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Storks and Jars: Within the World of Surrogacy Narratives

Abstract: By analyzing public accounts of the experiences of surrogates and intended parents, this article aims at identifying popular American discourses on surrogacy, which remains a contested assisted reproduction technology. Focusing on first-person narratives, I look at the strategies of rationalization employed by people entering commercial surrogacy contracts, particularly in relation to the monetary exchange. I argue that even though the ethics of financial compensation is not questioned in most narratives by surrogates and intended mothers, the normalizing discourse on American surrogacy requires the issue of money to be downplayed—instead surrogacy is presented as an altruistic "gift of life."

Keywords: surrogacy, assisted reproduction, infertility, commercialization, reproductive choice

"We were all paying a price for the giving and receiving of life."
– Elizabeth Kane, *Birth Mother*

"I make families. What's your superpower?"
– pro-surrogacy bumper sticker

The last three decades have brought unparalleled changes in the ways people perceive human reproduction. The technological development paired with the ongoing social changes expanded the ways in which families are constructed and conceived of. At the center of these changes are new reproductive technologies, including surrogacy. The above quotes by two surrogates set conceptual frames for the phenomenon, locating it on the one hand in the domain of the market and on the other hand in the domain of familial relations. They indicate potential areas of conflict around commercial surrogacy: the anxiety over the use of new reproductive technologies and the intrusion of the market into the sphere of reproduction, as well as surrogacy's potential to create families and change existing family models.

While the nascent surrogacy industry in the United States has been analyzed and criticized by many scholars and activists, the perception of surrogacy by the general

public has been shaped less by the academic discussion than by the way it has been rendered in various popular media.[1] Television, newspapers and literary accounts of surrogacy by surrogates and intended parents have all influenced and continue to influence the way surrogate motherhood is perceived today. In recent years the Internet has become the main media outlet for providing information about, and shaping the views on, contract pregnancy. It has also become the means through which the surrogacy industry boom (especially on its global scale) has been possible, partially because it diminishes the monopoly of surrogacy brokers (Berend 917). The online world of surrogate parenting is of special importance within the surrogacy discourse: it is there that the cultural negotiating of the practice principally takes place.

The purpose of the article is to explore the public accounts of the lived experiences of the surrogates and intended parents. This includes analysis of the "surrogacy journey" stories recounted in memoirs, newspaper articles and weblogs. Another aim is to investigate the language in which surrogacy stories are often told. While the article puts under analysis the embodied surrogacy experiences of individuals, its focus is principally on the way those experiences are discursively constructed within the analyzed cultural texts.[2] It also looks at the pragmatic purpose of the accounts of surrogacy: from a predominantly therapeutic narrative to a source of useful tips on how best to plan a surrogacy contract.

The article starts with an analysis of two such narratives by surrogates who came to regret their decision to bear children for other people. Significantly, those two personal accounts of surrogacy were also historically first and as such they brought to public attention some considerable problems surrounding the practice, claiming that it degrades women, breaks families and even amounts to baby-selling. Consequently, any subsequent attempts at normalizing surrogacy had to take those charges into account. My goal is to trace the discursive strategies that enable rationalization and normalization of commercial surrogacy in the personal narratives and blogs by intended mothers and surrogates. I argue that even though the ethics of financial compensation is not questioned in these accounts, prevalent normalizing discourse on American surrogacy requires the issue of money to be downplayed. Instead, the common elements emphasized in the texts include pain of infertility and maternal desire (on the part of

1 Some of the most comprehensive analyses of the growing surrogacy industry and the politics surrounding it include: Susan Markens. *Surrogate Motherhood and the Politics of Reproduction* (Berkeley: UCP, 2007); Michele Goodwin, *Baby Markets* (Cambdrige: CUP, 2010); and Debora Spar, *The Baby Business* (Boston: HBP Press, 2006).

2 With its focus on language of existing accounts, the article uses the methodology of cultural studies. Nevertheless, ethnographic studies of surrogacy are important to this article, since they constitute a rich background of knowledge about those surrogates/intended parents who have not had their experiences made public within popular discourse.

intended mothers), and strong wish to help other people create families (on the part of surrogates). At the same time, the restriction about the evasion of money issues does not seem to be required in accounts of surrogacy overseas, e.g. in India. On the contrary, money is then presented as significant means of empowerment for surrogates. The article ends with an examination of the metaphor of a journey, frequently used to describe the surrogacy experience.

Baby-Selling vs. Plight of the Infertile

In her study of the contentious discourse on surrogacy at the beginning of the practice in the United States, Susan Markens has identified two competing discursive strategies that typically frame any story on surrogacy—"baby-selling" versus "plight of the infertile couples" (*Surrogate Motherhood* 80–88). She traces their origins to the news coverage of several landmark surrogacy cases, including the Baby M case and *Johnson v Calvert*, and claims that they shaped both the attempts at legislation of surrogacy, as well as the public imagination. The discursive power of these two strategies remains potent and they still reappear in most if not all accounts on surrogacy, including those analyzed in this article.

