

The science issue – reproduction medicine Or the extension of the zone of exploitation

Issues like reproduction medicine (and the kind of tourism linked to it), the practice of making use of „egg cell donors“ or of „surrogate mothers“ are commonly seen as a bio-ethical challenge. Then there is talk about „values“ being put under menace by technological developments or in need to be reformed in a neo-liberal perspective. Spaces of autonomy and individual spaces of liberty are then talked about, which should be regulated by law or withdrawn from state interference.

These international phenomena are generally not recognized as an occasion for a critical analysis of society, neither by the parliamentary nor by the extra-parliamentary left.

This is, however, quite remarkable – given that about 15 years ago there has been a critical debate on „bio-politics (referring to specific medical, but also political technologies), which have been criticized, because of their „depriving human beings of their political capacities, by reducing them to ‚mere life‘, as e.g. in reproduction, health, vulnerability, and the susceptibility of being killed“.

Bio-politics can be understood as a core issue of an up-to-date, really contemporary critique of capitalism. In such a perspective, reproduction medicine could be used as an exemplary area, in order to address and to analyse the following developments:

- a) Globalized markets of bodies have emerged, which are further expanding.
- b) Rights for the valorization and control inter alia of body substances, and reproductive services are multiplying.
- c) On the global level, the well-known inequalities between Rich and Poor take the form of a polarization between those who are capable of realizing their demands for bio-medical consumption, and those who can just provide the materials and the services for which a solvent demand exists
- d) „Bio-Law“ is there in order to secure, inter alia, – within the respective societies, but mainly according to the poverty differential between Southern and Eastern Europe in relation to the richer Northern European states – such reproductive body markets – with different legal frameworks also resulting from political conflicts determined by neo-liberal interpretations of individual liberties (of marketing and consumption), on the one hand, and conservative values as ideologies (especially concerning women and families), on the other hand.

In a critical perspective on society it would be necessary to discuss the following points:

- Health (and health related offers) is no longer just an implicit condition of all production, but it has itself become a mode of valorization (pharmaceutical industries / privatised ‚landscapes‘ of clinics and research agencies / state support for competitiveness).
- Like in other sectors recognized to be ‚productive‘, an „entrepreneurial“ subjectivity is forming within a deregulated health sector which has ceased to be focused on health and healing, and is oriented towards optimization and life management etc.. This subjectivity is declared to be „creative, flexible, self-responsible, risk conscious, and customer oriented“.

- Those who are „superfluous“ in this world (also within wealthy societies) will have to learn, in the face of capitalist valorization processes, to market their own bodies (egg cells, uterus, and other body substances), when their force of labour has ceased to be relevant.
- Faced by the circulation of body substances, especially women are called upon to donate their bodies (as a voluntary gift or against a cost compensation). At the same time, a valorization of human bodies by others has emerged (via reproduction clinics and by centers of mediation), with an ensuing change in the perceptions of one-self and of others, of ways of life, bodily practices, and of subjectivities of those concerned.

All this could be summarized by talking about an extension of the zone of exploitation. The most interesting and the most difficult issue will be to determine the relation of the spheres of production and of reproduction in this respect. Is it possible to apply concepts like production, productivity, surplus-value and labour without further analysis in the area of reproductive services? Or should we rather conceive them in terms of „Leibeigenschaft/serfdom“? And what about the ‚invisible‘ labour of women which is as old as capitalism itself?

In the last instance, the task at hand will be a new elaboration of the concepts of the critique of political economy – i.e. labour, production, distribution, and consumption (taking account in the latter case, of the changes in needs and in the regimes of conducting one's life).