



SPECIAL SECTION ON FERTILITY TRAVEL

FERTILITY TRAVEL: THE COMMODIFICATION of HUMAN REPRODUCTION

**CHARLOTTE KROLØKKE, KAREN A. FOSS,
and SAUMYA PANT, GUEST EDITORS**

Charlotte Kroløkke is an associate professor at the University of Southern Denmark. Her research centers on fertility travel, egg donation, and transnational surrogacy. Her work has been published in *Journal of Consumer Culture* and *Text and Performance Quarterly*.

Karen A. Foss is Regents Professor, professor of communication and journalism, and a Presidential Teaching Fellow at the University of New Mexico. Her research interests include rhetoric and criticism, feminist perspectives in communication, and social movements and social change.

Saumya Pant is an associate professor at Mudra Institute of Communications Ahmedabad, where she is head of the fellowship program in communication management. Her research interests include gender studies, transnational feminism, communication for social change, and participatory theater for development.

ABSTRACT Assisted reproduction in a global world produces not only new babies and new parents but also new citizens and raises new bioethical concerns (e.g., Campbell 2007; Franklin 2001; Thompson 2005). This essay outlines an interdisciplinary theoretical perspective in understanding how fertility travel and transnational reproduction unfold from the perspectives of the different actors involved. Three theoretical pairs—care and engineering, reproscapes and reflows, and gifts and commodities—are suggested as theoretical frameworks for understanding transnationalized reproduction. The authors conclude that reproductive movements and fragmentary bodies confront legal and administrative systems in interesting and often highly complex ways.

KEYWORDS: fertility travel, reproductive flows, globalized reproduction, assisted reproductive technologies



How do we come to understand the making of kin in a time when (in)fertile bodies and biogenetic substances cross the borders of nation-states? What controversies are at stake when infertile Indian couples travel to Dubai for fertility treatments or when Eastern European women travel to donate or sell their eggs to an increasingly global fertility market? What legal and policy-related issues shape the making of kin in these various transnational crossings? Fertility travel, while still undertheorized, depends on the appearance and juxtaposition of several interrelated factors: differential national laws on access and availability of reproductive techniques; clinical success rates and procedural costs that differ markedly from country to country; a generation of individuals who are accustomed to traveling and have the resources to do so; and the availability of media and communication technologies that enable fertility clinics to market their services to a foreign clientele (Shenfield et al. 2010; Inhorn 2010; Storrow 2005).

This special section on fertility travel employs an interdisciplinary perspective in exploring how reproduction unfolds in the global arena. Albeit inspired by different theoretical and methodological frameworks, the contributors share a desire to engage feminist scholarship. Feminist scholars have been productive in their critique of new reproductive technologies, noting the potential of assisted reproductive technology (ART) to deconstruct essentialist notions of maternity, including the connection between motherhood and genes (Markens 2007; Sharp 2000; Thompson 2005), while simultaneously pinpointing how biogenetic substances are turned into global commodities (Haraway 1997; Mamo 2007). Moreover, feminist scholars have explicated how, at times, traditional views of kinship are paradoxically reinstated and even strengthened in a threefold process involving naturalization, denaturalization, and renaturalization (Franklin, Lury, and Stacey 2000: 19). Ideas of “the natural,” in other words, travel and become reasserted in new forms.

The contributors to this special section add to the existing scholarship by discussing how families, motherhood, and citizenship are constructed and reinvented when bodies and biogenetic substances cross borders in the assistance of fertility. To delineate a common theoretical frame, we first discuss three enmeshed pairs that theorize the relationship between globalization and reproduction: (1) care and engineering, (2) reprocapes and reproflows, and (3) gifts and commodities. We conclude by briefly discussing how each contribution to the special section elaborates on these issues and frames.