The first narrative frame, "baby-selling," has been used principally by the opponents of the practice. It relies heavily on exposing the corruptive influence of womb rental on humans, babies and surrogates alike, and may also involve emphasizing the mercenary role of the brokers (Markens, *Surrogate Motherhood* 84). The "plight of the infertile couples" frame has often been used to illuminate the scale and causes of the problem and served as the justification of surrogacy as a valid, if not perfect, solution to the problem of infertility. The form that this discursive strategy often takes is that of an "emotional testament" of an infertile individual (Markens, *Surrogate Motherhood* 86).

The prevalence of first-person narrative is very telling because it shows that the responsibility of dealing with the problem of infertility is placed predominantly on individuals: it is a "narrative that privileges the personal as both the site of infertility's unfolding as well as its posited solution" (Fixmer-Oraiz 136). This is largely influenced by and at the same time it upholds the neoliberal approach to surrogacy in the United States, whose logic requires individual consumers themselves to seek solutions themselves on the free market of reproductive services. Since there is no federal regulation that could ensure the legality or safety of a surrogacy process, it is up to the intended parents and surrogates to work out the rules. Thus, the regulation by the market prevails. However, even though the monetary exchange is an essential element of most of the contracts, it seems that it is often unaccounted for. The narratives tend to gloss over the issue of compensation and instead employ either the language of altruism

(surrogacy as "gift of life") or they present the contract as a mutual benefit, in which the final compensation, ranging anywhere from $10,000 to $40,000, is presented as a welcome help to repair the surrogate's family budget during pregnancy.

The appeal to emotions and the personal character of the generally heart-wrenching stories marks them as confessional and intimate. In her study of the impact of therapeutic discourse on American identity, sociologist Eva Illouz claims that the contemporary autobiography has been largely influenced by "the therapeutic discourse and the self-help ethos" (156). She recognizes the therapeutic narrative as the basic cultural schema of making sense of oneself in the world and identifies its inherent features:

> The main characteristic of therapeutic narratives is that the goal of the story dictates the events that are selected to tell the story as well as the ways in which these events, as components of the narrative, are connected…. But we arrive here at an extraordinary paradox: therapeutic culture—the primary vocation of which is to heal—must generate a narrative structure in which suffering and victimhood actually define the self…. Thus the narrative of self-help is fundamentally sustained by a narrative of suffering. (173, 178)

Surrogacy memoirs largely match this description. First, they employ psychologized language, e.g. "When you're facing something as intractable and incomprehensible as infertility, and you're feeling helpless and hopeless, denial can be your best friend" (Arieff 3). Moreover, they are a testament to the suffering: either the pain of infertility or the pain of relinquishing a child by a surrogate. However, since surrogacy narratives have certain pragmatic goals, such as providing support and hope to those troubled by infertility, they eventually tend to go beyond the narrative of suffering and include a happy ending. The exception to that are surrogacy narratives which serve as cautionary tales against malpractice or threatening transgressions of surrogacy as such.

Surrogacy Narratives as Elements of Public Crusade

In the mid-1980s the American public saw the emergence of the first surrogacy scandal: in the form of the Baby M court case. That was also the first time that the American public learned about contract pregnancy in more detail (Markens, *Surrogate Motherhood* 31). The surrogacy issue, however, had broken through to the American daytime television earlier: with the story of "America's first legal surrogate mother," Elizabeth Kane, in 1980. The woman who used the name of Elizabeth Kane as a pseudonym, traveled across the United States to appear on numerous talks shows, promoting the concept of

surrogate motherhood. In her memoir, written years later, after a drastic reevaluation of her experience, Kane wrote of her role as that of a "crusader of social change" (161):

> I knew that if I could spare one woman that pain by publicizing surrogate parenting, if one more woman could be called 'Mother' because of it, the trips and the inconveniences that went with them would be worth it.… There were times I felt hopeless, tiny, and ineffective. My one baby would not make a dent in the vicious sea of infertility. But by doing it publicly I at least could hope that I helped the world sympathize with barren women who craved motherhood. For fifteen months I wanted to encourage other women like myself to take up the crusade. (158)

Interestingly, the aim of Kane's public crusade has changed over the years: she became a staunch opponent of surrogacy after she realized the pain of giving up her biological child and the fact that she was used for publicity. The above description of her motivations, however, is very much embedded in the 1980s language: the "vicious sea of infertility" is sample of the emotional language of the period (Markens, *Surrogate Motherhood* 86). The sympathy towards "barren women" is obviously a part of "plight of the infertile" frame: Kane even uses the very term. Presenting the fight, first for and later against surrogacy, in a religious term of a crusade is a testimony to the strength of Kane's convictions about the matter. More importantly, it indicates an important trait of surrogacy: the general belief in its transformative potential as a practice that brings cultural and social changes, and its character as a contested issue that has to be fought over, rather than debated.

