



Commodification of Motherhood in Nigeria: An Afrocentric Examination of Commercial Gestational Surrogacy

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Abstract. Commercial gestational surrogacy is a growing area of Assisted Reproductive Technology (ART) that is increasingly prevalent around the world, including in Nigeria. Contributing factors include rising fertility issues; increased financial pressure; and technological advancements in the field of reproductive medicine. Although commercial gestational surrogacy can be beneficial for individuals who wish to become parents, it raises serious ethical, social and philosophical questions regarding the commodification of motherhood and human reproduction. The objective of this study is to provide a critical assessment of commercial gestational surrogacy in Nigeria using the Afrocentric lens. In doing so, this study adopted an Afrocentric perspective to understand how Nigerian women perceive motherhood, community, human dignity and personhood. This study argued that commercialising reproductive labour reduces the value of motherhood from being viewed as a sacred socio-cultural institution to a business based contractually driven relationship. Using Afrocentric philosophy and African ethical thought this study asserted that commercial surrogacy is at odds with many African traditional views on motherhood as a communal relational institution that is both morally important and valued rather than just providing a service. This study discussed the socioeconomic aspects that make poor women more susceptible to exploitative practices while engaging in surrogacy agreements due to lack of legal regulations in Nigeria. This study acknowledged that if commercial surrogacy remains unregulated in Nigeria, then it may continue to perpetuate unequal treatment of women by exacerbating their vulnerability to economic exploitation and degrading maternal dignity. This study concluded that Nigeria needs a culturally sensitive and ethically conscious legislative framework to protect the rights of women; to protect the dignity of motherhood; and to ensure that

reproductive technologies aligned with the socio-cultural norms of Africa.

Keywords: Commercial Gestational Surrogacy, Commodification, Motherhood, Afrocentrism, Reproductive Ethics, Assisted Reproductive Technology.

1. Introduction

The tradition of regarding children as central to the institution of marriage is prevalent across many African cultures, including Nigeria. Marriage has historically been viewed not only as a union of two people, but also as a partnership of families and generations. The presence of children provides strength to these partnerships, preserves family lines, supports the preservation of culture, and creates identity among communities. Historically, scholars have noted that reproductive fertility and parenting were highly valued in many African cultures due to their symbolic nature; fertility was a means of creating new life and ensuring that social identities would endure through generations. Hence, fertility and parenthood represented social accomplishment and inheritance succession (Mbiti, 1990).

In addition to providing an heir in many African societies, one significant value of children in marriage is to provide a means for the continuation of family lineage. This is especially true in those societies where lineages are passed down through patrilineage; children, most commonly sons, preserve family names and inheritance patterns. Childless marriages can often be perceived as incomplete or socially unstable (Onimhawo & Adamu, 2015). Procreation is very much tied to African concepts of immortality since descendants ensure that the memories and legacies of their deceased ancestors will live on (Mbiti, 1990). In this way, children enable the continuation of both the

living and the dead within the framework of traditional African belief systems.

In most Nigerian societies, it is common for older adults to rely upon their adult children for support in their later years (Isiugo-Abanihe, 1994). In the light of this reliance on their offspring for assistance in later years, raising children is generally understood as a form of investing in future family economic and social welfare. The act of bearing children is often equated with maturation, responsibility, and successful completion of the various stages of life. Conversely, being childless can bring about stigmatization in societal expectations, and even marital discord (Onimhawo & Adamu, 2015). Research conducted by Amadiume (1987) notes that fertility is directly correlated to women's social standing and familial power in many Nigeria societies. In these societies, therefore, children tend to fortify the emotional connections between married partners and elevate their reputation in the larger society and extended family.

From a religious and cultural perspective, children are viewed as gifts from either the gods or ancestral spirits. Both traditional African religions and modern Christian and Muslim communities in Africa see child-bearing as evidence of the favour of the divine towards a family. Birth ceremonies and subsequent naming rituals serve to reinforce the notion that children represent hope for the future, continuity with past generations, and shared communal identity.

Therefore, when a couple does not produce children, it can cause significant negative effects on both their physical and social wellbeing. In extreme cases, the stigma experienced by an infertile person can extend beyond the immediate family to parents-in-law and extended family members. This added dimension increases the feelings of guilt and shame already being felt by the infertile individual. These cultural misunderstandings along with the emotional burden associated with having no child particularly for women, make living with childlessness extremely difficult, as childlessness is often thought to be a curse from the gods due to past misdeeds.

In order to overcome these misgiving, modern science has created alternative methods outside of the normal human reproductive process (i.e., copulation) to provide childless couples with opportunities to experience the privilege of raising children (Adamu, 2023). Some examples of these non-natural ways of producing human life, include *Intra Uterine Insemination* (IUI), *In Vitro Fertilization* (IVF), and more recent options: *Gestational Surrogacy* (GS) or "outsourcing" pregnancy.

