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International Solidarity in reproductive justice: surrogacy and gender-inclusive polymaternalism

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ABSTRACT

Reproductive justice and gestational surrogacy are often implicitly treated as antonyms. Yet the former represents a theoretic approach that enables the long and racialised history of surrogacy (far from a new or 'exceptional' practice) to be appreciated as part of a struggle for 'radical kinship' and gender-inclusive polymaternalism. Recasting surrogacy as a dynamic contradiction in itself, full of latent possibilities relevant to early Reproductive Justice militants' family-abolitionist aims, this article invites scholars in human geography and cognate disciplines to re-think the boundaries of surrogacy politics. As ethnographies of formal gestational workplaces, accounts of gestational workers' self-organised resistance, and readings of the attendant public media scandals show (taking examples from India, Thailand, and New Jersey), there is no good reason to place these new economies of 'third-party reproductive assistance' in a 'realm apart' from conversations about social reproduction more generally. Surrogacy, I argue, potentially names a practice of commoning at the same time as it names a new wave of accumulation in which clinicians are capitalising on the contemporary – biogenetic-propertarian, white-supremacist – logic of kinmaking in the Global North. Ongoing experiments in the redistribution of mothering labour ('othermothering' in the Black feminist tradition) suggest that 'another surrogacy is possible,' animated by what Kathi Weeks and the 1970s intervention 'Wages Against Housework' conceive as anti-work politics. In making this argument, the article revives the concept 'gestational labour' as a means of keeping the process of 'literal' reproduction open to transformation.

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Radical kinship

In *Against Love: A Polemic*, Laura Kipnis (2003) wrote in passing: 'Clearly the answer to the much-debated question "Does divorce harm children?" should be "Compared to what?"' (141). This, I believe, is the right kind of question to ask about commercial gestational surrogacy. News headlines typically imply that surrogacy inflicts a great

deal of degradation and indignity upon women and children (those sempiternal stand-ins for the supposed sanctity of 'life' and 'humanity'). Book-length arguments to this effect are regularly published, as in *Surrogacy: A Human Rights Violation* (Klein 2017). I argue in what follows, however, that it is the proprietarianism and the work in contemporary kinmaking that harm people; ills whose origins do not lie in the new gestational markets. No good can come, I infer, from looking at 'surrogacy' on its own. Instead we must determine: harmful *how*, and compared to what?

Commercial gestational surrogacy, also called contract pregnancy, involves privately contracting a biogenetically curated pregnancy using IVF. It distinguishes itself from what is commonly considered natural in procreation in that the human fetuses it produces are formally entered upon birth into a legal unit other than the family of the pregnant party. Compared with the major historical ways (including accident and rape) in which human newborns have always been brought to light, it is possible to hypothesise that surrogacy possesses a good track record. Trauma inflicted under the aegis of surrogacy, often publicised via 'surrogacy scandals' in the press, is certainly not to be excused. There may just not be cause for the traumas in question to be singled out, as though they were uniquely evil. Logically speaking, after all, what happens in the 'assistance' sector is more likely to be a symptom of the prevalent social mode of reproduction than an autonomous exception. Given the vast proportion of murder, battery and sexual abuse that occurs within 'normal' families, it seems odd to worry about a mode of family formation *because* it is intensely intentional, artificial, and 'different'.

As ethnographers such as Amrita Pande, Amrita Banerjee, Sharmila Rudrappa and Kalindi Vora have documented in the Indian context, the existing surrogacy industry often causes considerable harm to some of its workers; harm that is comparable to that incurred in other industries (Pande 2014; Banerjee 2013; Rudrappa 2015; Vora 2015). Many people working on surrogacy contracts, it is found, contend with psychic, corporeal and emotional workplace challenges that include stigma and secrecy, surveillance, wrenching sadness, conflicted regret, boredom, resentment, an absence of postnatal care, and being financially shorted by clinics and agents; in short, they suffer, as all workers do. Reading these workplace inquiries, I do not reject the hypothesis that many gestational workers might suffer *more* than the majority of workers worldwide (although attempts to rank suffering in a hierarchy cannot, I think, result in liberatory politics.) I note, simply, that workers in this industry, studied over many years by these scholars, do *not* claim access to a qualitatively unique form of suffering. It behooves society to believe them.

'Care' and 'social reproduction' being key idioms for feminist humanities and social sciences today, it is often noted that the distinction between reproduction and production is quasi-illusory (Lewis 2018). Yet the idea that biological reproduction may *literally* constitute production is less often entertained. In the 1980s, the Scottish midwife and philosopher Mary O'Brien (1981) called the work of pregnancy 'gestational labour': a form of labour-power whose world-historic product is, or at least *could* be, 'synthetic value'; the knitting together of people.

Without carrying over the totalising, gynocentric and trans-exclusionary tenor of her book *The Politics of Reproduction* (1981), nor its historical narrative in which surrogacy appears as the exception, this article proposes to revive O'Brien's concern with the political and productive labour of gestation. In the context of the rise of pregnancy's partial marketisation qua 'clinical labour' (Cooper and Waldby 2014), I try to peer towards conditions of possibility for non-exploitative surrogacy. I take inspiration from O'Brien's materialist account of pregnancy, and apply the lens of 'reproductive justice' developed by the SisterSong collective (Ross et al. 2016) to struggles waged on the terrain of embodied production in which that production becomes a form of care. By exploring reproduction as care/production, I seek to avoid the trap of thinking of care as a simple antidote to exploitation and injustice.

