

Introduction. Reforming or abolishing surrogacy: arguments, practices and critiques in international perspective

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In the last decade, surrogacy has developed as a fast-growing, transnational practice of medically assisted reproduction, with an estimated 6 billion-dollar world market. Globalization, i.e. inexpensive intercontinental travelling and communication, as well as trans-national accessibility of medical services, facilitated the spread of surrogacy across country boundaries. Commercial gestational surrogacy is cheaper when the surrogate is hired in countries with higher poverty rate. Feminists have mobilized against surrogacy, claiming that this reproductive technology is the ultimate form of women commodification and slavery (Klein, 2017). Other feminist groups adopt a liberal approach or demand better regulations to protect the reproductive rights of all the subjects involved. A U.S.-born, now international campaign StopSurrogacyNow calls for a universal ban of all kinds of surrogacy practices; allies in the campaign are feminist voices and lesbian activists, together with pro-life and Christian groups, as well as bioethicists and individuals from different backgrounds. On the opposite side, neoliberal stances on individual self-determination connect with gay movements and the interests of clinics and lawyers.

Surrogacy as a way of giving birth was inaugurated in the U.S. earlier than elsewhere (Jacobson, 2016). It has also become an available form of paid labour for women in Global North and South; in recent years, the industry has further globalized with surrogates traveling from one country to another to undergo embryo implantation, pregnancy and delivery, in order to escape bans and restrictive regulations introduced for example by India and Thailand, which for a long time were the main low-cost option for intended parents from all over the world (Nadimpally, Banerjee, Venkatachalam, 2016). Surrogacy is also expanding in Europe, with increasing infertility, a growing number of women available for contract pregnancies to face economic crisis, and civil society groups pressuring decision makers to ban

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or regulate it. In an age of culturally and economically intensive mothering (Hays, 1996), if couples can afford it surrogacy provides a way to resolve the tensions between the mystique of fertility and the stigma of infertility.

Within a vibrant international scholarship predominantly focused on parents' and surrogates' narratives, commodification of women and children, parenthood, political discourses, and race and class stratification, there is need for reflections on the social implications of surrogacy on the future generation, comparative studies on the contextual nature of surrogacy and quantitative data to map the fluxes of people and gametes in and outside Europe. The underlying question of this special issue is how the recurring conflict between advocates of women's freedom and self-determination versus critics of commodification and oppression is actually underpinned by a limited and individualistic notion of power and empowerment. The international prestige of white feminism has spread the latter notion worldwide, but it actually adopts the neoliberal language of choice, rights and self-determination while at the same time criticizing the neoliberal foundations of contemporary societies. Surrogacy technologies across national boundaries intersect issues of race, ethnicity and class (Pande, 2014; Saravanan, 2018).

This special issue looks at surrogacy from the vantage point of different sociological fields: medical sociology, sociological theory, sociology of the body and the family. The first article by Daniela Bandelli and Consuelo Corradi investigates the main arguments adopted by Italian feminism with respect to "surrogate motherhood", the practice of medically assisted procreation which involves the gestation of an embryo created in vitro and given to the intended parents after delivery. In "Abolishing or regulating surrogacy. The meanings of freedom according to Italian feminism", Bandelli and Corradi summarize the steps of feminist mobilization against gestational surrogacy from 2015 to 2017 and analyse in depth the main themes used by abolitionists and reformists. In the final section of the article, Bandelli and Corradi offer a critical reading of the notion of freedom, which is central in the feminist discussion. The reformist front maintains women's freedom to dispose of themselves, of their reproductive capacity and sexual identity, to achieve forms of parenting assisted by technology and not limited by traditional conceptions. In the abolitionist front, freedom is "matri-centric" and individualistic; its boundaries are marked by the female sexual identity, the only one to hold maternal potential – understood as a "naturally" indivisible function – that women today can decide whether to actualize or not with greater freedom than in the past. Freedom-power in gestational surrogacy is critically discussed in the same way as Habermas criticizes

neoliberal genetics. The parents' unshakable will of power in bringing the child into the world contributes in weakening the ethical basis of the future freedom of the child herself.

In the second article, "Medical conceptions of control in the field of commercial surrogacy in Kazakhstan" Alya Guseva and Vyacheslav Lokshin examine the central role that the fertility professionals in Kazakhstan played in establishing medical conceptions of control – understandings of the fundamental guiding principles of exchange in a given field – over the ethically fraught surrogacy practice. Only gestational surrogacy is legal in Kazakhstan, and it is only available to officially married couples, whose inability to have children fits with one of the five medical diagnoses, with no other limitations based on age or their country of origin. Therefore, surrogacy is defined as medical help to those in medical need, rather than a commercial service. Kazakh doctors restrict their responsibility to the medical side of surrogacy (testing and IVF) and distance themselves from both the commerce of surrogacy, and from entanglement in the management of relationships – and, therefore, potential conflicts – between surrogate mothers and intended parents. These tasks are usually outsourced to specialized surrogacy agencies – the middlemen that buffer medical professionals from the "messiness" of relationships and symbolic contamination by the market.

Daniela Danna critically examines definitions of surrogacy in an international perspective, grouping them in four frameworks: medical technique, gift, job and judicial institution. In her article "The subrogation of motherhood", the author discusses these frameworks, which are not merely definitions: they are written in the laws and they influence the representations of the social agents involved. The author's objective is to critically analyse these frameworks, addressing contradictions and inaccuracies which hinder the debate. The article aims at demonstrating that only the interpretative framework "judicial institution" can satisfyingly make sense of this multi-faceted phenomenon. It also represents the point of arrival towards which different legal frameworks tend. By challenging the legal principle *mater semper certa est* – literally, "we are always certain of who the mother is" – a market is created, on which filiation and maternity (concretely, new-born children) can be sold and purchased; once established the market, the price will be set by supply and demand, as the work conditions of the carrier, her rights and what she is entitled to decide upon during her pregnancy. Consequently, according to Danna there are only two possible political stances: either the creation of this judicial institution, to be technically referred to as the 'subrogation of motherhood', or complete rejection

in order to maintain the above-mentioned principle according to which the woman who physically gives birth to the child is always its mother.

In his article “La maternità surrogata: una prospettiva critica dell’addio al corpo del post-umanesimo”, Giorgio Porcelli seeks to analyze how the disgust of maternity and more in general of the body which is currently widespread in many currents of post-humanism, leads to the thought that sooner or later children will be born with no mother and father, they will be assembled into a test tube, run by the machines even before being born, covered by a guarantee by gametes donors. Maternal and gestational surrogacy as well as an augmented or refused body, are therefore the expressions of that dismissal of the body that characterizes post-humanism and cyberculture. The article concludes by presenting some extreme implications of the posthuman thought in the light of Le Breton’s and Giddens’ most recent reflections.

Paola Di Nicola, Cristina Lonardi and Debora Viviani’s “Man, woman, couple: facing the challenges of medically assisted procreation” conclude this special issue. The authors discuss the results of an empirical survey conducted in Italy with a sample of 360 interviewees. They highlight how Italian men and women are receiving and constructing the new social imaginary on motherhood, fatherhood and gender identity, and how surrogacy fits well in this broad picture. In this new social imaginary, filiation is split into its different genetic, biological and social components, while reproduction is separated from sexuality and indeed the sexual act, bringing into play new figures of men, women and couples who overcome all the biological, genetic and in some cases natural issues related to reproduction.

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