

The social tie and the gaze of the other
How biomedical prenatal practices affect interpersonal, social, and transnational relationships

Ben Gurion University of the Negev, Be'er Sheva,
Room (for the two days): Rotem Hall, Building 70, 2F

11–12 December 2019

Conference: tentative program

11. dec. 2019

3 pm

Aviad Raz and Christina Schües: Welcome

Christina Schües: General introduction

3:30–5 pm

Nitzan Rimon-Zarfaty: *Ideals of Parenthood, Anticipated Families and Social Egg Freezing: A comparative cross-cultural German-Israeli analysis*

Hannes Foth: *Family bonds, (un)conditionality and prenatal genetic testing*

coffee

5:30–7 pm

Nurit Kirsh: *Jewish Identity and Genetic Testing: A Study of the Current Rabbinic Discourse and Political Struggle in Israel*

Olivia Mitscherlich-Schönherr: *Can the practices of genetic testing undermine the pre-political foundations of democracy?*

dinner

12. dec. 2019

9:30–11 am

Burkhard Liebsch: *Biological reproduction, otherness, and offspring*

Natan Sznajder: *The Israeli Variety of Transnationalism*

coffee

11:30–13 am

Shai Lavi: *Our Cut is our Bond: Male Circumcision in Israel, Germany and Turkey*

Anne Weber: *No cut no bond? The female gaze and religious identity practices*

lunch

2–3:30 pm

Sara Cohen Shabot and Pascal Delhom

Obstetric violence and the medical gaze

coffee

4–5:30 pm

Aviad Raz and Cornelia Klinger: *Neoliberal domination and “the ties that bind” in the context of routinized prenatal genetic testing*

5:30–6 pm

open discussion (moderated by Christoph Rehmann-Sutter)

Christina Schües: Closing and futural remarks

In the evening, we'll have dinner at *Kiton*, a traditional East European Jewish restaurant in Dizingoff str., Tel Aviv

Ties that bind? is the pivot of an ***Israeli-German social-philosophical platform on biomedical technologies, epistemic discourses, and body politics***. Initiators are Christina Schües and Aviad Raz; secretary Hannes Foth. Sponsored by Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft (DFG).

Abstracts

Nitzan Rimon-Zarfaty

Ideals of Parenthood, Anticipated Families and Social Egg Freezing: A comparative cross cultural German–Israeli analysis

Reproductive technologies have been critically discussed as deconstructing the “natural” reproductive process and thus as challenging cultural understandings concerning life, nature and family. In particular, they have been discussed as challenging accepted social ties governed by the traditional nuclear family while introducing new forms of kinship and new concepts of parenthood. At the same time, such technologies and their practical implementation have also been identified as embedded within and as reinforcing traditional social order and the “biological imperative of motherhood”. The implementation and usage of such technologies, can therefore serve as an important context for examining family ties and in particular the concept of parenthood as well as social understandings regarding parental ideals, roles and responsibilities. Those may very well be linked to anticipated sets of familial bonds and mutual (e.g. inter-generational) commitments. Our joint session aims to discuss those ties, while taking into account ‘the gaze of the other’.

Those appear as particularly relevant in the context of the newly emerging practice of ‘social egg freezing’ (SEF) on which my talk will focus. Introducing healthy women with the possibility to cryopreserve their oocytes in order to prolong their fertility, SEF therefore offers a possibility for post-menopausal motherhood which meets the ‘gold standard’ of biological motherhood. At the same time, however, SEF also involves uncertainty regarding normative dimensions. The critique evoked by SEF shows the co-existence of particular social expectations towards women, motherhood, and its ‘ideal’ timing while highlighting controversies around ‘late’ or ‘delayed motherhood’.

In many of the media report, SEF users have been portrayed as “selfish career-women” intentionally delaying childbirth to a time of their choosing due to career or educational aspirations. Current empirical research however, suggests that at the moment, most women opting for SEF do not aim at intentionally delaying childbirth but are in fact single women who opt for SEF mainly due to lack of partner. Furthermore, empirical research indicates that women choosing to use the practice are highly influenced by contemporary parenting culture and ideologies of parenthood. The decision to use SEF can therefore also be linked to certain socio-cultural values and ideals associated with the timing and the practice ‘proper’ and responsible parenthood and the appropriate familial formation. However, little is known about the ways such constructions and ideas may take shape in, and differentiate between different societies.