A similar language of compassion and struggle paired with an overwhelming desire to help the infertile marks another account of surrogacy experience by a disillusioned surrogate, Mary Beth Whitehead. Published shortly after Kane's book, Whitehead's *A Mother's Story*, is an account of her legal fight for her biological daughter Melissa, the famous Baby M. This similarity is by no means incidental—both Kane and Whitehead claim to have first thought of bearing children for someone else when their friends and family faced the tragedy of infertility. Whitehead, who initially offers to carry a baby for her own sister, later reasons: "I had always been religious, and at some level I hoped and I certainly prayed that if I did this for another childless couple, God would reward me by giving my sister a baby" (12).

The framing of motivations in the language of compassion and altruism (as both women assert that they initially did not consider compensation) is a key element of their construction of self. Central to both women's sense of identity is the emphasis on the importance of family and the belief that everybody should have a chance to have one. The insistence on the family values and the surrogates' self-portrayal as devoted mothers and good housewives serve to undermine the image of surrogates as aberrant mothers and unstable women. It also ensures that they are not presented

as complicit in wrongdoing, as the rhetoric of the memoirs shifts from "plight of the infertile" to "baby-selling." Rather, it is the manipulative brokers who are to blame for the baby-selling since the two women repeatedly point out that they had been lied to and had no means of realizing the abnormality of the contract they had entered. They speak of their changing views on surrogacy as of a lesson they have learned. Whitehead phrases it as follows: "I have learned that the rental of a woman's body for the sale of the child she bears is wrong. It violates the core of what a woman is" (xiv-xv), while Kane acknowledges the pain inherent for everyone involved in surrogacy: "I now believe that surrogate motherhood is nothing more than the transference of pain from one woman to another. One woman is in anguish because she cannot become a mother and another woman may suffer for the rest of her life because she cannot know the child she bore for someone else" (275). This quote highlights the bond between the surrogate and the child, the bond that both Kane and Whitehead claim to have naturally formed, despite their earlier belief that they would not have problems relinquishing the baby. The memoirs, then, expose problems with the concept of informed consent: "I signed a contract believing that [I would feel nothing for the baby]. How could I possibly know that this deep deception would surface slowly in a whirlwind of emotions for years to come?" (Kane 3).

While both narratives are testimonies to the psychological cost of relinquishing a child, there are some important differences between them. Whitehead's story is, to a large extent, her version of her relationship with the Sterns and their subsequent legal fight for Melissa. Her aim is to change the public perception of the notorious case, which is indicated already by the subtitle of her book: "The Truth About the Baby M Case." She begins: "I have learned all of these things the hard way, and although I deeply hope that other women will learn from my mistakes, I am not a public crusader. I am simply a mother and housewife who has decided it is time to set the record straight" (Whitehead xv). Even here, the language of altruism permeates her narrative: she claims to be telling the true story for the sake of her family unjustly suffering from the media bias. Kane's memoir, on the other hand, involves no fight for custody; it is a result of her much later realization of the mistake of surrogacy. Based on a diary she kept during her pregnancy, it is a far more introspective memoir, with a therapeutic goal: "At some point after the birth of my surrogate child I realized I had two choices: either to survive or to succumb to an overwhelming grief.... This is the story of my determination to survive" (Kane 3).

Notwithstanding the self-identified goals of the two stories, they both function as cautionary tales, exposing the problems of contract pregnancy. Despite Whitehead's disclaimer, the two memoirs seem to have served as elements of the social crusade against surrogacy. Both books were published shortly after a political campaign for the ban on surrogacy, which involved Whitehead and Kane testifying against commercial surrogacy in a congressional hearing in 1987 (Markens, *Surrogate Motherhood* 218;

Whitehead 178–183). Despite the authors' empathy for "the plight of the infertile," the memoirs are strong voices against surrogacy, citing its disruptive influence on surrogates' families. As E. Ann Kaplan observes, the impact of these texts on the emerging surrogacy narrative was profound:

> The surrogacy story, itself tied to prior mother constructs, gradually acquires the status of myth, with fixed characters, set verbal exchanges, and similar language and tone. After Mary Beth Whitehead's and Elizabeth Kane's 1989 narratives provided the full mythic account, there was less need for more stories, while these provided the blueprint for those that did appear. (121)

Kaplan's text focuses on the early surrogacy narratives and their legacy throughout the 1990s. At the turn of the twenty-first century, however, new types of narratives started to emerge.

Control, Trust, or Bond: Narratives of Intended Mothers

Surrogacy narratives include not only stories of the surrogates, but also those of the intended parents. Within the last decade in the United States numerous memoirs about surrogacy from the perspective of the intended parents have been published in book form.[3] Personal accounts of the surrogacy experience have also been featured in a range of newspapers and magazines, including *The New York Times* and *Nesweek*. This renewed media interest in surrogacy, parallel only to the time of intensified coverage of the topic after the Baby M case, is largely indebted to the recent growth of the industry, particularly as a transnational phenomenon (Markens, "Interrogating Narratives").