THEORIZING THE MATRIX OF FERTILITY TRAVEL

We begin our discussion of fertility travel in light of three pairs of theoretical concepts: care and engineering, reprocapes and reproflows, and gifts and commodities. These pairs allow us to illuminate, analyze, and theorize globalized reproduction while also providing us

with frameworks from which the articles in this special section can be understood.

Care and Engineering

Caring, which Nel Noddings defines as a “feeling with,” “engrossment,” a “receptivity” to the other (1984: 30), and engineering together represent the basic process of reproduction in a newly reproduced form. The intimacy and everydayness of maternal caring is dispersed and distracted in the global reproductive environment. No longer is there one woman (or man) caring for one (biological) child. Now many people “take care” to manage the various parts of the reproductive process.

Motherhood becomes both a collective concern and an individualist undertaking, reinvented into a tapestry of care in which many assist in bringing a child into being. Moreover, in global reproduction, the network of care is extended into positioning caring as a legitimate rhetorical frame. In the case of surrogates, they often describe their contributions to reproduction altruistically; they “care about” another woman’s infertility and want to give her a child of her own (Kroløkke, Foss, and Sandoval 2010; Pande 2010). Surrogates acknowledge the economic benefits and the altruistic dimensions of the act while simultaneously negotiating caring both of the biogenetic substance and of the social relations involved.

The process of care in the conventional maternal sense is disrupted and reinvented further as global care chains emerge in the global reproductive arena. Arlie Hochschild (2000) created the notion of global care chains to theorize the intersections among migration, globalization, and care. Migrant women often cross considerable distance to serve as caregivers for other women’s children—work that is frequently made to appear invisible. Hochschild (2000) makes clear how migrant women end up taking on the traditional female position in the family. The caring that once was articulated as central to the mother-child relationship is reworked, with the First World becoming metaphorically repositioned as that of the old-fashioned male—unable to cook, clean, and take care of “his” own children (Ehrenreich and Hochschild 2003).

Global care chains not only reposition First World caregivers, but also work to reproduce and accentuate the existing inequality of material resources. Nicola Yeates’s (2004) reworking of the concept of global care chains illustrates how traveling in search of reproductive services, or, most notably, the reproductive work that goes into transnational forms of reproduction, is embedded in a hierarchical labor network. In the case of surrogacy, for instance, this network consists of a variety of informal agencies (recruiters who operate in Indian villages) and more formal ones—fertility agencies (which manage the transnational client’s trip to India, from sightseeing to visas and birth certificates). This network is highly gendered as well, with females engaged most clearly in physical and emotional labor, while

clinics and legal frameworks stand apart, in a more conventional masculine pose, engaged in forms of labor that are positioned as distanced, objective, and prescriptive. Those lower on the hierarchy work harder and earn less; those at the top manage rather than do, and they earn more. Chains of caring thus are buried beneath networks that exist for larger economic purposes and goals.

These global chains of care are paired paradoxically, perhaps, with the necessity of engineering that makes assisted reproductive technology and travel possible. Joan Bestard notes that “in the practice of reproductive clinics it is not enough to describe or understand the biology of reproduction; the most important thing is to engineer human reproduction” (2004: 254). In the traffic between care and engineering, reproductive labor comes to characterize global reproductive care by also featuring engineering or “doing.” Viewing reproduction as a form of doing means privileging the work that goes into picking a fertility clinic as well as the doing involved when technicians in the clinic mix two “good-looking” eggs with the intending father’s sperm and later through the use of ultrasound technology “present” these as future babies to the foreign clients.

This form of engineering is, however, frequently made to disappear in the clinical discourses. Technicians match donor characteristics with characteristics of the intending parents, positioning themselves as translators between nature and culture, while also engaging in cultural ideas of sameness and giving engineering the appearance of a natural sort of process. While engineering, with its tangible results and financial gains, at first may appear to overshadow caring, it is simultaneously intertwined with caring. This is notably present when fertility doctors as well as lab technicians position their work in light of the creation of loving and caring families. The traffic that takes place between caring and engineering illustrates how these constructs, in globalized reproduction, become strategies that the reproductive actors can employ.