Many places and cultures invest a quasi-sacred intensity of sentiment in 'the' maternal bond: there is implicitly only one available (an unforgettable counter-example is discussed, however, in *Death Without Weeping* [Scheper-Hughes 1993]). Nevertheless, many historians have demonstrated that this intimacy and love can and should be regarded as contingent and open to conscious transformations (Zelizer 1985; Kipnis 2003; Federici 2012). As such, while care labours are, as mentioned, typically understood to be *synthetic*, it is possible that the prevalent mode of organising gestation - under capitalism - may generate an *absence* of bonds between infants and adults. While we can see that this is especially true in the context of surrogacy, where non-relatedness is the *aim* of the labour, such effects are currently not confined to that sphere. Whereas O'Brien omits reference to structural reasons for maternal infanticide and postpartum depression, in their 'Theses on Postpartum', some activist mother-theorists of a later generation - Marija Cetinic and Madeline Lane-McKinley (2015) - insist that: "Postpartum depression" describes the social conditions of motherhood under late capitalism.

Lane-McKinley and Cetinic compare and contrast the psychologised, individualised phenomenon of postpartum to the *chosen loss* that is abortion, perceiving in both moments a kind of 'threshold' between a narrow, propertarian and lonely mode of family, and a politics of 'radical kinship' they wish to carry forward. Radical kinship for them is process, a struggle through which 'the distinction between mothers and non-mothers is radically challenged' (Lane-McKinley and Cetinic 2015). In this historicised and combative frame, surrogacy demands to be treated as just one site - not even necessarily a particularly privileged one, but a bounded one for the purposes of analysis - of that struggle. Further, as I explore below, with the unsettling of the mother/non-mother distinction, capitalist surrogacy becomes legible as a dynamic contradiction in itself, containing latent possibilities that are highly relevant to early Reproductive Justice militants' desire to abolish the nuclear family. When we refrain from casting it in a special realm apart from everyday reproduction, it becomes obvious that the grammar of commercial surrogacy is fundamentally premised on anti-polymaternalism. Cutting kinship into secure and sanitary sections, maintaining strict separation between participants' life-worlds

rather than bridging them, private surrogacy clinicians assure commissioning parents that their surrogate's body will leave no trace upon its product, *their baby*.

Applying an immanent critique here usefully reveals that, for the immaculate fantasy of surrogacy to be true, it would have to be true of all pregnancy. It shows how, in straightforward molecular as well as epigenetic terms, it is *not* true that gestational labour can be hermetically contained (either in surrogate or in 'normal' pregnancy). It seems plausible that the messy, infectious boundary transgressions of everyday kinship may be especially apparent to whoever contemplates working (or having a friend/relative work) as a paid gestator. On that basis, let us entertain the utopian possibility of self-organised gestators and their allies moving *against* the boundary-policing operations of contemporary surrogacy; pitting surrogacy (as it were) against itself. Could surrogates themselves instantiate a non-exploitative form of clinical care-labour, premised on the dynamic principles of reproductive justice developed by Black feminists around practices of 'othermothering' and polymaternalism (Ross et al. 2016)? I think so. At minimum, I defend reading actually-existing surrogacy against the grain for inspiration. The collective imaginary is in dire need of such aides to the task of instantiating a mode of expansive interrelationship, a web of radical kinship that would link children and mothers of all genders, everywhere.

Immediately below, I outline the dearth of treatments of gestation as real, economic work and illustrate the insufficiency of most Marxian approaches to surrogacy to date, proving the need for a category like 'gestational labour' (akin to Cooper and Waldby's overlapping one, 'clinical labour'). The subsequent section expands on this by arguing that embracing such a category is ultimately a matter of solidarity with gestational workers, lending itself well to engagement from an anti-work perspective. Next, I further contextualise 'gestational labour' vis-à-vis figurations of pregnancy as passive, asking 'who's afraid of gestational labour?' while grappling with the concept's complex relation to the categories 'production', 'social reproduction' and 'care'. This sets the stage for a brief 'alternative history' of surrogacy ('surrogacy before surrogacy') informed by the critical interplay between Wages For Housework in the 1970s and Black Feminism on the question of reproductive labour. Here, I highlight polymaternalism in Black feminist thought, and stress Black feminism's theorisations of the surrogate as a key figure of systemic reproductive stratification. The penultimate section seeks to contribute to a revival of the Reproductive Justice heuristic, proposing the gender-inclusive term 'gestational labour' as a way of denaturalising the body's mothering. Finally, my conclusion calls for solidarities between paid and unpaid reproducers, their allies, and various (chosen, made, found, held) kin.

Gestation as labour

A good starting place for theoretic material to bolster a sense of gestation as labour – for an anticapitalist – *ought* to be contemporary Marxism. One pioneer of

a 'value-theoretic approach to childbirth', Kathryn Russell, suggested in the 1990s that: 'the socialisation of reproductive labor under capitalism is a necessary precondition for its liberation, just as Marx theorised that the commodification of labor-power creates the possibility for a society free from drudgery and domination' (Russell 1994; 310). Nevertheless, it remains the case that (as Mary O'Brien lamented) in both Marx and much marxian scholarship 'the labour of reproduction is excluded from the analysis, and children seem to appear spontaneously or perhaps magically. Reproductive labour, thus sterilised, does not produce value, does not produce needs and therefore does not make history nor make men [*sic*]' (O'Brien 1981, 175). It is hardly surprising, then, that Marxist readings of surrogacy remain few to this day and those existing are disappointingly inconsistent in their treatment. One of the first, 'Marxism and Surrogacy', argued that 'surrogacy is the quintessence of capitalist patriarchy's estranged construction of motherhood' (Oliver 1989, 112), twice implying it might be a form of commodified labour-power but overall proving unwilling to explore the consequences of that. Another, 'Reproduction for Money' (Glass 1994), claimed that Marx's analysis of estranged labour 'would have led him to predict that paid surrogacy would be "forced labour"'. The commercial gestational surrogate's activity is, readers were told, 'not spontaneous activity... it belongs to another; it is the loss of self' (286). Two pages later it was noted, however, that surrogacy 'is not a well-paid job' when calculated per hour (288).

