

BOOK REVIEW

Full Surrogacy Now: Feminism against Family

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In many ways, *Full Surrogacy Now: Feminism against Family* is not about surrogacy per se. Rather, it is about a much broader demand about restructuring a basic unit of society: the family. Lewis thus joins a range of feminists, from liberal to radical, who have targeted the family as unjust (for example, Mill 1869; Chodorow 1978; Okin 1989; Coontz 1992). Lewis's critique, however, is specifically queer, cyborg, communist, and anticarist. The title of the book equates to a call to abolish *the* nuclear, privatized family. For Lewis, "'family abolition' refers to the (necessarily postcapitalist) end of the double-edged coercion whereby the babies we gestate are ours and ours alone, to guard, invest in, and prioritize" (119). Lewis's vision is for more communal *families* and to proliferate, not destroy existing, caring relations (19).

Some examples of what such abolition might resemble come from a range of feminist sci-fi novels. For example, sexual and parental roles would be distinct in social reproduction, children in communes would not be regarded as property to possess, and child-rearing would be shared equally among adults (120–21). These suggestions, in part, target a concern that the family is a mechanism for sustaining capitalism and wealth inequality (Engels 1884). Examples also come from alternative kinds of kinning, such as from Black, queer, trans, and migrant communities who disrupt ways of doing families. For instance, the notion of "mamahood," where child-rearing is done without domination or a sense of property (152–53), and the adage that it "takes a village" to raise a child (147) are noted. For Lewis, those "othered" in mainstream society—those who are not heteronormative, white, cisgendered, citizens, propertied, and so on—illustrate ways to do family differently and (presumably) better.

Surrogacy comes into the mix because Lewis regards it as a way to achieve this goal. The influence of radical and cyborg feminists (for example, Firestone 1970; Haraway 1991) is clear here. Such feminists embrace technology, like IVF used in surrogacy and artificial wombs, to take over gestation completely, to liberate us from narrowly conceived and oppressive social roles. Following suit, Lewis wants more surrogacy in order to transform our concept of families. Surrogates are already challenging how families are created and give us a glimpse at an alternative future: "a premonition of genuine mutuality" (167) if done well.

Importantly, however, Lewis does not want more surrogacy of the same kind that exists in today's neoliberal global marketplaces, the exemplar of which is Dr. Patel's Akanksha Infertility Clinic (chapters 3 and 4). Rather, Lewis proposes a surrogacy that is "beyond recognition" (33) where we all partake in social reproduction in multiple roles, rather than private reproduction with the sole role of the gestator. "We are the makers of one another," Lewis argues, "and we could learn collectively to act like it"

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(19–20). One way to do this is by identifying all of us as “surrogates”: “Social reproduction theory becomes a matter populated by a whole raft of ‘surrogates’: provisioners, test subjects, helps and tech supports” (56).

As part of the aim of proliferating caring relations, Lewis demands that we recognize surrogacy as work, as others have also argued (for example, Shalev 1989; Humbyrd 2009; Pande 2016; Rudrappa 2018). In so doing, Lewis distinguishes the view from feminists who think there is something uniquely commodifying about surrogacy (for example, Pateman 1988; Radin 1988; Anderson 1990) or that the problem is specifically about gender (rather than work) inequality (for example, Satz 1992) and that it should not be paid. The argument instead parallels the 1970s Wages for Housework campaign that called for housework to be classed as work, and ongoing sex-worker campaigns that seek to legalize sex work. In all cases, workers can make their labor visible, and they can unionize, strike, and demand better pay and working conditions from employers, and they can form collectives in alternative work arrangements (73, 75, 77, 80). Lewis also advocates for an “unalienated gestation” (140) in work. This requires a full spectrum of rights from abortion to giving birth, as well as more research into gestation-related disease. Access to abortion is especially important, if we are to take seriously the gestator’s rights to strike by “killing” a fetus (140). Lewis presses nongestators to show solidarity with gestators in order to realize all this (56). In these regards, the issue is not about being pro or anti surrogacy, but about improving working conditions (44). However, surrogacy being work is a means to “maximally eradicate work” (125), not an end in itself: we need to see work where it is (not necessarily increase or enjoy it) before we can get to abolishing capital.

