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Abstract for 28 February Work-in-Progress Workshop

In this first phase of my research I'm trying to reconstruct the process by which umbilical cord blood shifted from a waste product to a clinically useful material, triggering a debate on the way to store and distribute this life-saving tissue. In this phase of my research I'm analyzing scientific literature on cord blood paying attention to three different (but interrelated) issues: (a) the discovery of stem cells in the cord blood and the development of methodologies to optimize its use from the bench to the bedside; (b) the institutionalization of cord blood biobanks in some Western Countries and (c) the rise of ethical and legal concerns. Indeed biobanks represent a socio-epistemic technology lying at the interface between biomedicine and society. It is the locus in which cord blood is transformed in a good, stored and available to its circulation and exploitation. This is the first step to make cord blood a socially relevant thing. In order to analyze the debate between public and private biobanking (the second phase of my research) and the political, social and (bio)economic implications, I have first to understand how a previously waste tissue became a suitable bio-object in biomedicine by analyzing the biotechnological devices and practices that disentangled (Callon 1998) cord blood from its corporeal embodiment. In this workshop I will show the results of this phase of my research.