ONE

Introduction:
Conceiving the New World Order

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This book has two agendas: to transform traditional anthropological analyses of reproduction and to clarify the importance of making reproduction central to social theory. Our argument emerges from a resituating of both classic and more current research in anthropology and related fields. In the past, anthropologists paid close attention to the rich diversity of cultural practices associated with the "natural history" of human reproduction over the life cycle, focusing on topics such as fertility and infertility; conception and contraception; pregnancy and pregnancy termination; birth and infanticide; and a variety of issues involved in the parenting, distribution, caretaking, and survival of young children. Fine-grained, local-level holistic analyses such as these played an important role in the development of cross-cultural scholarship on reproduction.

However, the strength of such work—its focus on cultural specificity—was sometimes also its limitation. In response, new strategies have emerged that comprehend the transnational inequalities on which reproductive practices, policies, and politics increasingly depend; our project is part of this growing scholarly and popular awareness. While our work calls attention to the impact of global processes on everyday reproductive experiences, it does not assume that the power to define reproduction is unidirectional. People everywhere actively use their local cultural logics and social relations to incorporate, revise, or resist the influence of seemingly distant political and economic forces.

Additionally, this book offers a new framework that allows us to explore what happens when reproduction—in both its biological and its social interpretations—is placed at the center of social theory. By using reproduction as an entry point to the study of social life, we can see how cultures are produced (or contested) as people imagine and enable the
creation of the next generation, most directly through the nurturance of children. But it has been anthropology’s longstanding contribution that social reproduction entails much more than literal procreation, as children are born into complex social arrangements through which legacies of property, positions, rights, and values are negotiated over time. In this sense, reproduction, in its biological and social senses, is inextricably bound up with the production of culture.

It is our argument that, regardless of its popular associations with notions of continuity, reproduction also provides a terrain for imagining new cultural futures and transformations, through personal struggle, generational mobility, social movements, and the contested claims of powerful religious and political ideologies. These imaginings and actions are often the subject of conflict, for they engage the deepest aspirations and the sense of survival of groups divided by differences of generation, ethnicity, race, nationality, class, and, of course, gender. For example, China’s one-child policy is simultaneously a hardship and an aspiration. While most Chinese citizens still long to have several children, having a one-child family is nonetheless a profoundly desired and widespread status symbol, a “sign of the modern,” not only for the Chinese state but for ordinary people as well. (See Chapter 2.) In this case as in others, the relationship among imagined futures, state policy, and changing reproductive practices has specific consequences that must be taken into account.

We start with the centrality of reproduction to social life and then trace and investigate the multiple vectors that influence it. For example, reproduction simultaneously encompasses the impact of the international community of development agencies and local metaphors of childbirth. Thus, to study “honor and shame” in an Egyptian village may require attending to the Norplant birth-control experiments to which women are subjected within the framework of “international scientific cooperation” and with the blessing of the government (Morsy 1993). We also take seriously the unpredictable inequalities of global flows. K-Mart now sells Snuglis, whose design made ex-Peace Corps volunteers into millionaires in the 1960s and 1970s as they sold “natural” methods of childcare learned in Africa. More recently, the U.S. adoption market’s demand for white babies unwittingly turned Romanian babies into a lucrative commodity in an economy that was desperate for American dollars and in which abortion was illegal and birth control was almost impossible to obtain. (See Chapter 13.) Clearly, questions of culture, politics, and biology are impossible to disentangle around the topic of reproduction, as they often involve transnational processes that link local and global interests. Our goal is to keep the tension among these domains, while recognizing that our
very categories—biological, global, and local—are also subject to interrogation.