Applying personal semi-structured interviews with German (n=16) and Israeli (n=23) lay users, this research aims at studying and comparing the different socio-cultural constructions of parenthood and family ideas in the biomedical context of SEF. The Israeli-German comparison is especially interesting since the German regulatory and legal framework regarding new reproductive technologies is rather restrictive, while the Israeli regulation has been identified as extremely permissive.

My findings confirm previous research suggesting that women generally use the technology in the hope to bare children within heteronormative relationship while reinforcing ideals of the traditional family form. Furthermore, the findings highlight the perceived importance of biological parent-child ties as those women used SEF to enable the possibility of genetic parenthood for both themselves as well as their future partner. Those were found in both socio-cultural contexts.

Cross-cultural differences were found in the way participants viewed the decision to become a mother. German interviewees perceived this decision as less obvious and more conflictual. They discussed this ambivalence in the context of the perceived demanding German labor market and educational courses; as well as ideals of readiness connected to certain milestones and preconditions for motherhood-reflecting notions of parental responsibility. They further related to existing social controversies around late motherhood- while emotionally struggling with not meeting ideals of reproductive timing and maternal age.

In contrast, in Israel, the controversy around late motherhood came up as less prominent and the question of whether to become a mother was seldom brought up in the interviews. Alternatively, Israeli interviewees were more concerned with the legitimacy and decisions around single motherhood. Interestingly, (and within the regulative framework which allows embryo freezing), many of the interviewees (mostly secular ones), chose to freeze not only eggs but also embryos (created using donor

sperm). The rationale behind the decision was to improve the success rates of the procedure while viewing it as a form of ‘backup plan’. This decision can also be related to as reflecting both the unconditional wish to become a mother as well as the implicit legitimacy of single motherhood. In contrast, and though encouraged by fertility experts, most of my religious Israeli interviewees, chose not to use embryo freezing. As my research revealed, SEF is supported by certain rabbinic authorities as an alternative for single motherhood (as part of a halachic idea of family integrity and problem with sperm donation). Therefore, SEF becomes attractive for religious single women. Those women further discussed the usage of SEF as a form of long-term family planning by stressing that for them the decision to freeze eggs rely not simply on the wish to have a child, but on the wish to have multiple number of children. Such a strategy reinforces specific traditional family ideals.

The similarities as well as differences are further explained and discussed in relation to the different regulative frameworks in Germany and Israel as well as relevant social scripts such as the Israeli pronatalism and the perceived social expectations from German mothers highlighting ideas of “intensive motherhood”. I conclude by discussing the contribution of my findings to the analysis of the different ways in which reproductive technologies may reinforce and deconstruct ideals of parenthood a family. I will therefore claim for the importance of highlighting different cultural and social understandings of such notions as well as the social expectations constructing parental roles and familial formations. Finally, I will relate to the importance of understanding such cross-cultural differences for expanding the individualistic perspective to include the socio-political context (i.e. unveiling mechanism “cryopolitics”) as well as the cultural context.

Hannes Foth

Family bonds, (un)conditionality and prenatal genetic testing

Family bonds are often described as irredeemable and unconditional, yet we can witness several phenomena which reveal their complex structure or put these notions into question. Not only are families abandoned or reorganised but also in their very beginning and founding phase, decisions for or against certain notions of families are made – by the individuals themselves or the society who sets certain conditions upon them.