Reproscapes and Reproflows

The notion of global scapes and flows adds an additional axis to the theoretical matrix that informs globalized reproduction and fertility travel. Arjun Appadurai (1996) suggests that global scapes consist of five dimensions that move across cultural boundaries. These include ethnoscaples, the landscape of persons who constitute the shifting world in which people live; technoscapes, the global configuration of technology that now moves instantaneously across borders and boundaries; financescapes, the global flow of currency speculation and transfer; mediascapes, the production and distribution of information and images; and ideoscapes, the ideologies and counter-ideologies of political states, social movements, and cultures. All of these scapes function in a global environment that is intertwined with and changes the local culture.

Taking Appadurai's (1996) theorizing of global scapes as her starting point, Marsha C. Inhorn (2010) proposes to view the processes of globalized reproduction as a process of "reproscapes." In adding this element to the scapes Appadurai articulates, Inhorn (2010) focuses on the ways that bodies and biogenetic substances are situated in the global terrain. To give movement to the bodily substances and to emphasize the gendered implications that drive fertility travel, she suggests the concept of "reproflows" (Inhorn 2010: 183). Reproflows, she argues, speak not only to the ways that biogenetic substances literally move, but the concept also references the larger flows that unfold within these global crossings as well as acknowledges inner bodily flows of oocytes and semen, for example. According to Inhorn (2010), reproflows speak to "technologies invented in one country, which then 'flow' to others through a variety of commercial means; of embryos 'flowing' from one country to another through the work of embryo 'couriers' carrying their cryopreservation tanks; of men and women 'flowing' across transnational borders in search of reproductive 'assistance'; and of reproductive 'assistors' who 'flow' and are 'flown' to other countries in transnational reproductive networks" (2010: 183–84). Reproflows illustrate not only the ways the transnational market in reproductive cells operates in a global arena but also the ways national lines are continually crisscrossed in interesting and sometimes unpredictable ways: an American egg donor flies to the Middle East to donate eggs intended for economically privileged Middle Eastern couples whose much-desired in vitro fertilization (IVF) babies are later taken care of by Southeast Asian nannies (Inhorn 2010). The dynamics of globalized reproduction operate to make fertility travel an option to the financially privileged, while biogenetic substances are valued not only according to health and basic traits such as height, hair, and eye color but also in light of conventional understandings of gender and nationality.

Both scapes and flows are needed to define and understand globalized reproduction, just as both care and engineering are essential to describe the traffic that unfolds between modernist and postmodernist understanding of the making of kin. To problematize the ways substances and bodies become global products, we turn to the last theoretical pair—global gifts/global commodities.

Gifts and Commodities

In globalized reproduction, biogenetic substances are constructed as gifts (of life) as well as commodities, promising particular kinds of children (Kopytoff 2004; Scheper-Hughes 2005; Sharp 2000). Theorizing the gift and commodity framework, Catherine Waldby and Robert Mitchell (2006) pose that the gift economy creates social relationships based on indebtedness, whereas the selling of human tissue, by contrast, creates nonbinding relations between consumers and producers. While the gift and the commodity economy differ in

pertinent ways, Waldby and Mitchell (2006) also suggest that the two frames function simultaneously in the global market in fertility.

The gift/commodity frame raises several interrelated issues related to ownership and availability. For example, who owns the reproductive cells extracted, frozen, and made available to the infertile (Scheper-Hughes 2005)? And whose bodies are made available in the global market in fertility (Cohen 2004)? Lawrence Cohen's (2004) more anthropological perspective situates this dilemma in the global arena. In his work on organ donation in India, Cohen (2004) discusses how donor bodies become constructed as "bioavailable" and also illustrates the traffic that in organ donation takes place between gifting and commodifying. For example, organ donors employ a rhetorical framework of gifting when they articulate a desire to *give* their body parts away while simultaneously also being positioned within a transnational organ industry and someone else's need for an organ.