**STRATIFIED REPRODUCTION AND EUPHEMIZED VIOLENCE**

In this book, we have shifted our gaze away from the traditional anthropological focus on how reproduction is structured within cultures (presumed to be homogeneous and stable). Instead, we look at how reproduction is structured across social and cultural boundaries, particularly at local/global intersections. In order to account for the complexity of such junctures, we employ the term *stratified reproduction*, an idea developed by Shellee Colen, to describe the power relations by which some categories of people are empowered to nurture and reproduce, while others are disempowered.¹ This idea frames our research questions in particular ways: who is normatively entitled to refuse childbearing, to be a parent, to be a caretaker, to have other caretakers for their children, to give nurture or to give culture (or both)? Low-income African American mothers, for example, often are stereotyped as undisciplined “breeders” who sap the resources of the state through incessant demands on welfare. But historically and in the present, they were “good enough” nurturers to work as childcare providers for other, more privileged class and ethnic groups. (See Chapter 7.) More broadly, who defines the body of the nation into which the next generation is recruited? Who is considered to be in that national body, who is out of it? The struggle over the control of the sexuality and the offspring of women abducted and raped during the violent upheaval of Indian/Pakistani partition is a dramatic illustration of the conflation of national identity and women’s bodies (Chapter 12). Thus, put starkly, the concept of stratified reproduction helps us see the arrangements by which some reproductive futures are valued while others are despised.

In working out an analytical framework for a comparative understanding of inequalities in reproduction, the authors in this book focus on processes through which hierarchies are made to appear inevitable. One common strategy they point to is the discursive exclusion of women (and others) from cultural representations and social practices. State, corporate, and patriarchal powers sometimes efface the centrality of women to reproduction, even those aspects that are inseparable from female bodies. When the contraceptive Norplant was first proposed for testing in Brazil, for example, concerns of women were initially inaudible in the noisy conversation dominated by development agencies, nationalists, and the scientific establishment. (See Chapter 16.) Institutions may intervene into areas such as birth control, abortion, and maternal and child health in
the name of social need or national priorities but fail to acknowledge the impact of these interventions on the lives of women and their communities (Chapter 3). For example, the Catholic Church in its position on contraception and legitimacy has denied for centuries the fact that pregnancy carries the most extreme consequences for women and has subsumed women’s special interests into a seemingly beneficent discourse on morality and the family (Kertzer 1993). Effacements such as these are often overlooked because they are tightly woven into the fabric of “normal” daily life. Yet because they can have dramatic and even fatal consequences for women, we designate them as forms of what Ann Anagnost calls “euphemized violence” in order to call attention to their significance.2

Euphemized violence occurs in many contexts: when the work of midwives (Chapter 4) and childcare workers (Chapter 5) is erased in considering the support systems required for the survival of families; or when the grief resulting from China’s stringent one-child policy is silenced (Chapter 2); or when a woman’s identity as a mother (or nonmother) is split off from her sexuality and broader social relations (Chapter 6). In response to such erasures, much of the work in this book focuses on recognizing women’s centrality to reproduction in all its complexity, usually in the interest of documenting, empowering, and theorizing about female experience (Chapters 21–23).

Finally, we should mention another erasure. Perhaps because in our own social categories we disassociate men from domestic domains (Ginsburg and Rapp 1991, Heggenhougen 1980), little research has been done on men’s involvement with children (compare Battaglia 1985, Hewlett 1991). While the recovery of female-centered accounts of reproduction is central to this book and much of contemporary feminism, we in no way intend to perpetuate a more widespread and pernicious effacement of men’s participation in and concerns about reproduction, as is clear from the analyses in Chapters 10, 12, and 14.

TECHNOLOGY, REPRESENTATION, AND CULTURAL MEANING

Many authors in this book focus on the analysis of reproductive technologies where the relationship between stratification and cultural representation is dramatically played out. The unprecedented development and uneven global spread of biomedical technologies aimed at the control of reproduction have become a central analytical concern because such technologies have deeply unsettled received notions of what is “natural” for people everywhere. In the “social dramas” (Turner 1974) produced around the introduction of new technologies, reproductive relations are thrown into stark relief. This upheaval can be seen clearly in popular,
scholarly, and political commentary in the West, where in the 1980s and 1990s the definition of biological parents has been stretched and contested, as test-tube babies and surrogate mothers have become regular "solutions" to infertility for the middle class. More broadly, a single generation of women in industrialized nations throughout the world has experienced the ambiguous benefits and burdens of the contraceptive pill; vacuum-aspiration abortion; the growing use of surgical sterilization; and the routinization of fetal monitoring via ultrasound, amniocentesis, and maternal serum alphafetoprotein screening. (See Chapter 17.)