There is no shortage of published arguments *against* theorising gestation as labour-power. This despite the fact that – excepting Cooper and Waldby's admirable innovations on regenerative medicine, tissue and organ donation – a (Marxist) argument *for* doing so has barely been made. Seeking to refute it nevertheless, Bronwyn Parry makes much of the fact that Indian surrogates in Mumbai have 'no experience of formalised labour or of unionisation' and are 'inducted into the work through a complex and multifaceted network of kin relations ... a complex affective matrix' that frequently results in their calling bosses and managers 'sister' or 'auntie' (Parry 2015, 36). While it clearly never occurred to ethnographers Sharmila Rudrappa, or Amrita Pande (who document the same phenomenon) to interpret these workplace intimacies as evidence that relations in the surrogacy dormitory/clinic weren't capitalist or contractual, for Parry, these speech-patterns suggest that parties 'do not have an employer–employee relationship' (34). Says Parry with confidence: 'they [the surrogates in Mumbai] would never venture to undertake [an appeal in the case of a breach of contract] themselves' (35). Yet in Amrita Pande's six-year study of a similar Indian clinic, it was found that 'the stigma of surrogacy starts getting diluted, and women, especially the repeat surrogates, start negotiating higher payments and more support from their families and start demanding less interference by brokers' (Pande 2014, 11).

The insufficiency of Marxist theorising on gestational labour becomes especially apparent in the context of biotechnology and assisted reproductive tech. In his monograph *Cyber-Marx*, Nick Dyer-Witthford passingly calls commercial

surrogacy 'the ultimate in female service sector labour' (Dyer-Witthford 1999, 105); however, 'surrogacy' is then quickly replaced by the phrase 'genetic engineering'. In other words, at the mention of surrogacy, the author's mind seems to leap not to the vicissitudes of abstract labour but to a somewhat paranoid vision of total 'control'. *Cyber-Marx* (a fine book) is by no means an outlier here but is both characteristic and symptomatic of the uncertainty and moral hesitation among Marxists about the status of gestational labour (and indeed sex-work). Leftists trust their well-meaning intuition that 'the so-called 'surrogate mother' business' is 'obviously exploitative' (Dyer-Witthford 1999, 105). But they do not ask themselves why they find it so much easier to analyse other obviously exploitative industries than they do this one. Gestures towards assistive gestation are meant, it seems, as handy illustrations of mechanised estrangement or as jumping-off points for an argument. But surrogacy's uniqueness in this sense – because it is taken to be self-evident – is never quite explained.

My point in showcasing these shortfalls (sympathetically) is that when we skim over gestation, we downplay the labour of every gestator – commercial or not – and tacitly help justify the practice of having her 'excised from the family photos' in surrogacy (Weeks 2015, 740), whether or not we 'endorse' the industry. We betray a wishful conviction that the reproductive labour of mothers 'is not a commodity' (Anderson 1990) – against all evidence to the contrary. This habit precludes our seeing what surrogates do as having a history, let alone one of their own making. To borrow words of Donna Haraway's intended for a different context: 'Many sorts of social stratification and injustice are in play, but they are often not of the kinds found by those seeking their fix of outrage whenever they smell the commodification of humans or part humans' (Haraway 2007, 59). Outrage blunts the mind; moreover, embracing gestation as work is not remotely incompatible with struggling against work (quite the contrary, in the view of many of the militants discussed in this piece).

Marxist-feminist geographer Cindi Katz's reminder that everything about care economies is 'fleshy, messy' (Katz 2001, 711) is (rightly) ubiquitously quoted both in geography and beyond. Even so, appreciation of the ubiquity and banality of something like *care production* is still arguably underdeveloped in the field, although it is immanent in Katz's influential writings on the function of nature as an accumulation strategy for capital (Katz 1998, 2001; Marston, Mitchell, and Katz 2003). Despite its centrality to the marxian concept of social reproduction, gestation appears to be the most elusive subset of care labour, *except* in its exceptional guise as clinical labour. Contemporary enthusiasm for the study of flows of care or 'biovalue' does not usually begin with the most 'literally' reproductive component of so-called 'intimate economies' – ordinary gestation. Despite it representing the most spectacularly fleshy part of Katz's definition, the nitty-gritty doingness of gestation is still quite often skirted, even in Marxist feminist geography.

Solidarity with surrogates

In commercial gestational surrogacy's short history to date, avowed non-Marxists currently hold the more substantial track record in terms of worker solidarity. This history was shaped, for example, by two policy-activist *grandes dames* with deeply unsentimental perspectives: in the Indian context, Sulochana Gunasheela (Rudrappa 2015, 13–34, 79, 149); and, in the Israeli context, Carmel Shalev (Shalev 1989). The biographies of these figures reveal that both Gunasheela and Shalev were optimistic about the political horizon of demands for wages for reproductive services, and confident in commercial surrogacy's ability to draw attention to how much hard work is involved in pregnancy and childbirth *generally* (Shalev 1989; Rudrappa 2015). In the iconoclastic view of both these political women, the 'problem' with 'womb farms' hinges primarily on the question of who is doing the farming and running the farm.

In the 1980s, these isolated feminist pro-surrogacy advocates thought that, like the 'othermothers' of colonised, racialised and sexually marginal communities (Ross et al. 2016; Park 2013), the actions and claims of proletarian contract-gestational workers could shed new light on what was wrong with the mode of biological reproduction under present-day capitalism. The two, in fact, had different ideas about what this was: one wanted freer capitalism for women, the other, leverage for social justice struggles. But whereas, elsewhere, upper-middle-class white bioethical antisurrogacy movements were burgeoning under the name of 'radical feminism' in the Global North (Lewis 2017), Gunasheela and Shalev spearheaded 'feminist' forms of policy activism that were rooted in grassroots organising in Indian and Israeli communities. With Shalev's libertarian book *Birth Power* – which calls for a 'free market in reproduction' (Shalev 1989, 157) – as a notable exception, natality has not been philosophised primarily by history's gestators themselves.

