

Global Surrogacy and Local Practices Public Lecture

REC-B5.12

7 December 2017, 15.00-17.00

University of Amsterdam,
Amsterdam Institute for Social Science Research

Chair: Trudie Gerrits

Registration: send a message to e.oomen@uva.nl (please note that the number of available places is limited)

Surrogacy refers to the practice by which a woman becomes pregnant and gives birth to a baby in order to give it to a person or couple who cannot bear children. It is an assisted reproductive technology that allows heterosexual and homosexual couples and /or singles to overcome infertility and/or involuntary childlessness. Surrogacy is a highly debated and contested issue: while on the one hand its availability and use is considered as enhancing people's reproductive agency and rights, on the other hand it is considered a practice that implies exploitation and commodification, in particular when the surrogacy is transnational and commercial, involving poor women who are 'bioavailable' as surrogates. In this session policies, practices and experiences from three different parts of the world (South-East Asia, Israel and the Netherlands) are presented and discussed.

15.00- 17.00

Public Lectures: 'Global Surrogacy and Local Practices'

Chair: Trudie Gerrits

1. Andrea Whittaker, Monash University (Australia)
Disruptive Surrogacy in South-East Asia
2. Elly Teman (and Zsuzsa Berend), Ruppin Academic Centre (Israel)
Surrogate Non-Motherhood: Israeli and US Surrogates Speak about Kinship and Parenthood
3. Henny Bos, University of Amsterdam (Netherlands)
Experiences of Dutch Gay Couples with Surrogacy

Disruptive Surrogacy in South-East Asia

Andrea Whittaker

An aggressively marketed model of surrogacy emerged in Asia; first in India, then travelling across to Thailand, Nepal and, more recently, Cambodia and Laos. This model of commercial surrogacy was “disruptive,” with a number of characteristics in common with other post-Fordist disruptive industries. It superseded older, more bespoke forms of commercial surrogacy arrangements and created mass availability, rapid accessibility and new demands for surrogacy services. This lecture describes the features of this disruptive surrogacy and introduces the intended parents, surrogates and companies involved in it. In response to the closure of commercial surrogacy in some settings, new destinations have emerged and new forms of hybrid arrangements in which gametes, embryos, surrogates and staff cross borders to circumvent legal restrictions. I argue that the organization and practices of this disruptive surrogacy model create differential vulnerabilities for those enmeshed within its re/production logic: the intended parents, surrogates and children.

Bionote:

Professor Andrea Whittaker PhD is Australian Research Council Future Fellow and Convenor of Anthropology at the School of Social Sciences, Monash University, Melbourne, Australia. As a medical anthropologist, she specialises in the fields of reproductive health and biotechnologies with a special interest on Thailand and SE Asia and leads the Health and Biofutures Focus Program within the Faculty of Arts. She received her PhD from the University of Qld in 1995. Her major publications include *Intimate Knowledge: Women and their Health in Northeast Thailand* (2000), *Women's Health in Mainland South-east Asia* ed. (2002), *Abortion, Sin and the State in Thailand* (2004), *Abortion in Asia: Local dilemmas, global politics* ed. (2010) and *Thai in Vitro: Gender, Culture and Assisted Reproduction* (2015). Her latest book, *International Surrogacy as Disruptive Industry in South-east Asia* is in press with Rutgers.

Surrogate Non-Motherhood: Israeli and US Surrogates Speak about Kinship and Parenthood

Elly Teman and Zsuzsa Berend

Drawing on a comparison of two ethnographic research projects on surrogacy in the United States and Israel, this presentation explores surrogates' views about motherhood and parenthood, relationships and relatedness. The paper challenges three myths of surrogacy: that surrogates bond with the babies they carry for intended parents, that it is immoral not to acknowledge the surrogates' maternity, and that surrogacy upsets the moral order of society by dehumanizing and commodifying reproduction. Contrasting the similarities and differences in the voices of surrogates from these studies, the authors argue that surrogates draw on ideas about technology, genetics and intent in order to explain that they do not bond with the child because they are not its mother. This is followed by an exploration of surrogates' definitions of what constitutes parenthood, suggesting that in both contexts, surrogates draw clear boundaries between their own family and that of the intended parents'. Finally, it is suggested that surrogates expect a relationship, or a bond, to develop with the intended parents and view their contribution as exceptional moral work which involves nurturing, caring, friendship and solidarity. The paper concludes that for surrogates in the USA and in Israel, maternity, bonding and kin-ties are not automatic outcomes of pregnancy, but a choice. Surrogates in both contexts hold that bonding with other people's children as if they were one's own is wrong while bonding with their couple and creating 'fictive kin' ties with them is the logical outcome of the intense and intimate process of collaborative baby-making.

Bionote:

Elly Teman is a senior lecturer in cultural anthropology in the Dept. of Behavioral Sciences at Ruppin Academic Center, Israel. She is the author of an ethnography on gestational surrogacy in Israel entitled *Birth of a Mother: the Surrogate Body and the Pregnant Self* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010) and numerous articles on surrogacy.

Experiences of Gay Couples with Surrogacy

Henny Bos

In 2014 the Dutch government constituted the “Government Committee on the Reassessment of Parenthood” (“Staatscommissie Herijking Ouderschap”). The reason to install this Government Committee was related to social, medical and technological developments that have taken place over the course of the last few decades: people who in the past could not become a parent, now do have the opportunity to have children. As a consequence it was questioned whether the prevailing laws on parenting and custody still met the needs of today’s society and future generations. The Committee has been requested to advise the Government on the implications of these social and technological advancements with respect to parenting and custody law.

On December 7th 2017 it is exactly one year ago that the Government Committee published its report entitled “Child and Parents in the 21st century” and presented it to the Minister of Justice. Since that time the debate about the report - in the media as well among policy makers - are mainly about the Committee’s advice regarding the legalization of multiple parenthood and not so much about surrogacy, while the Government Committee has also delivered advice on the latter.

What do we actually know about families in which the parents had their children through a surrogate? What does it mean for the parents and children? What is the public opinion about surrogacy? In this lecture, we will go deeper into surrogacy from the perspective of a particular group, namely Dutch gay men who want to realize their wish to become a parent through surrogacy.

Bionote:

The lecture is held by Associate Professor Henny Bos of the University of Amsterdam (Department of Child Development and Educational Sciences of the Faculty of Social and Behavioural Sciences). She has an own research line on gay and lesbian parenting, with special interest in gay fathers who want to become or became a parent through surrogacy. Based on her work Dr. Bos received in August 2017 an award from the American Psychological Association, namely the “APA Division 44 Distinguished Scientific Contribution Award”.