However extraordinary such developments may be, we cannot simply be dazzled by the latest innovations in Western technology. Indeed, to focus too finely on the technology itself is to miss what anthropologists often discover in their research more generally: the control and distribution of knowledge and practices concerning reproduction are contested in every society. For example, in some societies, older women are gatekeepers for knowledge surrounding fertility and childbirth; only after initiation can young women have access to such information and participate in reproduction with social support (Bell 1983, Llewelyn-Davies 1979, MacCormack 1980). The introduction of birth control to younger women by outsiders may meet with resistance because of the challenge it poses to the authority of older women (Burbank 1988). Such cases remind us that our analyses must focus on nexuses of power shaping reproduction and not simply on the technologies themselves. Social actors with diverse interests promote their own versions of cultural continuity, and reproduction always is a central concern in such dramas.

When we analyze how knowledge of reproduction is distributed and controlled, both large-scale and local forces are always in play. At the local level, healers, for instance, whether physicians or other kinds of cultural specialists, play critical roles in the experience of reproduction in daily life. They may support or undermine women's interests. As the ongoing battles over abortion in the United States continually demonstrate, women themselves are deeply divided over whether they should enable or block access to the termination of pregnancy (Ginsburg 1989, Joffe 1987). Additionally, choices in reproductive technologies cannot be considered apart from international political and economic forces; for example, the devaluation of the Nigerian currency made diaphragms and fertility hormones produced in the West too expensive for importation during the 1980s and 1990s. Thus, in any given situation, the market and politics structure what knowledge is relevant, ruling out many potential choices.

More broadly, these examples demonstrate how technologies are cultural objects enmeshed in social, political, and economic systems (Appadurai 1986, Mauss [1924] 1954, Strathern 1988, Weiner 1992). Accord-
ingly, many of our analyses focus on reproductive technologies because they condense conflicts and reveal the workings of social relations. This is as true of Sioux menstrual huts (Powers 1980) as of Manhattan maternity centers. Thus, as knowledge of reproductive technologies, whether “traditional” or “modern,” is being conveyed increasingly through popular cultural forms, mass media, and legal language, our analyses must also attend to the realm of representation, which can present surprising variation cross-nationally. (See Chapter 19.) For example, the Inuit Women’s Association produced a video about midwives’ work in a birthing center in northern Quebec in order to convince Canadian health officials and other Inuit of the importance of sustaining traditional midwifery.9

Representations provide the arena in which cultural understandings and hierarchies are produced, contested, and revealed. Time magazine, for example, regularly publishes cover stories on everything from new infertility treatments to the search for in utero methods of screening for genetic diseases. How do such representations have an impact in the world? There are well-developed methodologies in cultural studies and semiotics for interpreting textual meaning; those using such methods might view Time magazine as an unproblematical stage for the display of scientific hegemony. From an anthropological perspective, this kind of analysis relies on outdated Durkheimian models in which the image and its interpretation are isomorphic. As an alternative, “reception theory” has developed an ethnographic approach (Ang 1991, Radway 1988) which recognizes that such imagery is produced and consumed by a broad range of people who may resist, negotiate, or accommodate encoded meanings (Hall 1973).

In the realm of representation, new reproductive technologies (NRTs) are particularly fascinating and unnerving in their novelty and unpredictability—a fact that advertising, the engine of late capitalism, exploits endlessly. Images of NRTs are especially burdened because there are no clear rules for the reading of such highly novel developments. A controversial ad for Volvo automobiles, for instance, used an ultrasound visualization of a fetus, a method for monitoring pregnancies and often the first “photo” that parents receive of their future offspring. By combining an ultrasound fetal image with Volvo’s reputation for safety, the ad invoked in many upscale couples modern anxieties about infant safety (Taylor 1992).

