behavioural aspects of human reproduction. She studies a Himalayan village which contains two populations, each of a different ethnic background, different mode of subsistence, different type of social organization, and different demographic profile. To identify the underlying reasons for the difference in demographic profiles, she uses the innovative method of measuring the hormonal variations which underpin human fecundity. She establishes a link between a high seasonal work load, lactation, and low fecundity among women of the agro-pastoralist group. Women of the blacksmith group, on the other hand, do not have heavy physical workloads, depend economically on their men, do not show seasonal variations in their fecun-

dity, and have a higher fertility rate than the agro-pastoralists. Panter-Brick clearly draws the distinction between fecundity and fertility. She reiterates that 'the biological perspectives on reproduction are often polarized. Yet they intersect in reality', but that 'for conceptual clarity it is important to dissociate the biological from the social determinants of reproduction' and that 'it is fruitful to tease apart which are the most important variables among those responsible for governing fertility'.<sup>5</sup>

### *Conclusion*

The articles in this issue by no means provide a comprehensive account of all aspects and phases of human reproduction. Menopause, abortion, parenting, infertility, pregnancy, new or old reproductive technologies, fertility regulation, and many other issues are not addressed here. However, from what has already been said here, it is clear that human reproduction is not about one specific phase of human life alone. Viewed cross-culturally, it encompasses the entire human life-cycle, from pre-birth to death and beyond. The value of this set of papers is in highlighting two inter-related themes. The first is the importance of being able to distinguish, and understand, reproduction in both its biological and socio-cultural contexts, as well as the interaction between the two. The global approach to the issues of population growth, environmental degradation, and poverty reduction endorses and justifies (albeit indirectly) the increasing intervention of the state in the reproductive life of its citizens. This process is pushed forward by the universal medicalization of reproduction, which is a useful tool in the implementation of population and development policies. At the same time, the new global approach to reproduction is promoting a 'rights-based' approach to reproductive health, places the individual at the top of its agenda, and advocates recognizing the freedom of people to choose their own reproductive lives. The two agendas often clash when applied to specific cultural contexts: looking for an ideal solution may not be realistic. However, a bio-cultural approach can open up new horizons in this field and guide policies to a better understanding of the intricacies of human reproduction.

The second theme is that of the links between reproduction and identity. The question of identity and its meaning is central to the study of anthropology. The contributors to this special issue of the journal all identify the cosmological and

<sup>5</sup> Examples of the interaction between ecological and environmental factors and social and cultural norms are abundant. A recent study carried out by Hampshire (2001) on Fulani agro-pastoralists in northern Burkina Faso shows that the climatic changes that have increased economic pressures on the Fulani have led to male out-migrations to the towns, with a resultant impact on fertility. The Fulani have not viewed this fall in fertility, which is assumed to be a desirable consequence of modernization, positively and even see it as a threat to their ethnic identity.

metaphysical understandings and practices of reproduction as the most important determinants of identity, which encompasses selfhood and personhood. Where life begins and in what form; the 'ownership' and 'control' of one's body; the formation of personhood through kinship, and maintaining the membership of the kin group; and conformity with the ideals which the society has of personhood are all themes that are linked to identity and are addressed by these papers.

Finally, human reproduction has become politicized as never before, a theme which is also hinted at, especially by Locke and Zhang. The increase in the involvement of the state in the reproductive lives of its citizens, the recent shift from the concept of reproduction to those of 'reproductive health' and 'reproductive rights', the medicalization of reproduction in contemporary societies, and the impact of global processes on everyday reproductive experiences are all important factors which confront traditional ideologies and are confronted by them, throughout the world. These competing ideologies of tradition and modernity often provoke reactions and trigger consequences which are unforeseen and lead to the creation of new political agendas by both recipients and providers alike. By emphasizing the agency of women (and men) in relation to personhood and selfhood, the contributors of these papers are also highlighting the political nature of reproduction. The way women perceive and manage the physiological and social care of reproduction and negotiate the various forces exerted in their lives (which are shown to be paramount in any measures to improving their health and rights) is shown to be embedded within the wider construction and negotiation of social identity. The relationship between power, reproduction, and gender is shown to be intertwined, and to affect the interaction between individuals, the community, and the state. Power taken in both its aspects of repressing as well as constructing identities (to use Foucauldian analysis) brings the question of reproduction to the forefront of the political debate.

This special issue of *JASO* derives from the Fertility and Reproduction Studies Group (FRSG), which was set up in 1999 following several successful seminar series at the Institute of Social and Cultural Anthropology (ISCA), University of Oxford. The establishment of the FRSG was part of the broader teaching programme of Medical Anthropology at ISCA, and its seminars are now integrated into the MSc course in Medical Anthropology there. The aim of the FRSG is to address the changing dynamics of fertility and reproduction from a cross-cultural and multidisciplinary perspective involving, among other disciplines, biological anthropology, demography, psychology, gender, development studies, and medicine. Biological Anthropology in particular provides one of the main complementary dimensions to the FRSG's seminar and research programmes. The papers presented in this issue of the journal have been written by both members and past contributors to the FRSG seminars.

The FRSG also has a publication series with Berghahn Books, on 'Fertility, Reproduction, and Sexuality', with David Parkin and Soraya Tremayne as the series edi-

tors. Two volumes have so far been published (Tremayne 2001 and Montgomery 2001), a third will be published in 2004, and a further eight volumes are in preparation.

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