Pattharamon Chanbua, the Thai surrogate who adopted the world-famous white-passing baby with Down's Syndrome, Baby Gammy (whom she gave birth to in 2015), is one surrogate worker in the contemporary era who has taken action, demanded solidarity from other women, and expressed inconvenient claims about kinmaking on a public platform. When the heterosexual commissioning parents from Australia attempted to have Gammy aborted, Chanbua refused, preferring, with her own large extended family, to keep the newborn and raise him. In so refusing, she further managed to articulate – in interviews reported in international media – her contempt for proletarian understandings of newborn kin and her disappointment at the devaluation of poor women's labour (Lewis 2016). Renegade surrogates like Chanbua keep alive, then, an image of gestational alterity: a suggestion of a mode of kinmaking in which people are knitted together, sometimes unexpectedly, via *specific* gestational labours (but not genetics). However, much like Carmel Shalev and Sulochana Gunasheela's divergent political beliefs, the politics opportunistically deployed off the back of unruly surrogates-turned-mothers like Chanbua are, at present, unstable. Surrogacy scandals like 'Baby Gammy' can

easily be made to point to bioconservative conclusions, i.e. *'unnaturalness' in baby-making inevitably leads to disaster, more regulation will fix it*; as well as neoliberal ones, i.e. *the pregnancy outsourcing market must be given free rein to iron out its flaws; internationally competitive surrogacy caters effectively to populations whose right to procreate and purchasing power aren't being given a chance by legislatures 'at home'*. Many scholars do not hold either of these views, yet few commit to the anticapitalist freight in surrogacy politics.

Simply put, surrogates' struggle can either be embedded in the history and horizon of class struggles and reproductive justice, or decoupled from it. Shalev, for her part, explicitly rejects the imperative that gestational theorising and obstetric practice be accountable to the demand to promote working-class people's freedom to reproduce themselves as they wish (Shalev 1989, 159). As a result, far from being about the abolition of class-race-gender stratifications, Shalev's concept 'birth power' is the name for an individual entrepreneurial force of production. In contrast, 'gestational labour' is intended here to name a collective power of struggle, bargaining, destruction and regeneration that makes and remakes the meaning of family, for good and ill.

The humanities and social sciences (and I) owe this kind of account of social reproduction's dual character overwhelmingly to Black and Marxist feminists (Hill Collins 2002; Federici and Cox 1975). In the first instance, as these theorists show, care work 'matters forth' (Detamore 2010, 241) our communities' people, and this, for many communities, means defying annihilation: affirming the right to exist and to be together in the face of necropolitical forces (Roberts 2015). At the same time, pregnancy yields workers for exploitation, while itself enduring indirect exploitation as work. In Silvia Federici's words, 'nothing so effectively stifles our lives as the transformation into work of the activities and relations that satisfy our desires' (Federici 2012, 3). If it fulfills its aim, pregnancy-work consigns the post-pregnant and their accomplices to a quasi-eternity of even more work (Dalla Costa 1972). While many people feel that parenting affords them the most fulfilling experiences of their lives, many simultaneously wonder (so early Marxist-feminist inquiries found) about what parenting would be like if it *weren't* work, or if its work-like attributes were reduced to a minimum (Federici and Cox 1975). The idea of totally remaking humanity for the purposes of flourishing – de-instrumentalising and communising procreation – appears in many texts: in Black Reproductive Justice feminism; Wages for Housework; Shulamith Firestone when she exclaimed 'down with childhood!' (1971, 72); and Mary O'Brien when she mysteriously predicted: 'with the liberation of women, children will be different' (O'Brien 1981, 208).

The surrogacy industry is *not* the manifestation of the historical force that first transformed pregnancy into work and opened the question of solidarity with gestators. As Wages for Housework conceptualised it, under capitalism, childbearing is already part of a 'baby line': 'every miscarriage is a workplace accident' (Federici and Cox 1975). With the surrogacy industry, this reality merely becomes (at least

potentially) more palpable to people everywhere. But, at the same time, postwork feminists such as Federici know well that there are ways of hailing activities as work that are destructive rather than helpful. In a ‘work society’, as Kathi Weeks (2011) tells us, identifying something as work can all too easily be mistaken for moral praise. For liberal and conservative juridical theorists alike, gestating is strictly only work in the novel context of commercial surrogacy. A typical juridical commentary on the subject approvingly states: ‘For tax purposes, the reproductive labor of surrogacy is work’ (Crawford 2009, 327). Antiwork organising is further complicated by the fact that feminised subjects are likely to feel *ashamed* of taking money for activities defined as constitutive of womanly virtue. Sharmila Rudrappa discovered, for instance, that religious altruism was the main self-justifying feature of gestational workers’ discourse: ‘even as [surrogates in Bangalore] understood surrogacy as a form of wage labor, they also simultaneously located surrogacy as a form of gift exchange’ (2015, 11).

Much as a new generation of bioethicists inveighs against this reality, people *do* work as gestators, both formally and informally. In Bangalore (India) and presumably elsewhere too, current or former gestational surrogates are seeking to cut out middlemen, learn methods such as IVF, administer embryo transfer themselves, set up independent cooperatives, and secure better payment and conditions (Rudrappa 2015); they are not calling for the industry to be abolished in faster order than any other industry. The moral distaste of onlookers is not only inappropriate and stigmatising, but actively complicit in the differential production (across populations) of ‘bioavailability’ – the condition of being recruitable for clinical labours (Cooper and Waldby 2014).

The popularity of measures designed to ensure surrogacy remains ‘altruistic’ (Satz 2010) while, at the same time, keeping intact the structural conditions that make proletarians commercially ‘bioavailable’ in the first place, is testament to the insufficiency of a liberal bioethics in apprehending the stakes of today’s bioeconomy. As *Wages for Housework* suggested with bitter sarcasm in its sideways assault on the wage-relation: perhaps ‘the quickest way to ‘disalienate’ work [would be] to do it for free’ (Cox and Federici and Cox 1975, 9). Carrying forward this tradition of ‘love and rage’, I stand firmly behind any proletarian’s contrivance to accommodate themselves as bearably and as profitably as possible to the discipline of work; just as I would expect them in turn to support my accommodation, as well as my resistance, to the transformation into work – via the neoliberal university – of the activities and relations that satisfy my desire to (in this case) read, think and write.