Such imagery is not confined to advertising and popular media texts. The social organization and templates of meaning used by groups as diverse as scientists, media workers, and reading publics can be investigated ethnographically and taken into account in any analysis. Analyses of both popular and medical representations of in vitro fertilization (IVF) reveal how women’s bodies are often erased from images of reproduction and
replaced by laboratory technologies. Through such erasure, the separation of infertility treatments from women’s bodies is made to appear natural, and scientific procedures become almost miraculous. (See Chapter 18.) Moreover, access to such procedures is highly stratified: wealthy women in Europe, the United States, and Australia can get IVF treatments, while infertile working-class, poor, and Third World women who cannot afford such treatments may turn instead to religion, popular remedies, and fostering or adoption.

More generally, most biomedical research is premised on scientific representations of the human body as a universal constant, not accounting for the biological impact of cultural differences and social inequalities. The birth-control pill, for example, designed for a middle-class American modal body, was tested on working-class Puerto Rican women with distinct and often compromised nutritional and health histories. The impact of such culture-blind research design has yet to be assessed in both human and scientific terms. Still, we do know that representations of birth-control devices as universally available and effective are subject to question in the absence of appropriate support services such as access to public sanitation and primary health care, especially for the poor. (See Chapter 11.) In Third World settings and inner cities, few governments and medical systems are actually committed to providing the services necessary to use technology effectively. Even in countries that supported widespread public-health campaigns, the decline of state support now compromises women’s options and health (Chapter 9). In such circumstances, the gap between representation and reality is often the catalyst for social action on the part of feminists and community activists committed to improving reproductive health care (Chapter 16).

RELOCATING REPRODUCTION

Such examples make it clear that new anthropological studies of reproduction require a capacious approach to ethnographic theory and method. In understanding women’s reproductive concerns in any society, for example, it is critical to consider their lives using expanded notions of historical time, whether individual or collective. Over the life course, for example, heterosexual women may first be concerned with access to contraception and abortion; then, effective infertility treatment; and, later, childcare arrangements. Moreover, one generation may hold different aspirations for the reproductive lives of their progeny than they held for their own, as is clear in the dramatic decline in birthrates throughout the world.

In addition, attention to the historical dimensions of concepts and cases sheds new light on contemporary views of reproduction. (See Chap-
ter 20.) For example, the common assumption that the dramatic decline in modern Western birthrates resulted from twentieth-century birth-control technologies has been challenged by the work of social history. Knowledge of coitus interruptus was widespread in late nineteenth-century Europe among members of artisanal classes who put into practice Enlightenment views of marriage and sexuality (Chapter 10). A historical perspective also sheds light on the circumstances surrounding official support of “modern” health strategies pertaining to women. Beyond official pronouncements of concern for women’s welfare in Egypt, the focus on maternal mortality coincided in the 1980s with the increased influence of international financial institutions, attendant structural adjustment policies constraining state support of public-health services, and, last but not least, the demise of state feminism (Chapter 9).

Our analyses of reproductive relations are embedded in expanded notions not only of time but of space as well. Like many other contemporary anthropologists (Gupta and Ferguson 1992), we have redefined the meaning of local research; we see “local knowledge” (Geertz 1983) as constructed and contested in the flows of transnational processes. For example, the birthing chair, banned in some Arab communities by British colonialists in the nineteenth century, now appears in trendy hospitals in the West. Perhaps a more compelling illustration is the case of West Indians caring for white middle-class children in New York City. These women are supporting their own children left with kin in the Islands, where well-paid jobs are scarce. In turn, their American jobs exist because of an entrenched sexual division of labor, inflexible workplaces, and the lack of adequate public childcare options for working mothers in the United States (Chapter 5).