Furthermore, empathetic concepts such as an unconditional bond have evoked quite different receptions. For instance, notions of unconditional love have been both, criticized as well as emphasized in different approaches of feminist theory, care ethics, and philosophy of emotions (e.g. Mullin 2009). Additionally, the idea(l) of an unconditional bond is of central concern for a disability critique (Asch/Wassermann 2005, Kittay/Kittay 2000) as well as theories of generativity (Schües 2008/2016). This is particularly true when it comes to the field of prenatal genetic diagnosis and reproductive medicine, since these technologies have the potential to transform the structures of human relationships in and beyond their families. The possibilities to check the genetic dispositions of a foetus and, hence, to selectively abort it, presented new concerns and decisions for the expectant parents. Perhaps, children were never born truly unconditionally; however, today most children are born under the condition that they passed these examinations successfully. Thus, the question arises, if or in what sense the emerging relationships still can or should be analysed and evaluated in terms of an unconditional relationship.

1) In its first part, the contribution analyses the different approaches and diverse receptions of the idea(l) of an unconditional bond and focuses on their meaning in the field of prenatal genetic diagnosis and its recent developments such as the introduction of non-invasive blood tests. This includes considerations of whether and how these conditions could influence the parent-child relationship. One focus addresses the interplay of genetic testing and views of genetic ties and “normal” families. Special regard will then be given to the related critical concerns: does genetic testing have the potential to weaken the bond between parents and children? Might a child who is born under the condition of a negative test result have reasons to feel less loved and cared? Might the prenatal decisions of parents become an issue in the later relationship?

2) To discuss these questions, at least three perspectives will be taken into regard: a) at first, I will also draw on material from the comparative research on prenatal genetic testing in Germany and Israel, including our own study. Israel is a particular interesting case since it is a very child- and family-oriented society who is in the same time very much in favour for genetic testing. An emerging norm such as genetic responsibility (Remennick 2006) might challenge the prevalent views of parenthood in Germany

(Hashiloni-Dolev/Weiner 2008). Moreover, such views might imply contradicting social expectations. From this comparative perspective, parental norms can be differently constructed or contextualized according to their local cultures and societies. b) Furthermore, research on the motives of pregnant women involved in genetic testing has revealed a puzzling complexity that any reconstructive and evaluative discourse on ideals for parenthood should take into consideration (Kittay/Kittay 2000). c) This complexity has long been recognized by feminist discourses on parent- and motherhood. In particular, ideals of an unconditional bond(ing) have been discussed with great ambivalence and in order to overcome an oppressive ideology of motherhood. Thus, any concern about genetic testing, who draws on such concepts, must be reconciled with such criticism.

3) The last section shall re-examine the referred ideals and norms in the light of a relationship-oriented account to ethics (Schües 2008/2016, Wiesemann 2008) and care-ethics (Mullin 2009, Gedge 2011). It is based on the assumption that neither a demanding conception of unconditionality, nor parental autonomy, and not to mention the emerging concept of genetic responsibility can do justice to the variety of reasons and concerns which have to be accommodated in the decision-making of intended parents regarding genetic testing or not.

Regarding the topics of the conference, our session addresses family and parent-child relationships in their interplay with reproductive technologies such as genetic testing and social egg freezing. The talks focus on the aspired construction of their interrelating bonds and the role of genetic relatedness and unconditionality. The gaze of the other is included on several levels: by the social expectations and anticipated relations which shape the decision-making of intended parents and might also be transformed to internal conflicts, by the comparative perspective between Germany and Israel, and by our own responses to perceived differences and each other's talks.

Nurit Kirsh and Yael Hashiloni-Dolev

Jewish Identity and Genetic Testing: A Study of the Current Rabbinic Discourse and Political Struggle in Israel

From time immemorial, halachic Jewish identity was determined by traditional social interrogations, relying on oral testimony and written documentation. Until recently, it was commonly accepted that Jewish identity is not necessarily based on biological entities and cannot be reckoned via genetic testing. The question arises: is this perception still true, or did the huge wave of immigration from the former Soviet Union to Israel as well as advancements in genetic technologies lead to a shift in the present-day Israeli rabbinic discourse and state policy?