Who’s afraid of ‘gestational labour’?

National Geographic’s film *In the Womb* (Macdonald 2005) provides a neat and concentrated example of the widespread invisibilisation of gestational labour qua labour (i.e. *productive care labour*, as I argue here). The documentary treats pregnancy as the autonomous fetus’s traversal and transcendence of maternal

body-territory, painting a picture of a self-valorisation process reminiscent of prevalent pro-capitalist narratives about capital itself. An authoritative male voice-over explains pregnancy in terms of an 'odyssey' accomplished by the future 'baby girl'; calling it a 'journey' of which the gestator is, for her part, 'most likely unaware'. Sophisticated graphic animations accompany the narration; one sequence depicts the embryonic ball of cells at two weeks, folding in on itself to create a tube that will eventually become a fetal torso, morphing like a melted marshmallow in outer space. The impression throughout is of miraculous growth autonomy. Throughout these microscopic interior sequences, it is as though the mother's body *isn't there*. To ensure the point is rammed home, the viewer being educated about the biology of 'becoming' (not *making*) a human is repeatedly treated to underwater footage of the adult gestator at various stages of her pregnancy, kicking around in a swimming pool, oblivious to the 'drama unfolding inside her'. *National Geographic's* strips the maternal subject's consciousness while paying incessant tributes to the will to self-determination of the baby-to-be. 'The mother provides the shelter and the basics: food, water and oxygen', we are told, 'But the real star of the show is the fetus herself' (Macdonald 2005).

The decision to use the term 'gestational labour' is, in the first instance, a manoeuvre intended to counteract 'capital's capacity', advanced through cultural productions such as *In the Womb*, 'to disguise itself as progenitor' (O'Brien 1981, 177). World-weary left-leaning readers may feel that to insist on labour as the source of worldly value is an overfamiliar point. But Tsipy Ivry has recently presented research inquiring whether the assumption that pregnancy is an active process has become embedded in prevalent twenty-first century discourses. She concludes that, no, 'the invisibility of women's procreative labor' in people's narratives of how children come into the world remains oppressive (Ivry 2015, 286). In sympathy with scholars like Ivry, I affirm 'gestational labour' in defiance of still-active ideologies that construct the womb as the passive object of efficient and expert harvesting; a space of waste, surplusness or emptiness that is being profitably occupied.

Today's archetypal surrogated pregnancy, to paraphrase Margrit Shildrick and Deborah Steinberg, is – as well as a site of labour – a 'radically schismatic' site of 'estranged bodily supplementarity' (Shildrick and Steinberg 2015, 14). This schismatic structure of gestation – where disposability generates the surplus – extends Melissa Wright's observations about the cheapening of gendered labour in Mexican 'maquiladoras' (export factories): 'she creates extraordinary value with her extraordinarily low-value body' (Wright 2006, 2). In surrogate dormitories, the extraordinary value is admittedly produced via unorthodox (24/7) working hours and a not fully 'spontaneous' form of care labour. I am content, all the same, to accept Kathryn Russell's rationale for casting pregnancy as 'genuine human productive activity': it features 'a unity of conception and execution ... expends physiological energy ... involves an interchange with nature, is planned, and utilises instruments of (re)production' (1994, 296).

Hybridising 'care labour' and 'productive labour' in order to talk about pregnancy is somewhat sacrilegious. Care, in everyday use, remediates suffering; talking about 'production' in the same breath threatens to align babies with object-products: an idea that affronts most people. Yet care is an amoral, capacious category. Even in everyday use it appears variously as a technical matter (of medical technology wielded by magical life-giving experts), and conversely, as a humanly personal lay project of mutual aid and communal nurture. Since we often say that care *produces* – it produces our very selves – why do we resist thinking of production as care?

Looking at surrogacy as productive care labour is not a solution to all problems, but it opens up the realisation that pregnancy-workers can bargain, commit sabotage, and go on strike. Even in the reviled 'womb farms' or surrogate dormitories cropping up in today's economic landscape, the subsumption of pregnancy by capital is incomplete. The job of paid pregnancy may be difficult to interrupt once begun, but it nevertheless yields opportunities for workplace disruption. In *Vora's* analysis, backed by *Pande's* and *Rudrappa's*, Indian surrogate workers often enact 'refusal to accept the condition of being temporary' (*Vora 2015*, 135) – much as *Pattharamon Chanbua* did by opening a conversation about the location of *Baby Gammy's* true kin. 'Third-party' gestators might bargain for long-lasting and ongoing investment (on the part of the commissioning couple) in their own families. Or they might simply disobey clinic rules regarding their diet on the basis that *they* know best what will be good for the fetuses growing inside their bodies. Inspired by these moments of refusal, small and large, I am invested in seeing a scaled-up iteration of this power. In the end, I am inviting a deepening of militant, gender-abolitionist, gestational labour-oriented thought in this domain – and an amplification of conflicts that denaturalise the surrogate/parent dyad.

'Gestational labour' is not merely polemic; nor is it an analogy. For the purposes of this inquiry it is not just that the concept of labour illuminates what gestation really is – a production of place and history – but that, vice versa, gestation's characteristics can shed light on other forms of labour in turn. In pregnancy, labour is palpable as an asymmetric form of transduction – 'the coupling of embodiment and technics by which humans and nature interpenetrate' (*Braun, Whatmore, and Stengers 2010*, xix). Removed from the magically insular viewpoint of *In the Womb*, the boundaries of what we think of as gestation move: it becomes obvious that there are always multiple 'others' involved in pregnancy, such as healthcare workers, kin and other carers, not to mention nonhuman organisms and an array of social technologies. None of this invalidates the fact that the burden of responsibility and suffering, in pregnancy, is asymmetrically distributed, nor does it undermine the right to self-determination of individual gestators.