Thus, an expanded view of the scope of reproductive politics requires renewed attention to what we mean when we characterize processes as global or local. In this book the local is not defined by geographical boundaries but is understood as any small-scale arena in which social meanings are informed and adjusted through negotiated, face-to-face interaction. In this sense, meetings of Inuit organizations concerned about birthing practices and meetings of Canadian health-policy officials who govern the Northwest Territories and other Inuit areas may both be viewed as local arenas, although the consequences of their decisions may be drastically different. (See Chapter 4.) Science, too, can be understood as local (and heterogeneous) in its daily practices. In the local practices of “lab talk,” for example, geneticists may reveal the ambiguity of their findings; nonetheless, these findings are quickly codified as absolute knowledge in the language of counselors responsible for transmitting knowledge to patients (Rapp 1988).

By contrast, transnational or global processes are those through which
specific arenas of knowledge and power escape the communities of their creation to be embraced by or imposed on people beyond those communities. When such ideas flow from the West to the Third World, the process is often implicitly read as a modernist narrative that presumes Westernization as the inevitable outcome. The most prominent example is the global spread of the costs and benefits of Western biomedicine. For example, African Americans in the southern United States accepted the promises of better health offered by hospital-based childbirth; the price was the demise of community-based midwifery (Chapter 3). But the story does not always unfold according to a singular narrative. Western science and technology may also open up possibilities for new cultural practices, such as the use of electronic communications by diasporic and indigenous peoples, enabling political dialogue and mobilization across great geographical distances.

Although modern technologies may be compelling, their effects are unpredictable. Diverse local practices must be accounted for because they play a role in the negotiation for or resistance to such technologies in every case. Thus, our work focuses on how people act as agents in shaping their own reproductive lives, however constrained their options may be by national and even international forces. A dramatic example is provided by the Sami, whose reindeer herds were contaminated by the Chernobyl meltdown. Well-intentioned Scandinavian governments urged them not only to be cautious about human reproduction but also to make wide-ranging changes in herding practices—changes that separated social reproduction from material production in unprecedented ways. In response, Sami are beginning to articulate a cultural future under these changed and dangerous conditions despite, at times, the government’s concern with their health in the narrowest sense. (See Chapter 15.)

THE POLITICS OF REPRODUCTION AND THE POLITICS OF RESEARCH

Our interest in the agency of our subjects springs from our unapologetic concern with the political nature of both reproduction and research about it. Many of us have experienced tensions between scholarship and activism concretely, in the pull to listen carefully to what people say about their reproductive lives and in our commitment to advocacy and the championing of reproductive rights. But “rights” are always historically and culturally located, a lesson we continually relearn. As a prominent example, easily accessible contraception is regarded by most Western health-care providers and feminists as a universally desirable human right. But research has shown that where women are concerned with “legitimate” reasons for denying men’s sexual access, they may find such
technologies a burden. In these situations, women’s reproductive concerns affecting their human rights might instead focus on the provision of infant health clinics or protection from domestic abuse.

Studying such cases forces us to reexamine the often-ethnocentric assumptions of social policy and the convictions of our own political debates. It can help us to map new ways forward through contested terrains. Thus, our analyses of specific reproductive strategies include policy as part of our investigation as well as an arena for action. This dual focus raises many questions. When we speak with policymakers whose discourses we study and critique, how do we then translate what we have learned into terms they can acknowledge? If we succeed in translating, are we likely to have any impact? In fact, our efforts to explain to policymakers the alternative cultural views of our subjects may result, ironically, in their categorization as “new savages” (Trouillot 1991), justifying policies of assimilation or neglect.