There is much to praise in Lewis’s book, and it will be of great interest to researchers from varying disciplines, including sociology, history, philosophy, and geography, who work on surrogacy, feminism, the family, and anticapitalism.

For instance, the analysis is admirably about the ordinary when it deals with the “problem of pregnancy” (1). It draws all pregnant people, and also those who support pregnant people (that is, all of us), rather than only those engaged in the niche practice of surrogacy, into the discussion. Following Shulamith Firestone, it de-romanticizes the process of pregnancy, showing the fetus to be parasitic on the gestator: pregnancy is hostile and violent rather than passive and innocuous (Firestone 1970). It reveals the sheer effort involved in any pregnancy, how that effort is naturalized, and why we should resist such naturalization since it makes the work being done invisible.

Lewis’s proposal is also radical and ambitious. It draws on anticapitalist and antiracist critiques, and is revolutionary in its vision of abolishing the family *through* more and fairer commercial surrogacy. It pays attention to the arguments of Anita Allen and Angela Davis who show how Black women in the US have historically been surrogates (without technical intervention) and continue to be denied adequate support or care for their pregnancies now (Allen 1990; Davis 1998). It argues that capital pushes us to see genetic babies as private property—we personalize and thereby commodify all babies (116)—and that this undermines a more communal approach to organizing society.

Lastly, and importantly, diverse perspectives are included. For instance, Lewis sees surrogates as at the forefront of driving change, thereby emphasizing their agency and power. Once their demands for better conditions and collectives have been met, Lewis suggests surrogates are the ones likely to want wider reproductive justice: “Families who have helped other families might enact ongoing kinship though forms of solidarity more meaningful than payment” (147). Similarly, Lewis utilizes ethnographic studies from researchers working in the Indian context (such as Amrita

Pande and Sharmila Rudrappa) and cites the work of Black feminists (like Saidiya Hartman and Hortense Spillers) and cyborg feminists (like Donna Haraway).

Lewis presents a rich analysis and tantalizing utopia, but some questions about the book linger; I pick out three such queries here.

First, to what extent is the vision desirable, and what methodologies are used to decide upon that vision? Lewis rightly criticizes abolitionists who want to outlaw surrogacy for not asking the surrogates what they want. Lewis points to various studies to show that, if abolitionists were to ask, they would find that surrogates in the Global South actually express a desire for the trade, to be paid, and to be paid fairly. Yet, as far as I can discern, surrogates have not been asked if the radical vision that is promoted in the book—to abolish the family—is what they want either. In this way, the core thesis seems to be a solution developed in isolation from the surrogates (indeed all pregnant people) it largely affects. Coming up with a universal, idealized theory is one way out of this problem. However, it is not obvious that this is the approach Lewis should favor, given the emphasis on listening to surrogates in the current abolition debate.

There *is* evidence of people of color in, for example, Cameroon, the Philippines, and Nigeria already raising children in a “polymaternal” (150) way, with multiple and informal caregiving in these communities. But—as Lewis notes—this has often been done out of necessity rather than being optimally what the people want. I am not suggesting it is *not* what they want, but it is not clear that they do want it either. There are reasons, in fact, why they would not prefer abolition of *the* family. For one, oppressed peoples may want to hold onto “their” families as important sites of resistance, as Lewis notes in relation to Palestinians seeking genetics-preserving IVF (155). For another, since Black people in the US have historically been excluded from *the* family under white supremacy, as Lewis argues through Davis and Allen (Allen 1990; Davis 1998), then the institution may be something such groups want inclusion *into* rather than dismantling *of* on grounds of equality. This does not undermine Lewis’s thesis, of course, but it does need more defense.

Similar queries arise about the vision and methodologies when considering the well-being of raising children communally. Lewis offers a study in the context of the global care industry, where women in the Global South leave their families to care for families in the Global North, to justify this. Children of such families in the Philippines do not seem to mind the arrangement, come out mostly fine, and have intimate relations with others, according to one study (130). Lewis also mentions ways the well-being of genetic children of the surrogate could be protected. These include by explaining that love, rather than nature, provides family stability and by children experiencing fairer division of labor in the household (121–22).