According to Cohen (2004), these processes make it more likely that certain bodies will become donor bodies and others will not. Bioavailable bodies, according to Cohen (2004), are those based on similarity (immunological similarity) and/or marginality (class, gender, or political marginality). In the case of reproduction, egg donors become bioavailable bodies on the basis of similarity, frequently matching the race of the intended parents (lighter skin, for example) but demonstrating marginality on the basis of age and economic disparity. In contrast, surrogates tend to be women who are frequently of a race and class different from the intended parents'. The operable and bioavailable fertile body, therefore, must be understood within the larger bioeconomy in which certain bodies become legitimate and eligible donor bodies, while other bodies are positioned as recipient bodies. In this manner, (in)fertile bodies are further situated in light of modern citizenship in which bodies are flexible and creative in the quest for capital accumulation.

The notion of bioavailability that establishes different rules by which bodies can even become commodities also articulates yet another value for the industry—that of a flexible consumer position in which reproduction is an individual choice (Mamo 2007). Consumer choice emphasizes how the ability to pay the price tag takes precedence, at times, over race, sexuality, or age as categories that limit access to and availability of treatment. Fertility consumption becomes framed as a legitimate practice, articulating and restating the rights of a self-governing consumer/citizen/entrepreneur (Mamo 2007). Simultaneously, the consumer position also must be situated in a global, neocolonial context in which reproductive labor is stratified (Colen 1995). Commissioning parents are comparatively wealthy, frequently white, and located in the North and the West; egg donors often are young, with lighter skin, and educated but economically less privileged; and surrogacy often is outsourced to and undertaken by poor women, usually located in the developing world.

Globalized reproduction is in need, however, of moving beyond the gift and the commodity frame into a new property regime (Hoeyer 2007). According to Klaus Hoeyer (2007), the commoditization hypothesis frames biogenetic substances in a moral economy of sorts and does little to explain the ways these substances move in and out of the commodity sphere. Biogenetic substances must necessarily travel as “products” and not as persons, Hoeyer (2007) argues. To consider commoditization as a process means to empirically investigate the ways biogenetic substances, at various points, move in and out of a commodity state. For example, in the case of oocytes, they move from having little value (framed as “excess” or “waste” material when extracted from the donor bodies) to having immense value (framed as “intelligent” eggs) or potential (“my future baby” when placed within the recipient’s body).

The above theoretical pairs exemplify the traffic that takes place between care and engineering, reproscapes and reproflows, and the gift and the commodity sphere. They raise a set of issues relevant to our understanding of ownership, policy making, motherhood, and citizenship and even our very understanding of fertility travel—issues that the contributors to this special section, from different disciplinary frameworks, work to address.

REFLECTIONS

The articles included in this special section problematize globalized reproduction while also highlighting the traffic that takes place between different theoretical pairs. The movement from one’s home country to a foreign country in search of a cheaper fertility option further exasperates the complexity of international fertility markets. In the article “Reproductive Exile in Global Dubai: South Asian Stories,” Marcia C. Inhorn foregrounds the notion of reproflows in the stories of South Asian infertile couples who travel to Dubai for treatment. Highlighting the problematics involved when infertile individuals are “forced” to travel, the author concludes that the concept of “reproductive exile” more aptly frames the issues at hand.

Illustrating how care—and not engineering (or technology)—is renaturalized in transnational surrogacy, Charlotte Kroløkke, in “From India with Love: Troublesome Citizens of Fertility Travel,” highlights how more modernist notions of maternity such as caring are reinvented and embedded with notions of maternal intent. When the intent to mother is combined with caretaking and worrying about babies’ health, the engineering that goes into the making of motherhood is made to disappear, and instead “natural” motherhood (caring) is reinvented and renaturalized. This framework is, however, in stark opposition to recent Norwegian legislation that ensures cultural homology by assigning citizenship to children born to Norwegians and to individuals with Norwegian genes.