Increasingly, a solution to the dilemma of our double identity—as analysts and activists—is the use of collaborative methods in which the concerns and aspirations of the people with whom we work guide both research and action. Canadian medical anthropologists, for example, have been working to create support among Canadian health-care providers as well as indigenous northern communities for their efforts to develop culturally appropriate medical support for women in labor. Rather than view such methods as applied research whose “real” goal is theory, we argue that they provide basic challenges to social theory and epistemology. By breaking down boundaries between “us” and “them,” collaborative approaches transcend models of cultures as bounded units. For example, those who study people with HIV find their role expanding from researcher to caregiver to activist as they engage with people whose circumstances challenge received notions of gender, generation, and embodiment (Chapter 14). When studied politically, as process, and collaboratively, reproduction provides an arena for investigating and theorizing about the production of culture.

By engaging in contested situations, we find that our work frames cultural production as a continuous process of social transformation rather than as the static duplication implied by older, more functionalist models of social reproduction. Thus, we underline that our understanding of reproduction departs radically from prior uses of the term in anthropology as a synonym for replication. Our perspective is anything but static. Much of the work in this book involves moments of clear social transformation; yet even when cultural practices appear to be continuous with the past, their cultural production cannot be taken for granted, as people increasingly struggle to sustain their lives under conditions different from those of prior generations. (See Chapter 3.) Given this model, those
of us who study the politics of reproduction join with others interested in the problem and process of agency in daily life.

A number of key concepts that have gained currency in social theory concern both agency and its limits. These ideas cluster around notions of emergent cultural forms, counter-discourses, alternative and oppositional practices, or resistance (Foucault 1980, Lave et al. 1992, Terdiman 1985, Williams 1977). Such concepts have profoundly disrupted fixed notions of culture by calling our attention to the many ways in which new practices and understandings—whether conservative, reactionary, or progressive—continually emerge. The most powerful work coming out of this perspective emphasizes that people cannot develop oppositional positions independent of the categories of the dominant culture, even as they attempt to destabilize them (Anderson 1983, Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983, Williams 1989). This point is not always taken into account by those who romanticize resistance as a complete alternative to hegemonic positions or those who see oppositional practices everywhere, without considering the relationship of intentionality to action or outcome. This complexity is evident, for example, in the case of lesbian mothers, who often strive to create households modeled on conventional American nuclear families. They intentionally deploy this normative household arrangement to legitimize themselves in legal arenas, even as their actions undermine the heterosexual assumptions of that form.

In this case as in others, analysis depends on a careful accounting of the processes by which accommodation and opposition to dominant discourses are intertwined. (See Chapter 6.) Here, Leith Mulling’s idea of transformative action provides a framework for understanding agency in a grounded way that does not require categorizing cultural practices as either dominant or alternative. Rather, this concept helps us recognize the emergence of new social and cultural possibilities in the activities of daily life. Minimally, the notion of transformative action requires a recognition that human agency (and limits to it) can be seen in even the smallest activities. From such actions the consciousness and intentionality commonly identified as resistance can be constructed. For example, women who create alternative explanations to medical interpretations of amniocentesis may eventually become involved in feminist health-care groups. As another instance, religious women often come to community activism, whether as right-to-life activists or Witnesses for Peace, through church-based sodalities. A framework such as transformative action emphasizes the considerable effort involved not only in making dramatic changes but also in sustaining daily life under conditions made difficult by warfare, disease, impoverishment, or ecological disaster (Chapters 7, 12, 14, and 15). Transformative action can occur at many levels—from households to community organizations to social movements.
Our interest in transformative action grows out of our concern with the permeable boundary between scholarship and social action in a world where the rules for constituting meaning are not always predictable, for subjects and researchers alike. For example, when Sharon Stephens queried Sami men and women about their experiences of living with the devastating aftereffects of Chernobyl (Chapter 15), they pointed out the similarity of their circumstances to hers as a child, when she lived downwind from a nuclear-power facility in North America. Such responses are moving testimony to the interconnected perspectives of people on the so-called periphery. Clearly, researchers do not have a monopoly on transnational models of cultural analysis or social action; this is precisely what we mean when we speak of the epistemological possibilities presented in truly collaborative research.