What it does imply is that the refusal of proprietary logic that lies at the heart of the surrogate-centred reproductive justice I envision extends more broadly across generations. Rather than apply only to the small strangers whose cries trigger in us an instinctual nurturing response (as they continue to gestate outside the womb), the non-proprietary kinmaking logic surrogacy encrypts necessarily

has implications involving elder care, fostering, and adoption of adults, as Donna Haraway discusses in her 'speculative fabulation' on multispecies reproductive justice and kinmaking (Haraway 2016). The gestational surrogate, with her often painful experience of gestational labour, is a pioneer in the history of the transformation of kinmaking: she may help map a path towards an unentitled, communised form of nurturing. She is *a* mother in the attempted making of a baby – not '*the* mother'. While commercial surrogacy practices typically suppress and deny the coexistence of multiple mothers, practices in which such coexistence is celebrated and sought have an established genealogy I will now draw upon.

Surrogacy before 'surrogacy'

The richly storied presence of the surrogate gestational labourer in history is important to stress, lest she be assumed to be an entirely recent and new kind of subject in reproduction (as race- and class-minimising forms of feminism encourage us to assume). In this part of the discussion, my argument is that the surrogate's supposed newness, inscribed in the phrase '*New Reproductive Technologies*', reflects a ruling-class perspective associated with the shoring-up of whiteness. Enslaved women's births – on United States slave plantations, for example – were routinely construed such that the child was not necessarily 'being delivered by his/her mother' in any sense with legal standing (Roberts 2009). Legacies of these practices reverberate in the present, in instances of obstetric shackling of pregnant inmates, and systematic removal of infants from low-income people of colour in the US. That vagrant or unmarried gestators were dispossessed of their babies and imprisoned in workhouse penitentiaries across much of 19th-century Europe is unfortunately also not a story fully consigned to the past (Murphy 2012). Hence, as the keystone term '*stratified reproduction*' coined by Shellee Colen neatly conveys (Colen 1986), the privilege of having one's motherhood honoured has long been differentially distributed. Nowhere does the Janus-faced character of '*nature*' come more violently into play than when some human bodies' stake in motherhood is vested with *sacredly natural* right while that of others is dismissed as *merely natural* detail.

In discussing the so-called rise of surrogacy in the United States, Anita Allen levels the challenge succinctly: 'Before the American civil war, virtually all Black southern mothers were ... surrogate mothers. Slave women knowingly gave birth to children with the understanding that those children would be owned by others' (Allen 1991, 17–18). As Allen notes, the case that launched surrogacy into public infamy was that of the (aptly named) Mary Beth Whitehead in New Jersey: a lower-middle-class married white woman with three children. Whitehead gestated to term and then changed her mind about relinquishing 'Baby M' to the couple who contracted her. In response to the drawn-out litigation and Supreme Court appeal that ensued, crowds demonstrated, and an activist antisurrogacy coalition

was born (Lewis 2017). In contrast, a mass moral reaction was *not* triggered by the plight of Anna Johnson (the 'Black Surrogate' in Allen's article of this name in the *Harvard Black Letter*).

In 1990, the state's separation of Anna Johnson from the (white-passing) product of her gestational labour passed without much comment, whereas the separation of Mary Beth Whitehead from hers (also white) inflamed public opinion on a massive scale. Both these surrogates claimed parenting rights and were denied them, but Whitehead's case is the one that became the milestone and universal talking-point. Johnson's tragedy followed shortly after Whitehead's, but the trial proved much less sensational, not more so. Without much deliberation, the judge who decided against Johnson's custodial rights to the white baby analogised her to a 'wet-nurse' and used a quite strikingly passive formulation in describing her role: 'a baby boy was delivered *from* Anna Johnson on 19 September 1990' (Allen 1991, 22; italics mine). As such the adjudication of the case – *Calverts vs. Johnson* – confirms, in Allen's reading, the stratification built into racial capitalism to date, whereby 'Blacks are not supposed to have white children. Blacks are not supposed to want to have white children of their own' (23). By the same token, in the other, prior, case, the prosecution had had to make every effort to erode the ontological privileges carried by Whitehead's whiteness in order to legitimate the expropriation of her baby. One tactic involved painting her as racially contaminated lumpenproletarian, 'a high school dropout and former sex-worker' according to Valerie Hartouni (1997, 132). These de-mothering measures were unnecessary in the courts' dismissal out of hand Johnson's desire to parent. As a black woman, Anna Johnson was – as Allen shows – *already* a surrogate.

In a context in which Black maternal dispossession and white maternal idealisation are both key ingredients of business-as-usual, to highlight the historic continuities embedded in surrogacy is to rupture this notion of 'surrogacy' as a rupture. Against the public 'shock' that is widely conjured up at the contemporary figure of the paid surrogate, there is a duty to cultivate sensitivity to historical racial stratification in the United States and beyond – and thus recognition of the historic 'blackness' of the figure of the surrogate. Over twenty years after *Calverts vs. Johnson*, the case of Pattharamon Chanbua (or 'Baby Gammy') demonstrated once more that a very narrow moralising script is activated in public dramas involving 'cross-racial' renegade surrogates in the context of global racial stratification (Lewis 2016). Even as it showed that a nonwhite surrogate *can* become 'Mother Courage' under some circumstances, the *exceptionality* inscribed in the Gammy case – whereby the white paedophile father was delegitimised as aberrant – still reinforced the basic logic of what Carolin Schurr, in the Mexican context, has called the 'liberal eugenics' of surrogacy, 'reproducing white futures' (Schurr 2017). Rather than undermine the 'natural' priority of white parents' claims upon babies, the brouhaha reinforced it by stressing how (supposedly) exceptional the scenario in question was.

