

SURROGACY: SITUATING FRANCE WITHIN THE WORLD – REPRESENTATIONS, REGULATIONS, AND EXPERIENCES

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*First international
scientific conference
on surrogacy in France*

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Surrogacy is a very ancient practice, and today one that has become medicalized and globalized. Though it still remains limited in practice when compared to all other forms of available assisted reproductive technologies (ART) used in the world (artificial insemination, in vitro fertilization, gamete donation), it nevertheless stands out as the most controversial form of ART. The act of mobilizing another woman's reproductive body/capacity for someone else, breaking up maternity into different parts, and partaking in the pluralization of parenthood have raised intense debate in both the public and media sphere, especially in France where arguments oscillate between **reproductive autonomy and free choice on the one hand and the commodification of the body, the child, and the exploitation of women's bodies on the other hand**. Surrogacy becomes even more controversial when it crosses borders, becomes transnational, and involves a financial transaction between poor women from developing/emerging countries considered as vulnerable and wealthy individuals or couples most often coming from rich/developed countries. It is notably in India or in certain Eastern European countries where the national and international media focus their attention.

The reality of surrogacy is more complex than what meets the eye. Indeed, surrogacy practices across the world are plural and diversified, even within Europe. Altruist, commercial, authorized, illegal, traditional, gestational, anonymous, or within families, all these forms make up the diverse nature of surrogacy around the world and even within a single country. It has therefore become important today to understand how surrogacy is organized and practiced in the world, and to do so through the prism of historical, political, socio-economical, cultural and religious contexts.

Why is surrogacy possible in some countries and not in others? What principles or values are invoked to inspire ensuing laws and legal frameworks? What socio-cultural and gender norms do these regulatory frameworks reflect and produce? Why do some countries allow for a financial transaction and others don't? Why are surrogates, and more frequently egg donors (in the case of gestational surrogacy) invisible and silenced in

some countries while in others they are looked up to and often times the main decision-makers in the surrogacy configuration itself?

Though surrogacy today is in the middle of quite a vigorous and growing academic, political and media debate, there still remains very little documented empirical data. Indeed, we know little of the experiences and representations of doctors, agencies, intended parents, surrogates, egg donors, and children born from surrogacy. What are the characteristics of all these actors, Their stories? Their motivations? Their expectations? How do they perceive of their involvement in a surrogacy arrangement? What is their experience of the practice? The way their future then evolves? What impact does surrogacy have on their personal, medical and social lives? What are the roles and motivations amongst and between the different actors?

It is within this controversial and limited documented context that we are organizing the first international and scientific conference in France with the objective of analyzing and discussing the diversity of situations, regulatory frameworks, and experiences with surrogacy throughout the world so as to better understand the practice, its impact, and its development locally and internationally. Hence, we hope to rely on a scientific approach so as to better nourish these debates, including those building up in France over the past several years. During this conference, issues linked to surrogacy will be explored and discussed by both French and international experts and researchers working on this subject from the standpoint of various social science disciplines (legal studies, anthropology, sociology, demography, medical studies), within different national contexts (the United States, India, Australia, the United Kingdom, Mexico, Bulgaria, Belgium, etc.), as well as transnational contexts, and finally through the prism of different levels of analysis (institutional, intermediaries, individuals).

Three major axes will be developed:

1. Surrogacy placed within its normative context wherein juridical, religious, and sociological norms will be discussed against the backdrop of that context's historical and philosophical argumentations;
2. The individual experiences, representations, roles, strategies and interactions of surrogacy agents (doctors, agencies, intended parents, surrogates, egg donors, and children) will be presented and discussed;
3. The situation in France will be placed within the larger juridical and sociological European context.

This conference thus seeks to highlight new scientific knowledge relative to a practice that is in fact very poorly known and essentially mobilized in a reductionist manner by the media. The conference will also seek to demonstrate that surrogacy practices are in the process of revealing important global societal transformations that in turn are sparking new issues in the medical, socio-cultural and juridical realms. Last but not least, this conference aims to create a new scientific, interdisciplinary and international network bent on better comprehending these issues through the establishment of group analyses and comparative studies.