But we are interested in more than epistemological possibilities. We are developing theory and method that will lead us to new understandings of interventions as well. Our research can help map points of potential innovation or activism, despite the grim realities of an increasing stratification of reproduction on a global scale. Such inequalities in reproduction are often but not always economic, as was clear in the Nicolae Ceausescu regime’s criminalization of abortion or more recently in the widespread raping of women in the former Yugoslavia, both of which were strategic and symbolic nationalist statements. Yet in response to these atrocities, international activists are now working together on behalf of the human rights of these (and other) women. Global interconnections may thus generate positive possibilities as well as negative consequences. We consider such action to be a “politics of hope” that seeks not only to redress abuse but also to identify the space in which new social imaginaries are emerging out of people’s daily lives. These processes call for the reflexive engagement of researchers, not simply in textual terms but as players who cannot deny that they have stakes in a social world shared with their subjects (Fabian 1983).

DEBATING REPRODUCTIVE POLITICS: THE CONTENTS OF THIS BOOK

The theoretical and substantive differences in the chapters of this book are rich resources for exploring the relation between the corporeal body and the body politic. The authors engage contemporary theory and historical or comparative perspectives to illuminate the multiple and often intersecting forms through which reproduction is given cultural weight and social shape. The authors’ subjects range from the textual and symbolic to the biosocial. Their concerns encompass radioactive reindeer, the hidden history of coitus interruptus, and the imposition of nationalist
boundaries on women’s bodies. The people they worked with included migrant nannies, militant midwives, indigenous reproductive activists, people with AIDS, and government bureaucrats.

The chapters are grouped into six parts. In our first part, “The Politics of Birth / Control,” the authors show how the availability of new technologies for birth and its control may create contradictions for those who have access to it. People may desire the possibilities presented by new resources but reject the systems of control in which they are embedded (Chapter 4). However, faced with the power of the state, they may find that resistance proves futile (Chapter 2) or leads even to the “voluntary” abandonment of local practice and the erasure of cultural history (Chapter 3). The chapters also cover the epistemological, methodological, and ethical dilemmas involved in doing ethnographic research in contested situations. In each case, the authors argue for a stereoscopic focus that recognizes the specificity of both the imposed regime and the responses to it.

Chapters in the second part, “Stratified Reproduction,” illustrate how the hierarchical social arrangements surrounding parenting structure empirical knowledge about and practices involved in pregnancy, birth, and childcare. These authors explore the discursive dimensions by which parents are categorized as appropriate and inappropriate and are stratified by age (Chapter 8), race, class, nationality (Chapter 5), gender (Chapter 7), and sexual preference (Chapter 6), as well as how these cultural understandings are translated into the social organization of daily life surrounding the care of children (Chapters 5 and 6). When the relationships between social organization and discursive processes are considered, we can see clearly the impact of ethnocentric assumptions. For example, when parenting is reduced to “mothering,” the other people involved in childcare—fathers, foster and adoptive parents, nannies, and day-care workers—are rendered invisible, and mothers alone are held responsible for their children’s well-being. More generally, experiences of reproduction are shaped by a variety of cultural ideas and practices that are hierarchically organized according to normative categories: femininity and masculinity (Chapter 6), class and race (Chapter 7), the expression and control of sexuality (Chapter 8), and the nurturance and enculturation of children (Chapter 5).

In the third part, “Rethinking Demography, Biology, and Social Policy,” the authors address conventional theory as well as social policy concerning the consequences and control of human fertility. Their chapters call into question traditional top-down paradigms in demography and social policy that model demographic transitions on the putative experiences of Western societies, using them to design interventions in other places. Scholars looking carefully at local history have revealed the wide-
spread, self-conscious practice of coitus interruptus that moved through the popular classes in Europe in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, challenging the assumption that Western birthrates declined significantly only as a result of new contraceptive technologies (Chapter 10). Ethnographic research in Egypt unmasked what is hidden by statistical categories such as “maternal mortality” that are used in national reports. Women’s health problems, whether pregnancy-related or not, are inseparable from the economic and physical hardships they endure under global conditions that have spurred male labor migration and pressured the government to cut back local health services (Chapter 9). In Nigeria, the government kept out family-planning programs until the 1980s, when Western development agencies made them a condition for continued aid. At the local level, however, resistance to imported contraceptive technologies persists because of patrilineal pronatalism and the sexual mores associated with polygyny (Chapter 11). These chapters, by taking human agency and culture into account and working from the bottom up, challenge the monolithic and ethnocentric assumptions built into concepts such as “population control,” “the demographic transition,” and “maternal mortality.”