Yet these are still within the confines of *the* family structure—in the Philippines case, for instance, some sense of *the* family unit, with a father and siblings, remains intact—which is the type of arrangement Lewis worries about.¹ For the reproductive commune, such intimate ties to multiple particular persons may exist, but they may not, and it is quite a jump to have faith it will simply work out for the children. Lewis could evade this concern by assuming that all future communes worth discussing will be places with such intimate ties *simpliciter*. But this would be somewhat of a romanticization of *families* in the vision; a romanticization that Lewis, at the same time, wants to avoid about pregnancy or *the* family. Again, it is not that this arrangement would *not* be positive but that it could equally be negative, and the studies do not in themselves quite justify the radical vision.

Second, there are multiple aims in the book that, when taken together, appear somewhat at odds or their relation unclear. If the goal, for instance, is only to make surrogacy

fairer by seeing it as labor and paying the women, then that is one project. But, if the vision is ultimately anticapitalist and procommunist, as Lewis argues it is, then the idea of payment, and attaching the norms surrounding the marketplace to surrogacy, seem to make for uncomfortable bedfellows. For instance, the norms of commodifying *are* relevant to the marketplace, and these problematically increase chances of exploitation, objectification, and alienation according to many (for example, Anderson 1990; Davis 1998), which is the antithesis of a communist goal.²

Moreover, whether commercial surrogacy is *necessary* for abolishing the family is unclear. One could imagine achieving the vision of communal families through some other means, especially as Lewis takes surrogacy work as instrumental and something (along with other work) to eliminate. For instance, one could push for devaluing genetic ties by eliminating surrogacy *because* it was created to prioritize and continue our esteem for genetic relatedness. At the same time, one could opt for developing alternative, better, and more appealing work opportunities to surrogacy so as not to make existing surrogates worse-off. This would remove the need for surrogacy work in the first place and improve employment opportunities for workers, and both could be done without undermining the overall vision of abolishing the family.

If Lewis does believe surrogacy is critical to achieving the vision, more should be said on this. For instance, when and how should we use surrogacy to get there? Should it be immediately (since the women need the work), in the near future (in amended form with some improvements), in the intermediate term (only when it is run as a collective but still within the broader context of capitalism), in the end state (only when everyone is doing surrogacy in the reproductive commune), or all of the above? There may be issues at each stage. For example, if immediately, then we continue to exploit surrogates in the terrible ways outlined; if in the end state, then we desist from all surrogacy and remove work options from surrogates until then. If surrogacy is truly necessary for abolishing the family, and this is a call to do something to meet those goals, then further justification of the connection would be conducive to that end.

Third, and finally, we may worry about who might end up doing the gestation part of surrogacy in a reproductive commune. Lewis notes not all people who could get pregnant would do this work now, just as not all those who could be brain surgeons or trash collectors would take up that work, and we can suppose this extends to a reproductive commune. But, in a communal vision, another value we may want is equity in the kinds of people doing gestational labor. This is so it is not women of color who end up both disproportionately gestating and not offering their genetic material to be gestated, as exists in current capitalist contexts (Banerjee 2014). Can we explicitly ask hitherto middle-class white persons with wombs to take on their fair share of gestation, if their contribution is decently rewarded and it is socially valuable?

There is an enormous amount to admire about Lewis's provocative and enthralling book. None of these comments are meant to be destructive to the project of proliferating caring relations in a more communal way but rather constructive to it. Nor are the comments only for Lewis to consider or resolve. Going by the ethos of the book, these are for all of us to address, if we think the vision is worth pursuing.

Notes

¹ Lewis might argue that the goal is not to eliminate these kinds of families at all, but rather to proliferate caring relations. But it is not clear what this hybrid situation might look like or how it squares with the ideas from the sci-fi novels mentioned earlier. How do we seriously proliferate relations when some families

can elect to cling to the nuclear private version? The details of this could be worked out at a later date, of course, but they are not hinted at here.

2 Lewis may claim that all work is equally commodifying under capitalism, and so just as viable. But why not argue this the other way: why bolster problematic work (like pregnancy that is hostile and violent) in the marketplace when we ultimately want to destroy problematic work in the utopia?

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