During the year of 2018, there were nearly 20 cases in which Jews, who had emigrated in Israel after 1990 from the former Soviet Union were asked to undergo genetic testing in order to prove their Jewishness, as a condition for marriage registration. The practice of identifying someone as Jewish through DNA spurred heated controversy and political struggle. Our study trails the ongoing process and debate among politicians and Rabbinic authorities. We seek to unpack and explore the unique circumstances under which certain scientific theories merge with current political agendas, and study if and how genetics is used, abused, or ignored, depending on particular socio-political situations.

There is an apparent shift in the definition of Jewishness, inspired by technology and the availability of genetic databases. The social and political consequences of this change shape the "ties that bind us" which are co-produced by genetics and society. Thus, it is instructive to understand the underpinnings of the current shift and its possible social ramifications by studying the reciprocal relationship between science, religion, communal identities and state policy.

Olivia Mitscherlich-Schönherr

Can the practices of genetic testing undermine the pre-political foundations of democracy?

Preliminary concepts, questions, thesis

In my lecture I use a presupposition of modern technology:

I do not understand technology as a single tool that remains external to human nature (cf. Arnold Gehlen); rather, I understand technology as a "dispositive" (Foucault) that penetrates human nature and opens up certain possibilities of life and blocks others.

With the concept of genetic testing I would like to address diagnostic practices that are exercised in the network of modern prenatal medicine and that aim to enable - if necessary - interventions in the genetic material of future generations. In this process, interventions in the genome can take various forms: from the choice of partner to the technical manipulation of the germlines; and can be carried out for the purpose of treating hereditary diseases or enhancement.

In my reflections, I would like to explore the question whether genetic testing can undermine the emotional foundations of the modern democracy.

Please, see extended abstract in the dropbox!

Burkhard Liebsch

Biological reproduction, otherness, and offspring

To a great extent it has become uncontested that we are biological beings and that our generative relations must be conceptualized in keeping with the laws of life.

The yardstick of any decision to intervene in someone's biological constitution etc. is, however, the retrograde perspective of somebody who will be an ›other‹. That every human individual is an ›other‹ (in the sense of a radical otherness) cannot be proven convincingly. This – and how the promise to vouch for the radical alterity of the other in practical life is kept or betrayed – we can only testify – thus objecting to any ›appropriation‹ of human life through the seemingly sovereign power of progenitors, peoples or the state that wants to capitalize on its bio-political resources.

Please, see extended abstract in the dropbox!

Natan Sznajder

The Israeli Variety of Transnationalism

The problem with Israel . . . is not—as is sometimes suggested—that it is a European “enclave” in the Arab world; but rather that it arrived too late. It has imported a characteristically late-nineteenth-century separatist project into a world that has moved on, a world of individual rights, open frontiers, and international law. The very idea of a “Jewish state”—a state in which Jews and the Jewish religion have exclusive privileges from which non-Jewish citizens are forever excluded—is rooted in another time and place. Israel, in short, is an anachronism. (Tony Judt, NYRB, October 2003)

Thus, more sixteen years ago, Tony Judt declared Israel to be an anachronism, an entity refusing to move on to the next stage, to a kind of trans-national Modernity Judt imagined. Thus, imagine for a moment what would happen if Israel applied for membership in the European Union. What would be the response? Its application would either be deferred like Turkey's, or flatly rejected. Why? Is Israel not European enough? Does it even belong to Europe even though geographically it is located in Asia? Even though founded in Europe, Israel is out of Europe but not in Europe. It lies in Asia and like Turkey connects Asia to Europe. Those who share the European continent, but do not share this Christian heritage, are seen as Europe's Other (just look at Turkey). Thus the same should apply for Israel and for Europe's Jews. Israel is certainly not a Christian country. One can almost claim that it is the opposite with its particularistic and ethnic self-definition as a Jewish state. Israel (like Turkey) rose out of the Ottoman Empire and constantly has to balance processes of Europeanization, Americanization, the expectations of international institutions and the pressure of local groups and tradition. One the one side the European Union, the European Council and the United Nations, on the other side Kurds and Palestinians, which are in an ethnic and national conflicts with both states. Both states struggle to find their own special path to modernity, which looks differently than most Western states with their post-

Enlightenment separation between state and religion – a Christian based notion of just that Western Enlightenment. Turkey attempts its own way of a Moslem democratic modernity, while Israel goes its own way of Jewish democratic Modernity. Both countries show Europeans a not-yet existing diversity beyond their participation in European song, sporting and academic events like this one.