While most of those memoirs have been authored by infertile women, there are also surrogacy memoirs written by gay men. The focus of this section, however, is entirely on the accounts written by women, as they best show the often juxtaposed parties of the contract: the surrogate and the intended mother. As they involve many recurring fixed traits, they are best analyzed collectively. The common element that resurfaces

3 Adrienne Arieff, *The Sacred Thread* (New York: Crown, 2012); Susan Bowen and Heidi Thompson, *I Got Drunk at My Own Baby Shower* (Mustang, OH: Tate Publishing, 2013); Sara Connell, *Bringing in Finn: an Extraordinary Surrogacy Story*. (Berkeley: Seal Press, 2012); Zara Griswold, *Surrogacy Was the Way: Twenty Intended Mothers Tell Their Stories* (Gurnee: Nightingale Press, 2006), Michael Menichiello, *A Gay Couple's Journey Through Surrogacy: Intended Fathers* (New York: Routledge, 2012); Sandra W. Rapley, *Intended Parents: Miracles Do Happen: a True-Life Success Story of Having Children Through Surrogacy* (New York: iUniverse, 2005).

in them is the pain of infertility and a strong desire to have a child, preferably one that would have a biological link to at least one of the parents. Since much of the focus within these stories is on the struggles with infertility, they also belong to a broader genre of infertility narratives (Harrison 338). Surrogacy is usually presented as the last resort, considered only when attempts at natural conception, in vitro fertilization and/or adoption have failed. The focus on the long and tiresome path to pregnancy serves to justify surrogacy in so far as it counters popular fears that surrogate motherhood could be a choice based on laziness or vanity.

The infertility narrative is the starting point of the narrative for the intended mothers that try IVF in the first place. The pain of not being able to conceive is presented as utterly heart-wrenching and most narratives relate the long run of treatments undertaken with the hope of conception. The intended mothers often describe their attempts to get pregnant as a growing obsession, from the first routine appointments to numerous costly cycles of IVF. The sources of most suffering, however, are miscarriages and a feeling of loss:

> The miscarriage was so awful, it broke me in ways that I will never be able to articulate or ever fully heal from. But I learned to endure the unendurable.… This loss was heartbreaking and no easier to come to terms with than the earlier two. I had made a promise to Alex and to myself that after three miscarriages, we would try a new approach. The toll of these losses on my spirit, my body, and my marriage was simply too damaging. Something had to change. It was time to find another way. (Arieff 31)

Readers are asked to witness the suffering and empathize with it before the perspective of pursuing surrogacy is introduced. While some women admit their doubts about surrogate parenting and research the possibilities of adoption (which due to being more closely regulated is not always a viable option), others differentiate the two options and choose surrogacy as the most appealing and easier:

> The biggest reason that I like this idea of surrogacy is that once the surrogate is pregnant the baby is yours. That is the difference between surrogacy and adoption. In a surrogacy scenario, the baby is created with intent. The baby isn't being 'given up.' Rather, it's 'intended' for someone. (Griswold 58)
>
> It was such a contrast to what we had been dealing with in the adoption world. The bonus, I thought, is that at least Michael could be biologically related to the baby. Not that a genetic connection was crucial, I just thought it would be neat. (Griswold 268)

The difference in opinions testifies to the fact that surrogacy complicates the concept of parenthood: the practice itself does not answer the question whether its basis should be biology, genetics or intent and it is up to the women involved to provide their own

interpretations.

The choice of surrogacy is never presented as an easy one, but rather as a result of a long process of deliberation. This is in stark contrast with accounts by some surrogates, who often describe their decision to carry a child for someone else as something they were meant to do. The two very contrasting notions of the role of fate and intent in the process of choosing surrogacy can be read as fulfilling a similar function for the two sides—they seem to be discursive means of rationalizing the experience. The acknowledgment of surrogacy as an attractive option does not, however, erase problems inherent in it: the anxiety due to the lack of control over the outcome of pregnancy, the tensions surrounding the agency of the surrogate over her body and the different concepts of what the relationship between the surrogate and the intended parents should look like.

Surrogacy Was the Way, an anthology of stories by intended mothers compiled by Zara Griswold, a mother through surrogacy herself, includes an array of different experiences by twenty intended mothers. The stories are a reminder of how many misconceptions about contract pregnancy there remain. For instance, public perceptions of surrogacy can influence the experience for intended mothers whose friends do not realize the difficulties of contract pregnancy from the perspective of an infertile woman: "They have no idea what it's like being an intended mother, they don't understand how difficult it is to have zero control of the pregnancy and they don't realize how emotionally draining the whole thing is" (Griswold 58). The feeling of lack of control may be a result of failed negotiations over the shape of the contract between a surrogate and intended parents. Different assumptions about what constitutes a risk for the pregnancy can be a source of conflict. One woman describes how her surrogate insisted on driving alone at night to another town in advanced pregnancy, something that according to the intended mother was too much of a risk:

> Fortunately, this was really the only major conflict that we encountered.... I've talked to many intended mothers who have come across similar circumstances. It feels awkward to ask someone 'not to do' something that she'd normally do otherwise, but as an intended mother, it's incredibly difficult to sit back and not say anything when it's something you wouldn't do yourself if you were the pregnant one. (Griswold 39)

The woman and her husband decide to take a vacation in Jamaica, while their surrogate is confined to bed rest. The prospective mother recollects a feeling of satisfaction about that: "something that we admitted to nobody else but each other was that we were both secretly happy that she was stuck at home. Mike used to joke with her that we wished she was in a bubble—although he was only partially kidding" (40). This quote shows how the control over pregnancy is tied to agency—if it is the intended mother who makes the important decisions concerning pregnancy, the surrogate's agency is

at stake; if, however, the surrogate is in charge of everything, the intended mother may become disempowered. That is why the construction of surrogate and intended mothers in public accounts often falls into binary opposition. In order to reconcile them, a relationship of trust needs to be established between the two sides, which is why the process of choosing a surrogate is difficult. Interestingly, intended mothers describe the meeting of the right surrogate as instantly knowing that she is the one (Griswold 232–233, 294).