The caring and engineering pair is also exemplified in Susanne Lundin’s article “I Want a Baby; Don’t Stop Me from Being a Mother’:

An Ethnographic Study on Fertility Tourism and Egg Trade.” According to Lundin, the care and desire for a child is used as a communication device that makes the quasi-legal egg trade gain legitimacy. Moreover, reproductive assistants including egg donors as well as recipients engage in remedial narrative work to make their choices appear more acceptable. Thus they navigate the gift/commodity framework in interesting but also very strategic ways.

Globalized reproduction raises profound questions related not only to the making of kin but also to our most basic understanding of coming into being. Today the making of a child may involve the freezing, transportation, and thawing of reproductive cells intended for—although not necessarily derived from—the individuals themselves. The articles included in this special section illustrate the traffic that takes place between different theoretical pairs and between modernist and postmodern constructions of reproduction. Care is, for example, frequently foregrounded even at times when engineering is necessary. Similarly, the notion of reproflows aptly illustrates the various transnational links created in the fertility industry among bodies or frozen biogenetic substances, reproductive actors, the intended parents, and policy makers. Also, the traffic that unfolds between the theoretical pair of the gift and the commodity exemplifies how biogenetic substances frequently are both: while economic need may motivate young women to donate their eggs, they use the rhetoric of gifting to make themselves and their decision legitimate and understood. Meanwhile, the intended parents may view biogenetic substances in light of their particular traits and characteristics (as products) and yet simultaneously prefer the narrative of gifting when imagining their own child’s creation story. Fertility travel and globalized reproduction engage in this complicated traffic between care and engineering, reproscapes and reproflows, and between the gift and the commodity sphere. Biogenetic substances engage not only in transnational crossings but, as noted by Aditya Bharadwaj (2008), also in crossings between biology, machine, commercial, ethical, moral, and national borders. Biogenetic substances can be understood not as stable entities but rather as dynamic ones, imploded with varying and shifting values that are made manifest in the marketing, commodification, and legal negotiations that unfold as well. These issues play out as substances cross not only time and space but also varying cultural terrains (Bharadwaj 2008: 103). Consequently, studying fertility travel means investigating these more theoretical constructs through a critical examination of the empirical material at hand.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We wish to thank Ryan Bishop and John Armitage for their enthusiasm and constructive feedback throughout the process of creating this special section.

REFERENCES

- Appadurai, Arjun. 1996. *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Bestard, Joan. 2004. "Kinship and the New Genetics: The Changing Meaning of Biogenetic Substance." *Social Anthropology* 12, no. 3: 253–63.
- Bharadwaj, Aditya. 2008. "Biosociality and Biocrossings: Encounters with Assisted Conception and Embryonic Stem Cells in India." In *Biosocialities, Genetics, and the Social Sciences: Making Biologies and Identities*, edited by Sahra Gibbon and Carlos Novas, 98–116. London: Routledge.
- Campbell, Ben. 2007. "Racialization, Genes, and the Reinvention of Nation in Europe." In *Race, Ethnicity, and Nation: Perspectives from Kinship and Genetics*, edited by Peter Wade, 95–124. Oxford, UK: Berghahn Books.
- Cohen, Lawrence. 2004. "Operability: Surgery at the Margin of the State." In *Anthropology in the Margins of the State*, edited by Veena Das and Deborah Poole, 165–90. Santa Fe: School of American Research Press.
- Colen, Shellee. 1995. "'Like a Mother to Them': Stratified Reproduction and West Indian Childcare Workers and Employers in New York." In *Conceiving the New World Order: The Global Politics of Reproduction*, edited by Faye D. Ginsburg and Rayna Rapp, 78–103. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Ehrenreich, Barbara, and Arlie Hochschild. 2003. *Global Woman: Nannies, Maids, and Sex Workers in the New Economy*. New York: Holt.
- Franklin, Sarah. 2001. "Biologization Revisited: Kinship Theory in the Context of the New Biologies." In *Relative Values: Reconfiguring Kinship Studies*, edited by Sarah Franklin and Susan McKinnon, 302–22. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Franklin, Sarah, Celia Lury, and Jackie Stacey. 2000. *Global Nature, Global Culture*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Haraway, Donna. 1997. *Modest_Witness@Second_Millennium. FemaleMan[®]_Meets_OncoMouse[™]: Feminism and Technoscience*. New York: Routledge.
- Hochschild, Arlie. 2000. "Global Care Chains and Emotional Surplus Value." In *On the Edge: Globalization and the New Millennium*, edited by Anthony Giddens and Will Hutton, 130–46. London: Sage.
- Hoeyer, Klaus. 2007. "Person, Patent, and Property: A Critique of the Commodification Hypothesis." *BioSocieties* 2, no. 3: 327–48.
- Inhorn, Marcia C. 2010. "'Assisted' Motherhood in Global Dubai: Reproductive Tourists and Their Helpers." In *The Globalization of Motherhood: Deconstructions and Reconstructions of Biology and Care*, edited by Wendy Chavkin and Jane Maree Maher, 180–202. New York: Routledge.