Demographers have long noted that war and famine often alter reproductive strategies but have paid scant attention to the ways in which culture may deeply influence meanings of the reproductive risks these crises generate. In our fourth part, “Disastrous Circumstances and Reproductive Consequences,” the chapters demonstrate how dire situations (and their consequences) are interpreted through cultural logics and strategies. These circumstances may even provide ground for the production of new understandings of the human and social body (Chapter 14). People living in extremity are often viewed as victims by outsiders; however, a focus on reproduction can provide a sense of human agency by emphasizing people’s efforts to sustain what is of value to them under transformed circumstances (Chapter 15). The chapters also reveal how extreme circumstances put cultural systems at empirical risk, as they suddenly collide with social and political forces far beyond their spheres of influence (Chapter 12 and 13).

Remarkable developments in medical technology tempt us to think of interventions into reproduction as a current imposition on “the natural” (Chapter 18). In our fifth part, “What’s So New about the New Reproductive Technologies?”, the authors remind us that innovation in “technology” is not necessarily new nor can it be understood independent of culture and history (Chapter 19). These chapters reveal how cross-cultural understandings enable us to move beyond simplistic depictions of reproductive technology as either a blessing or a curse. People’s desires for resources to control reproduction are longstanding and ubiquitous.
The impact of such resources cannot be separated from the power relationships within which they are embedded—in particular, the sometimes opposing concerns of local, state, international, and feminist interests (Chapter 16) and of the state, as represented by expert practitioners, and lay clients (Chapter 17).

Our last part, "What's Political about Reproduction?", explores the origins of many of our current understandings of reproduction. Coming from a variety of disciplines, the authors challenge the received wisdom concerning the concept of reproduction in their respective fields. Through the lens of social history, we can stretch our temporal framework in order to see how a politics of reproduction developed out of eighteenth-century attitudes toward sexuality, marriage, and childhood, long before the advent of the modern bureaucratic state (Chapter 20). In political theory, tensions between individual and collective rights to bodily autonomy are also longstanding; a historical perspective helps us see how these issues are played out in present political battles (Chapter 21). In social anthropology, classic theories of kinship and exchange have fetishized women's roles as wives and mothers, neglecting the significance of women in broader cycles of cultural production (Chapter 22). In evolutionary theory, a systematic misreading of Darwin's arguments regarding female choice in sexual selection has had at least two consequences: it has marginalized the importance of the female role in evolution, and it has reduced the notion of reproduction itself to the instrumental transmission of genetic material (Chapter 23). The authors in this part offer powerful evidence that the concept of reproduction is far from static; it must be understood as embroiled in struggles for meaning in both popular and scholarly discourses.

Taken together, these chapters move reproduction to the center of social theory, pushing research practices, analysis, and political interventions in new directions. They remind us of the uneven and contested nature of the social terrain on which the politics of reproduction are played out; and they challenge us to conceive of an alternative world order in which that terrain might more equitably accommodate the broad range of aspirations we all attach to the creation of future generations.

NOTES

1. We are grateful to Shellee Colen, who first coined this term and has been developing this concept in her research on West Indian childcare workers in New York (Colen 1986, 1989, 1990). See also chapter 5.

2. We are indebted to Ann Anagnost for this idea, which she used in discussion at the Wenner-Gren Conference on the politics of reproduction in November 1991.

3. This fifty-one-minute video entitled Ikaajuri (The Helper): Midwifery in the Canadian Arc-
REFERENCES