The surrogacy world presented in the contemporary narratives is also one of global dimensions. Among the intended mothers whose stories appear in Griswold's anthology several are foreigners who chose the United States as a destination for contract pregnancy. Motivations for their choice were varied: familial relations, prohibition of the practice in their home country or the perceived ease: "I knew that if we were going to pursue surrogacy we'd have to do it in the States. Even though it's legal in the United Kingdom, there are no laws to protect intended parents" (Griswold 268). Paradoxically, the perception of the legal protection of surrogacy offered by specific countries fluctuates. While the US is presented as an attractive destination in some narratives, Adrienne Arieff decided to pursue surrogacy in India because she felt American contracts were not sufficiently binding: "after so much disappointment, the idea that an American surrogate could change her mind at the last moment was terrifying" (33). This outweighed the other doubts she may have had:

> Undergoing surrogacy and medical procedures and having my baby be born abroad, all in a developing nation, was daunting. Even so, domestic surrogacy seemed even riskier to us because of the complex web of U.S. laws. All I had to do was to think of the name *Mary Beth Whitehead* or of her daughter, known as Baby M, to give myself pause about going through this process domestically. (34–35)

Transnational surrogacy remains problematic as outsourcing to developing nations brings about additional problems and ethical questions, but the intended mothers who have chosen and cherished it, come up with rationalized arguments for it—Arieff writes:

> To me this was not exploitation. This was a win-win, allowing the surrogate to have a brighter future and the couple to have a child. If my money was going to benefit an Indian woman financially for a service she willingly provided, I preferred that it be a poor woman who really needed help because the money that a surrogate earns in India is, to be blunt, life-changing. (37)

Interestingly, in the context of Indian surrogacy the difference of status and income between intended parents and surrogates is willingly acknowledged. Furthermore,

in this case it seems to be the very basis of the superiority of Indian surrogacy over American one (Pande 23; Markens, "Interrogating Narratives"). The poverty of the Indian surrogate becomes a good reason to respect her and want to empower her, while the poverty of an American surrogate would likely disqualify her, since women who speak freely of their financial motivations for surrogacy are considered "bad" surrogates. Arguably, the difference stems from the different notions of poverty in the United States and India. In individualist and capitalist American society, which at its roots has also the ideals of egalitarianism and meritocracy, each individual is responsible for his/her action, so poverty becomes a result of individual mistakes rather than a result of social or historical forces. Such understanding of poverty is less fitting in the Indian context, where income opportunities for women are significantly fewer and destitution of surrogates is so pronounced that it does not translate into American concept of individual responsibility. Poor women are not trustworthy in the American context, where the surrogacy narrative is expected to be "articulated within affective economy" (Fixmer-Oraiz 138). When it comes to positive surrogacy narratives, most of them are characterized by a "glaring absence of reference to the economic, class and race issues" (Fixmer-Oraiz 138).

A particularly interesting example in this regard is Alex Kuczynski's widely discussed article "Her Body, My Baby." Published as *New York Times Magazine* cover story in November 2008, the article begins, as do many other narratives, with Kuczynski's battle with infertility which ultimately results in her decision to hire a gestational surrogate. Later, however, the text departs from the dominant discourse of other narratives as it does not shy away from the issue of money. Discarding the sentimental language of altruism, "Her Body, My Baby" stands out among the other narratives about domestic commercial surrogacy.

Kuczynski's description of her surrogate, Cathy, and their relationship is highly ambivalent. The gap between Kuczynski's world and that of surrogates is evident when she notes with pleasure that Cathy "must live in a house with a computer and know how to use it." The surprise which she expresses at this information contrasts with the fact that she undermines the stereotype of surrogates as destitute. The contrast between their worlds is further emphasized by the photos that accompany the story. Kuczynski posing in front of her mansion with her baby is visually juxtaposed to the picture of pregnant Cathy sitting on her porch, and to the nanny, a woman of color, standing in the background of the first photo. On the one hand, Kuczynski writes that among the surrogates "none were living in poverty" and that she chose Cathy because of her non-financial motivation. On the other hand, she doubts the sincerity of the altruistic language:

> Still, in our experience with the surrogacy industry, no one lingered on the topic of money. We encountered the wink-nod rule: Surrogates would never say they were

> motivated to carry a child for another couple just for money; they were all motivated by altruism. This gentle hypocrisy allows surrogacy to take place. Without it, both sides would have to acknowledge the deep cultural revulsion against attaching a dollar figure to the creation of a human life.