Israel defines itself ethnically and its criteria of citizenship are exclusive. Wouldn't the term "European" imply, at least politically, the demands to change the basis of the Israeli national definition and found it on the conventional territorial principle - equality before the law of all citizens living within Israeli territory, irrespective of ethnic origins, race, community, religion, or sex? Shouldn't Israel first of all "Europeanize" and stop opposing those who think that nations are either "imagined" or "invented" and as a consequence, live with the illusion that nationalism will disappear when shown and "proven" that the nation is a creation of the mind? However, the continuation of the Israeli-Arab conflict and the resistance of antisemitism will resist these kinds of tendencies. Israel attempts to be universal democratic and particular Jewish at the same time and with that reaches its limits of universality. Israel suggests a different reading of European history undermining the project of reconciliation between former enemies enabled by the break-down of the socialist regimes. Israel's alternative reading of European history keeps the memory of destruction alive for which Nazi Germany and its allies were responsible. Its existence presents a challenge to European, especially Western European countries, to see transnationalism as almost self-evident.

Shai Lavi

Our Cut is our Bond: Male Circumcision in Israel, Germany and Turkey

Anne Weber

No cut no bond? The female gaze and religious identity practices

Whoever asks herself, "who am I?" or, "where do I belong?", might find identification practices and signs, such as specific close or hairstyles, jewelry or even body alternations helpful and reassuring. Also within religious contexts identification practices are very common and usually have a long tradition. In form of symbols, they help to identify others as part of the religious reference system; in form rites, they help to structure and organize individual and also group actions; and in form of associated clothing, they help to inform about status and roles. Correspondingly, also the question whose voice has authority and what rules need to be recognized can be answered by mirroring the social ties and dynamics accepted by identifying with this group.

Despite positive aspects identification practices or rituals indicate, the distinction coming along with in-group and out-group signs is ethically ambiguous and challenging: The people who accept a specific form of visible identification, at the same time accept discrimination or at least exclusion. This might not necessary become a problem. But, wherever identification symbols and bonding practices are aligned with and show parallels to known attributes of discrimination – such as gender, ethnicity or sexuality – the in-group/out-group-setting tends to foster, preserve or even justify such discriminations. In other words, no matter how existentially affirming and psychologically comforting it appears for the members already belonging to the in-group, when the symbols of their bonds coincide and overlap with stereotyped attributes, they become symbols for unjust hierarchies and discriminating structures. For instance, Christian-Catholic woman where the first to criticize the male-clerical bonds in catholic church, where the original positive distinction between spiritual and lay authority, folded up in gender and ministry, so that status and power was and still is systematically blocked for female believers. Their critique demonstrates, how even a shared value system – which essentially emphasizes liberation, emancipation and empowerment of all people – cannot grant that bonding and identification symbols are used as tools for the exact opposite: to defend and internalize discrimination and inequality. Backing up the resulting distinction between clerical and lay, male and female, by arguments of tradition and biology, the bonds are immunized against critique and the female gaze (as well as the gaze of the lay male!) are categorically blocked.

Consequently, even though identification practices can help to bond and solidarize with others, wearing the same signs, across all borders, they can – under specific circumstances and settings, which need to be analyzed and understood thoroughly – also create, legitimize or perpetuate existing discriminations. Against this background and on the claim of ethical responsibility, it appears necessary to anticipate and analyze the possibility of such – partly subtle or unaware, partly intentional and promoted – discriminations, when- and wherever bonds are created as base or criteria for answering to the need of some, and neglecting the needs of others.

The long version of the abstract and base for discussion will be found in the Dropbox, presumably, on Monday .

Sara Cohen Shabot and Pascal Delhom:

Obstetric violence and the medical gaze

The starting point of our common presentation and discussion will be the experience of obstetric violence. It relates to the experience of many women giving birth in a medical institution and experiencing their body on the one side as impressively powerful even in the pain of labouring, on the other side as reduced to the object of a medical knowledge and practice which denies and annihilates this power. This experience is lived as an experience of radical passivity and is not seldom suffered as violence.