- Kopytoff, Igor. 2004. "Commoditizing Kinship in America." In *Consuming Motherhood*, edited by Janelle S. Taylor, Linda L. Layne, and Danielle F. Wozniak, 271–78. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press.
- Kroløkke, Charlotte, Karen A. Foss, and Jennifer A. Sandoval. 2010. "The Commodification of Motherhood: Surrogacy as a Matter of Choice." In *Contemplating Maternity in an Era of Choice: Explorations into Discourses of Reproduction*, edited by Sara Hayden and D. Lynn O'Brien Hallstein, 95–114. Lanham, MD: Lexington Books.
- Mamo, Laura. 2007. *Queering Reproduction: Achieving Pregnancy in the Age of Technoscience*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Markens, Susan. 2007. *Surrogate Motherhood and the Politics of Reproduction*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Noddings, Nel. 1984. *Caring: A Feminine Approach to Ethics and Moral Education*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Pande, Amrita. 2010. "Commercial Surrogacy in India: Manufacturing a Perfect Mother-Worker." *Signs: Journal of Women and Culture in Society* 35, no. 4: 969–92.
- Scheper-Hughes, Nancy. 2005. "Bodies for Sale—Whole or in Parts." In *Commodifying Bodies*, edited by Nancy Scheper-Hughes and Loïc Wacquant, 1–8. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Sharp, Lesley A. 2000. "The Commodification of the Body and Its Parts." *Annual Review of Anthropology* 29: 287–328.
- Shenfield, Françoise, Jacques de Mouzon, Guido Pennings, Anna Pia Ferraretti, A. Nyboe Andersen, Guido de Wert, and Veerle Goossens, and the European Society of Human Reproduction and Embryology (ESHRE) Taskforce on Cross Border Reproductive Care. 2010. "Cross Border Reproductive Care in Six European Countries." www.eshre.eu/01/MyDocuments/Shenfield_et_al_2010_Cross_border_reproductive_care_in_six_European_countries.pdf.
- Storrow, Richard F. 2005. "Quests for Conception: Fertility Tourists, Globalization, and Feminist Legal Theory." *Hastings Law Journal* 57, no. 2: 295–330. www.lexisnexis.com.proxy1-bib.sdu.dk:2048/us/Inacademic/delivery/PrintDoc January 2010.
- Thompson, Charis. 2005. *Making Parents: The Ontological Choreography of Reproductive Technologies*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Waldby, Catherine, and Robert Mitchell. 2006. *Tissue Economies: Blood, Organs, and Cell Lines in Late Capitalism*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Yeates, Nicola. 2004. "Global Care Chains: Critical Reflections and Lines of Enquiry." *International Feminist Journal of Politics* 6, no. 3: 369–91.