Despite her frank analysis of what is at stake and how it is hidden, she does not finally seem bothered by the financial element of her contract:

> We were not disturbed by the commercial aspect of surrogacy. A woman going through the risks of labor for another family clearly deserves to be paid. To me, imagining someone pregnant with the embryo produced by my egg and my husband's sperm felt more similar to organ donation, or I guess more accurately, organ rental. That was something I could live with.

The article sparked controversy and a big online discussion. While technically the text is a pro-surrogacy narrative, it has been read by many as evidence of the significant ethical problems with contract pregnancy. Readers decried the representation of gestational carriers, Kuczynski's condescending attitude towards her surrogate, and class entitlement discernible in the article. The response was so big that it led to a statement by *The New York Times*' public editor at the time, Clark Hoyt who admitted: "The article glossed over their class and economic differences, but the accompanying photographs seemed to emphasize them. The cumulative impact struck some readers as elitist."

The organ rental comparison made by Kuczynski is problematic because it presents surrogacy as a temporary service that has troubling consequences for the agency of a surrogate. Such language reduces the surrogate's body to a biological repository of interchangeable parts, ultimately dehumanizing her. The problem here seems to lie in the interweaving of the free market logic (that allows for buying or renting of anything) with the traditions of kinship. Melanie Thernstorm, a writer and a mother of two through gestational surrogacy, summed up this conundrum in her apologetic article on surrogacy in *The New York Times*:

> If you consider third-party reproduction to be simply a production detail in the creation of a conventional nuclear family—a service performed and forgotten—then acknowledging the importance of outsiders could make it all seem like a house of cards. But if you conceive of the experience as creating a kind of extended family, in which you have chosen to be related to these people through your children, it feels very rich.

Her argument is interesting, as she points to the need to redefine and possibly expand the existing kinship structures. According to her, the closeness between surrogate

and intended parents, specifically the intended mother, is the necessary condition for reconciliation of the commercial exchange. Only a lasting bond allows to remove the pecuniary stigma of surrogacy.

Buns and Ovens: The Online World of Surrogacy[4]

Memoirs of the intended mothers from recent years tend to indicate the role of the Internet in widening the awareness and accessibility of different options to the infertile couples. The internet not only facilitates the procedure for most of the actors involved but also serves as a medium for popularizing the idea of surrogacy. The existence of multiple websites of agencies and surrogacy brokers allows both surrogates and intended parents to do some research and compare available options. For those who would rather enter a contract independently there remains a vast number of surrogacy forums and websites with classifieds. Surrogacy online, however, includes more than just an updated version of a paper ad. The internet serves also as a channel for those who want to share their surrogacy stories: in the forms of weblogs, which function as both public and personal spaces (Raitliff 127). Unlike newspapers, books and television productions, blogs are a far more democratic and uncensored outlet: whoever wants to publicize their surrogacy story can do it without external constrictions, reaching the general public. While there are surrogacy blogs which are password-protected, many are open-access, thus constituting a "public online world of surrogacy" (Berend 921). Moreover, unlike spaces such as forums or websites where comments and discussions are typically centrally moderated, blogs are a more personal space, allowing for a continuous construction of self over time. In that respect, blogs are similar to diaries. Yet, since they allow for immediate interactions with the readers, they have an additional aspect of an online community. As they often tend to group people of similar problems and views, infertility blogs have been described as enclaves: "spaces where communities can form and articulate positions" in an encouraging environment (Raitliff 139). The most visible trait of blogs as enclaves, however, may be the fact that they often employ a specific jargon known only to the insiders to the world of surrogacy.

Blogs which center around the issue of surrogacy could be classified into two major groups according to who writes them: those run by surrogates and those run by intended parents. Sometimes they exist as dual projects: simultaneous inter-linked blogs written by a surrogate and an intended parent, where the perspectives and voices of the two sides of the contract complete one another. The need to document the shared

4 For the purpose of this analysis I have read 31 blogs that center around surrogacy. While not all of them are quoted in this article, the general observations were based on their collective content. The full list is included in the bibliography.

experience is also expressed in some of the memoirs: "We started online journals to document our surrogacy journeys. Both of us lived and breathed pregnancy and surrogacy" (Griswold 30). The thematic scope of blogs by surrogates and blogs by intended parents is, however, slightly different. Blogs on surrogacy projects by intended mothers are often created as extensions of their blogs about infertility: in such cases the women stop writing them soon after the birth of their child(ren). Meanwhile, surrogates' blogs are typically devoted primarily to the surrogacy experience, the motivations leading to it and its aftermath: surrogates, who remain in contact with their intended parents, often continue to post updates on the children they bore.