The perspective chosen to analyse this experience is the one of the women who endured it: it doesn't understand violence as depending on aggressive actions or bad intentions of the medical actors who are mostly doing what they do in the conviction of doing the right thing for the sake of the "patient" and of the child being born. Moreover, the experience of certain practices as violent also depends on expectations of the pregnant women towards the medical institution, its expertise and its caring function. Hence their perspective is relevant.

In this context and out of this perspective, the experience of medical intervention as a form of violence might be structurally bound with the objectifying gaze of medical actors who reclaim the right of control and decision on what is happening on the basis of their scientific expertise. The structural alternative wouldn't be an illusory autonomy of the labouring woman, but a complex interpersonal interaction of empowering assistance (personal and medical) involving the recognition of claims (a diversity of speaking and claiming gazes) and the possibility of trust.

We would like to shortly conclude our presentation with the question of a possible relevance of such an analysis for other kinds of medical practices around pregnancy and birth, among others of course for the practice of medical diagnoses.

You find in the dropbox:

Sara Cohen Shabot: Making Loud Bodies "Feminine": A Feminist-Phenomenological Analysis of Obstetric Violence, *Hum Stud* (2016) 39:231–247.

Pascal Delhom: The Normative Force of Suffered Violence, in: *Political Phenomenology. Experience, Ontology, Episteme* Thomas Bedorf / Steffen Herrmann (eds.), Taylor & Francis 2019, 32-51.

Aviad Raz and Cornelia Klinger

Neoliberal domination and "the ties that bind" in the context of routinized prenatal genetic testing

Building on our common interest in neoliberal forms of domination, we present and juxtapose two related genealogical accounts.

The first account, presented by Aviad Raz, offers a three-phase periodization of eugenics: first, the 'old eugenics' and its criticism; second, reprognetics as a new, 'backdoor' eugenic regime of bio-governmentality; and third, the recent enthusiasm regarding 'liberal eugenics,' claiming that

reprogenetic decisions should be left to individual consumers thus enhancing their options in the health market (see Raz 2009). This dialectics of regulation and choice, and its modern hybrid forms, will be also demonstrated through the shift to a routinized universal offer of NIPS (non-invasive prenatal screening) that is legitimated by policy-makers as the best way to safeguard women's choices.

The second account, presented by Cornelia Klinger, presents Foucault's distinction between ancient sovereign rule and modern biopolitics, leading to a third stage of domination: bio economics plus culture industries, where in contrast to the two previous forms of domination, this new regime does not endeavor to suppress but to foster and unleash life. Nevertheless, domination in the neoliberal-libertarian guise may prove no less dangerous than the former totalitarian variants.

We conclude by reflecting on the similarities and differences of such a genealogy, discussing how the three stages might not follow each other consecutively in a linear fashion but rather form a kind of circle. There might come a backward movement from neoliberal bioeconomics and cultural industry to authoritarian biopolitics and propaganda - for example, as we experience a rollback from global neoliberalism to a more authoritarian nationalist rule in recent years. It is thus intriguing to ask where the pendulum shift or the dialectical interplay of leitmotifs between utopian and dystopian visions takes us next, and how to understand and untangle its contemporary hybrid syntheses.

Find in the dropbox:

Cornelia Klinger, (2018) "An essay on life, care and death in the Brave New World after 1984", Equality, Diversity and Inclusion: An International Journal, Vol. 37 Issue: 4, pp.318-331, <https://doi.org/10.1108/EDI-12-2017-0269>

Aviad E. Raz, (2009) "Eugenic utopias/dystopias, reprogenetics, and community genetics'", Sociology of Health & Illness Vol. 31 No. 4, pp. 602–616

Dropbox link

<https://www.dropbox.com/home/Platform%20conference%3A%20the%20social%20tie%20and%20the%20gaze%20of%20the%20other>

List of participants

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