As Schurr observes, the industry is fast disappearing from certain legislatures (including Thailand, where it was banned in 2015) only to reappear in others (such as, in 2016–2017, Kenya). As of 2016, India has banned surrogacy clinics from doing business with foreign ('transnational') clientele – a ban which may yet prove temporary (see Lewis 2019). Yet the likelihood that cases like Gammy's will continue to erupt – inside and outside the 'surrogacy industry' – in years to come makes it imperative that we name, denounce and reject the racist scales governing the adjudication of reproductive rights and wrongs, identified by Anita Allen decades ago. To succeed in doing so we must resist the decontextualisation of Assisted Reproductive Technology (ART) from its local and global histories.

As Kalindi Vora tells us: 'In the context of US histories of conquest, racial slavery, immigration, the reproductive work of women has served not only to perpetuate families in the predominantly white middle class but also to perpetuate a dis-course of white middle-class families as needing more care than working-class families and other families of color' (Vora 2015, 169). The processes that give rise to the condition of 'bioavailability' among certain populations are, Vora argues, forms of race-technology: 'Present technologies mostly operate to racialize and devalue particular populations' (143). Nevertheless, just as reproducers are capable of gestating historic continuity, they (we) also gestate discontinuity. The theory and praxis of Reproductive Justice historically rests on the implied, ever-widening path to freedom that people beat together as they walk by organising against lucrative systems of reproductive stratification.

Reproductive justice

The reproductive justice movement was spearheaded in the 1970s by OWAAD in the UK (Organisation for Women of Asian and African Descent), the Combahee River Collective in the US, and later SisterSong - in opposition to the more powerful, mainstream feminist lobbies. The latter prioritised formal equality and access to contraception, while marginalising Black-led womanist grievances around sterilisation and police violence and propping up what Melinda Cooper (2017), Laura Briggs (2017) and Michelle Murphy (2012) have analysed as the structural racism of a system of welfare organised around the Fordist 'family wage'. Progressives in America advocated that Black families be included in white heteropatriarchal welfare; in contrast, Reproductive Justice envisioned a rejection of biogenetic, 'nuclear' familiarity altogether, presciently seeing it as the basic disciplinary unit both neoliberalism and its enemies were attempting to consolidate across much of the world (Roberts 2009, 2015; Ross et al. 2016). Accordingly, a core campaigning issue for reproductive justice became the radically different meanings that contraception and abortion held for white as opposed to nonwhite women as groups. Activists emphasised, in a dialectic way, the importance of asserting the right of racialised women to be valued *as* mothers in society even as other feminisms fought primarily for the freedom to disavow the role of 'mother'. In challenging

institutionalised motherhood and denouncing the whiteness of that institution, Black feminists in this tradition challenged the rejection of mothering in unequivocal terms. The vulgar praxis of mothering, as opposed to the bourgeois prison of motherhood, was to be taken seriously as a site of struggle and creativity central to any revolution.

In the '70s, the 'Wages for Housework' platform articulated a radical new politicisation around the unpaid work performed in white and nonwhite homes alike under heteronormative patriarchal models (Dalla Costa 1972; Federici and Cox 1975). The demand for a wage was, in this autonomist-Marxist context, an impossibilist one whose ultimate aim was the abolition of work ('Wages Against Housework'), not the generalisation of its control. However, the campaign was strategically questioned by Black and South-East Asian feminists including – most notoriously – Angela Davis, for downplaying the fact that many women had, for decades, received wages for the housework they performed in wealthier and, often, whiter households (Davis 1981). *Wages for which housework?* these comradely critics interjected: *how about better wages?* Moreover, unemployed husbands, children and male relatives often served as houseworkers in (disproportionately) racialised homes in the metropolitan west. So, Wages for Housework had failed – initially – to explicitly enrol many feminised workers as potential feminist subjects in their care revolution. What had been missed, in retrospect, was the sex-indeterminate (although gendered) and collective character of both naturalised and professionalised housework, including mothering.

Mothering – as reproductive justice thinkers pointed out – has *always* been substantially outsourced along colonial and/or class lines, while at the same time, working-class communities have shared their own mothering burden on the basis of mutual aid. In 'Reflections on the Mutuality of Mothering', Njoki Nathani Wane contends that 'children do not solely belong to their biological parents, but to the community at large ... [and that] mothering is not limited to females with biological offspring' (Wane 2000, 112–113). Proponents of such 'polymaternal' knowledge put forward a politicised and denaturalised concept of mothering, in which mothering, while work, is given space to flourish as non-alienated and communal creativity. According to the US-based SisterSong collective, reproductive justice means 'the freedom to have children, not have children, and parent the children we have in safe and healthy environments' (Ross et al. 2016; xiii). The SisterSong call is rarely cited in geography and associated disciplines, but its echoes can be found everywhere, including in the pages of *Staying with the Trouble* when Haraway dreams of 'being able to bring children, whether one's own or those of others, to robust adulthood in health and safety in intact communities' (Haraway 2016, 6).

Black feminists such as Patricia Hill Collins and Patricia Williams have long insisted on the centrality of 'othermothering' and polymaternalism (multiple mothering) to counterhegemonic praxis and revolutionary survival (Williams 1991; Hill Collins 2002). Queer and/or family-critical voices have lately joined this chorus, too, highlighting the means by which the racist institution of 'family' has

marginalised gay, lesbian and trans polymaternalisms (Murphy 2012; Park 2013; Haraway 2016). Some feminist geographers have identified polymaternal practices as core worldmaking metabolisms – for instance, Londa Schiebinger describes enslaved women’s covert and collective reproductive and anti-reproductive actions in the West Indies in *Plants and Empire* (Schiebinger 2007). But generally speaking, when gestational labour has received attention in feminist geography, it has been in the siloed contexts of migratory ‘long distance’ mothering on the one hand (Pratt 2009) – which counts as mothering – and ‘reproductive tourism’ on the other (Deomampo 2013) – which doesn’t. This article hopes to have provided arguments and generated discussion that may attenuate that trend.