The construction of self, central to the idea of a blog, is of special importance to surrogates, since they often choose to blog in order to defy the image that has been created for them in public discourse. They speak of this desire to correct their public image quite openly:

> One of the reasons I try to keep up my blog is to show a continuing, successful Surrogacy journey.... You know, one where I don't take off with the babies, extort money or the IPs don't end up suing me for breach of contract, etc. It's so hard to find good PR on Surrogacy sometimes. It's like the media has decided to only show the negatives and that really makes me mad. (Enders-Thapers, 28 Dec 2009)

The frustration experienced by surrogates over the public rendering of surrogacy is two-fold. On the one hand, it is frustrating because surrogacy's negative image threatens their public image and social standing as individuals (since some surrogates may face disapproval or even ostracism by their relatives and acquaintances).[5] On the other hand, the sensational accounts of surrogacy in the press are not good for the practice of surrogacy in general, leading some surrogates to campaign to "remove the surrogacy taboo" (Bumpfairy).

As a way of correcting their image, surrogates self-identify principally as mothers and wives in happy families. Typically, a blog will include a short introduction of not only the surrogate, but also her children and husband/partner. It is their desire to share familial bliss that is often credited as the source of motivation: they want to help create other happy families. The self-construction of surrogates as mothers in "normal" and "healthy" families mirrors findings of the anthropological research on surrogates. Ethnographer Helena Ragoné in her 1994 study observed: "all participants attempt to re-create the conventional social norms that surround "traditional" motherhood, fatherhood, and reproduction and to erase any suggestion of illegitimacy, adultery or

5 Many stories feature (at times anecdotal) references to (potential) surrogates dissuaded from entering contracts by their family. See: Enders-Tharp, "You Want a Baby. I've Got a Uterus. Let's Do This," *I'm Not the Mom, I'm Just the Stork*, June 19, 2011; Thernstorm "Meet the Twiblings"; and Griswold 64.

anomaly" (11).

The insight into surrogates' personal lives demonstrates another important element of surrogacy: the need for a stable support system for the surrogate. While most blogging surrogates describe their motivations as a long-standing desire to help an infertile couple, they sometimes admit that they had to convince their family that this was the right choice. Once they gain the approval, surrogates emphasize the importance of this support. And through the very fact of writing a blog they seem to provide that support to each other. Blogs just as much as web forums can be understood as a form of support network for surrogates themselves as well as medium for communication between surrogates and intended parents, where they can compare their experiences. As Kelly Enders-Tharp of "I'm Not the Mom, I'm Just the Stork" explains: "It really makes a difference during your journey to have someone who knows what you're going through (for the most part). Yes, each journey is different, but there are several things that are very similar, if not identical, for us all" (3 Dec 2010). However, while the blogs are for surrogates a platform to share their experiences, some aspects of surrogate motherhood are rarely mentioned and almost never discussed there. As Enders-Tharp notes: "Surrogacy blues and money are not really discussed by surrogates" (3 Dec 2010).

Blogs also serve as a space for knowledge production by providing information on the legal and medical aspects of surrogacy. Both surrogates and intended mothers often include advice on how to approach surrogacy, what things to consider beforehand or how to handle legal matters. They discuss advantages and disadvantages of working with an agency and/or working independently. They share the information in comments underneath their posts or they edit "frequently asked questions" subpages. Using blogs as a site of knowledge production has important consequences: they undermine the monopoly of surrogacy brokers. Sometimes, drawing from their experience of undergoing surrogacy, surrogates and intended parents start working for surrogacy agencies.

Finally, since surrogates and intended mothers often interact through reading one another's online journals, the blogs serve as a space for negotiating the practice of surrogacy. Through the retelling of personal experiences, the two groups inform one another on the emotional expectations and the mutual perception. This involves a careful construction of self-image, e.g. while indicating a need to have a lasting bond with the intended parents and the child, surrogates police themselves in order not to come across as overly attached (as that could raise suspicion that a surrogate would want to keep the baby). Another way of sending a message about the surrogates' role in the surrogacy contract is the metaphorical language which they use. The titles of the surrogacy blogs demonstrate the rich variety of comparisons: "Their Bun, My Oven," "Their Pea In My Pod," "Prego: Their Sauce, My Jar."[6] On the one hand, such

6 The "oven" metaphor has become so popular that it has entered the surrogacy market: as a print on cups, T-shirts and other merchandise (Teman, 37).

titles are problematic, because they imply the dreaded reduction of a pregnant woman to a vessel, an incubator-like container: they indicate a mental separation of the surrogate and the baby she is carrying. On the other hand, while the vessel rhetoric may seem dehumanizing, according to Elly Teman, such metaphors are "often conjured up by surrogates in the context of rebutting ideas suggested in radical feminists' critiques and as assertions of agency and autonomy" (31). The metaphors are typically rooted in either kitchen or biological sphere, evoking the image of nurturing and care.

Surrogacy as a Journey

Throughout the blogosphere, most of the surrogates refer to their surrogate pregnancies and the experience as "journeys." This same metaphor can be found in all published accounts of surrogacy discussed in this article. Anthropological research confirms the prevalence of the journey metaphor: it has been noted that journey has become a "common language" for the description of the surrogacy experience (Fisher 239). It is, thus, worth taking a closer look at the journey metaphor to see whether it impacts the way surrogacy is constructed. In their seminal linguistic study *Metaphors We Live By*, George Lakoff and Mark Johnson noted the importance of metaphors in social life: "Metaphor is pervasive in everyday life. Our ordinary conceptual system, in terms of which we both think and act, is fundamentally metaphorical in nature" (3). While seemingly serving only as a simple stylistic tool, the journey metaphor functions to a large extent as a conceptual metaphor as well, allowing for "understanding one kind of thing in terms of another" (Lakoff and Johnson 3). In a study of surrogate's online presence Zsuzsa Berend observed some analogies between journey and surrogacy. They both require thorough planning: doing the preliminary research on legal and medical issues to ensure that the surrogacy is safe (Berend 933). Moreover, the metaphor is fruitful because it accounts for the shared aspects of the experience. It allows for including numerous actors as companions of the shared journey in different configurations: the baby and surrogate, the surrogate and the intended parents and the surrogate and her family. The final destination, in any of these configurations, is the baby's arrival in the world. It is on this level that many tensions may arise between the intended parents and the surrogate, depending on how they imagine their journey together. Another dimension of the metaphor is spiritual: a journey into the self, with potential "spiritual underpinnings" (Fisher 239). It can be conceived of as a transformative experience that leaves all the actors changed. The importance the surrogates attach to their surrogate pregnancy (many consider it the most important thing they have done in their lives) turns their journey into one of "ultimate meaning and purpose; a journey that is a test of character and validation of personal worth" (Berend 933). The fact that they at times have to negotiate the significance of this experience with their family, friends or

community, adds to the process of self-analysis. A blogger who identifies as a Mormon gestational surrogate, writes about the difficulty of reconciling her experience with the teachings of her denomination, but manages to do it through self-contemplation:

> It is discouraged, not absolutely forbidden. I have never been approached and told I should not be a surrogate…. It would crush me if I was ever told I couldn't do something that was so much a part of who I am. Not only that but I believe that being a surrogate brought me closer to God and I still feel good about being a surrogate. So if it's absolutely wrong in the church's eyes, then the most spiritual, uplifting times of my life were not valid….What's interesting is the fact that my blog began as a spiritual journal as we prepared to go through the temple. Mormon Surrogate is what described me best. (Reeder, 3 Feb 2011)

The metaphor of a journey is also informed by the fact that surrogacy remains ideologically problematic. It could be argued that it is a yet not fully explored territory. Thus, existing surrogacy narratives offer welcome guidance to this world:

> I'm exploring a brand-new frontier of emotional and ethical hills and valleys, without a clue as to where I'm headed. Except for this: I know that at the other end lies the possibility that my husband, Alex, and I will become parents; that I will finally, after so many years, so many hopes, so many heartbreaks, become a mother. So I'm willing to take the journey, and write the map and the guidebook as I go. (Arieff 4)

Most importantly, the metaphor of a journey may account for the ease with which commercial aspects of surrogacy are overlooked. Travel usually involves a financial cost, and so does surrogacy. Those who undertake this journey choose from an array of other options available on the reproductive market: "There are many roads to family building in today's day and age and surrogacy is not necessarily the right choice for everyone. For a growing percentage of the infertile population, however, and for the twenty women who tell their stories in the pages to follow, surrogacy was the way" (Griswold 15).

In conclusion, the above-mentioned narratives constitute a space in which the practice of surrogate motherhood can be negotiated. Depending on the specific experiences of the authors, the texts and blogs may serve as a therapeutic memoir, a warning against surrogacy or a set of guidelines on how to cope with this unusual experience. The latter function is particularly important in the context of online texts, since it turns them into support networks for both surrogates and intended parents. The language of the personal narratives is rather similar: it is heavily psychologized, full of sentimental metaphors, such as "gift of life" or "surrogacy journey." The psychological introspection trumps other perspectives and renders money, class, and race unimportant. The omission of the social issues in narratives about American surrogacy seems essential

to provide a positive surrogacy story and normalize the practice: when the money is explicitly discussed, as in the case of Kuczynski's article, surrogacy becomes visibly objectionable. However, narratives and blogs that describe Indian surrogacy do not follow this pattern: here the financial compensation functions as a means to empower the surrogates and ensure that surrogacy involves a relation of mutual benefit, and not exploitation.

Despite the initial dominance of critical scholarship and cultural anxiety caused by many irresolvable questions posed by surrogacy, the increasing figures of contract pregnancy (both in terms of the number of surrogate pregnancies and the amount of money present in surrogacy industry) seem to indicate that it has been largely accepted by Americans as one of the valid reproductive choices. This does not mean, however, that the once discussed problems, tensions and anxieties are gone. Rather, they are being constantly examined and in most cases subsequently reconciled by individuals involved in surrogacy experience. This is possible thanks to the largely psychologized and individualized discourse of surrogacy narratives, which emphasize the plight of the infertile and employ the language of altruism. Paired with the rules of free market economy, the individualistic approach proves effective, considering that most surrogacy contracts go as planned and it is only the most notorious ones that lead to problematic court cases. The prevalent rhetoric of choice (choosing how to create a family and surrogate's choice of what to do with her body) that accompanies such contracts ensures that surrogate motherhood is unlikely to disappear from the market of reproductive services.

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