Another surrogacy is possible

Perhaps unavoidably, this article has been circling the fraught question of whether or not there is a ‘need’, let alone a ‘right’, to procreate. Certainly, the financial interests of the reproductive assistance sector are directly at odds with ‘making kin, not babies’ (Haraway 2016, 2). For-profit surrogacy, by its very logic, opposes the project of arresting the generation of new humans, and discourages fostering ‘unexpected’ relatives instead of producing conventional ones. However, as I have already hinted, the growth imperative could be overcome precisely by a different, anticapitalist incarnation of surrogacy. Another surrogacy, I contend, is possible – a surrogacy that would undo today’s alienating outsourcing model by expanding relatedness, de-exceptionalising ‘assistance’, contributing to the abolition of whiteness as a category of power and, as a side-effect, doubtless, slowing the rate of population growth. There is an innate potential in relationships of surrogacy to attenuate the boosterism driving proprietorial reproductive desire. But the communist, ‘synthetic’ effects of gestational labour have to be fought for, not assumed. Only when embedded in a wider system of non-private social reproduction could we count upon gestating in and of itself to mix and knit lives together over the long term, to yield more than two parents motivated by solidarity, not blood-ideology.

In a ‘polymaternal’ understanding of surrogacy, families get bigger without more babies (necessarily) being born. A surrogate would not have to be ‘excised from the family photo’ unless she desired it. In fact, a new and explicitly active term might have to be invented for her to counter the passivity wrongly written into the service in question. For now, in western usage, the word ‘surrogate’ is freighted with negative assumptions that are rarely made explicit within a prevailing climate of *monomaternalism* (‘the assumption that a child can have only one real mother’ Park 2013, 3). Debra Satz epitomises the spirit of monomaternalist hegemony today when she says, in a footnote, ‘The so-called surrogate mother is not merely a surrogate; she is the biological and/or gestational mother’ (Satz 2010, 222). Actually, No. She (not necessarily she) is *a* figure in the childbearing process – *a* mother, if one prefers, but not ‘the’. She is one labourer among many. There should be no shame in the term.

If we as feminists are discomfited by the 'return of the biological' in feminism, I contend, that is all the more reason to participate in the politicisation of waged workplaces specialising in a gestational labour, that practice 'so identified with being female' (Weeks 2011; 130). The dangers, as mentioned in the introduction, are indeed great: a refusal to condemn specific forms of work on moral grounds, and a decision to support strategic struggles around the wage, can all too easily be mistaken for an embrace of alienation. As Marston, Mitchell and Katz caution, while all too much of work is neglected as 'nonwork' in a context of flexible accumulation, at the same time, 'the contemporary *blurring* of work and nonwork is accepted and understood as normal or even positive in some cases' (Marston 2003, 429). To call the work of surrogacy (and pregnancy more broadly) 'gestational labour' should serve us to delegitimise that blurring and to abet the agency of those struggling to ameliorate conditions, and must never be a means to downplay or apologise for its abuses. Used thoughtfully, I hope that the life's work of reproducers becomes visible through this lens as both networked and intimate, automated and active, productive in the economic sense (bioclinically productive) but potentially also *anti-productive* in the political context of capitalism – since a refusal of productivity is one of the potentials embedded in revolutionary caring. In mothering each other, we may choose to place limits on our labour; in fact we *must* demand such limits.

One further thing this discussion has shown is that reproductive justice is not 'reasonable': SisterSong's 'freedom to parent the children we have in safe and healthy environments', for example, to be fully realised, would surely require a revolution in free time and democratised access to the all the resources on earth. The 'polymaternal' utopianism this article has invited readers to pursue decentres the experiences of the minority of mothers who do relatively *little* mothering labour, but without dismissing or negating those class-privileged mothers, and – above all – without romanticising the labour performed by the majority. To premise baby-making upon gestational labour while maintaining a commitment to the politics of reproductive justice may, I suggest, offer us a way out of the bind of 'nature'; but only if we remain 'antiwork'. When Kathryn Russell says: 'the labor components involved in bearing child can be distributed among different people' (1994, 298); not only that, but it *should*.

The twenty-first century landscape of commercial gestational surrogacy poses new challenges for reproductive justice politics and carves out new geographies. In a call for a 'postmaternal practice' that is highly relevant to this discussion, Meredith Michaels seeks a framework for collaborative action that would have the power to 'honor[] the desires – for pregnancy, for children, for money, for giving gifts to other women – that [people] variously appear to have' (Michaels 1996, 63). My sense is, as shown, that 'polymaternal' conveys – better than 'post' – the continuum of gender-inclusive and gender-fluid practices and care-sharing experiments coming directly out of Black feminists' antiracist horizon of reproductive justice. Even as new forms of fascism and devastation lacerate the world, I sense, in affinity with geographers Elizabeth Johnson and Jesse Goldstein (whose affinity in this I wish

to enrol also), that there are openings all around us for bringing into being 'a new form of (re)production, one focused on holding as much as it is on making and, with it, the quickening of a new eco-social future' (Johnson and Goldstein 2015, 394).

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Sophie Lewis is currently writing a book, *Full Surrogacy Now* (Verso, forthcoming). Her published body of cultural criticism includes a recent intervention in *Viewpoint* on Donna Haraway's oeuvre and various essays at *The New Inquiry*, *Salvage*, *Jacobin* and (especially) *Blind Field* journal, where she is an editor (completing the *Blind Field* edited volume *End/And: Feminization in Unending Times*). Sophie has published research articles on surrogacy politics in *Signs*, *Frontiers*, *Dialogues in Human Geography* and *Feminist Review*. Her ESRC-funded PhD on gestational surrogacy, 'Cyborg Labour', was defended at the University of Manchester (UK) - supervised by Noel Castree and Erik Swyngedouw and examined by Cindi Katz. Her prior scholarly background is in English Literature (BA Oxford University), Geography (MSc Oxford University), and Politics (MA, the New School for Social Research). Sophie is a member of the Out of the Woods ecological writing collective, and has also translated two books for MIT Press.

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