These relatively new human reproduction technologies have stimulated discussions and debates in bioethics concerning these technologies, which continue to grow more complicated each day as proponents, ethicists and religionists continue to discuss whether or not it is appropriate to use these technologies.

Motherhood is at the centre of most African cultures. Traditionally, motherhood was considered to be both biological, social, moral and a communal institution that ensures family continuity, lineage preservation and communal identity. Motherhood is a highly valued cultural ideal in Nigeria, and is often linked to womanhood, dignity and fulfilment. But commercial gestational surrogacy question this understanding of motherhood, as the commercialization of gestational surrogacy in Nigeria has raised very serious ethical, cultural, legal, and social issues related to the definition and value of motherhood in Africa. Historically, motherhood was viewed as a sacred and communal in African societies. The rise of commercial gestational surrogacy however has changed the definition of motherhood from a completely social and cultural construct to a commodity-based arrangement. Therefore, the issue of buying, negotiating, contracting and outsourcing women's reproductive capabilities in the Nigerian has become relevant, compelling and urgent (Adamu, 2023).

Proponents of surrogacy argue that it allows for reproduction options for couples who are unable to conceive naturally. A key argument made by advocates of gestational surrogacy is the idea that it provides reproductive freedom to people and couples wishing to become pregnant but are unable to do so due to infertility or illness (Horsey, 2015; Shenfield et al., 2017). The argument is that these people have a moral right to seek alternatives to becoming parents. Surrogacy gives these individuals and couples the ability to exercise this important part of reproductive autonomy, especially women with non-existent or severely damaged uteri, recurrent miscarriage, medical conditions which make pregnancy unsafe (Brinsden, 2003; Pennings, 2004). Another argument by proponents is that although traditional surrogacy was primarily for infertile heterosexual couples, gestational surrogacy has now opened up opportunities for single individuals who wish to have children and for same sex male couples who cannot biologically carry a pregnancy (Golombok, 2020; Horsey, 2015).

Since gestational surrogates are not biologically linked to the Child, proponents claim that this removes many of the fears about parental identity and conflict that

arise when considering surrogacy (Teman, 2010). Often, the biological link will still exist between the intended parents and the Child and the surrogate will serve only as the gestational carrier (Shenfield et al., 2017). Others argue that while there are certainly cases of commercial surrogacy, there are also many cases of altruistic options who choose to become surrogates to assist others in experiencing the joys of having children. This type of act is typically viewed as an example of compassion, generosity and solidarity towards others (Blyth, 1994; Teman, 2010).

Advocates argue that medical advancements such as gestational surrogacy benefit society. As long as they provide solutions to human suffering and improve the quality of lives; then we tend to view them positively (Robertson, 1994). Since gestational surrogacy represents an advancement of assisted reproductive technology for those who were previously unable to create offspring, proponents believe that society should generally support gestational surrogacy (Brinsden, 2003; Robertson, 1994).

From a philosophical standpoint, liberal ethics support the use of informed consent and voluntary decision making (Robertson, 1994; Wilkinson, 2016). Therefore, as long as all parties entering into a legally binding surrogacy contract understand what they are getting themselves into and are protected by adequate legislation, proponents argue that government should respect these types of contracts versus prohibiting them (Pennings, 2004; Robertson, 1994).

Furthermore, proponents argue that gestational surrogacy creates financial opportunity for women who become surrogate mothers (Spar, 2006; Wilkinson, 2016). Some argue that in jurisdictions where compensated surrogacy is permitted and regulated, surrogates are entitled to legitimate compensation for their time, effort, discomfort and potential health risk incurred during the process (Anderson, 1990; Satz, 2010).

Critics of surrogacy argue that this form of surrogacy exploits poor women particularly in developing countries like Nigeria; because these women often do not have access to education, employment, or income; they are often forced to make decisions based upon poverty and lack of alternatives (Pande, 2010; Rudrappa, 2015). Additionally, the process of becoming a surrogate may create unequal power dynamics between the commissioning parents and the surrogate mother (Anderson, 1990; Satz, 2010).

Furthermore, since there are no federal laws regulating commercial surrogacy in Nigeria, unscrupulous medical professionals can take advantage of this void

for profiteering (Anderson, 1990; Satz, 2010). The absence of regulation can lead to issues of “baby factories”, contract violations, and disputes over parental rights (Ezugwu et al., 2022). Surrogate mothers may experience physical harm during pregnancy, mental trauma after giving birth (i.e. depression), stigma from friends and family members, loss of personal autonomy and identity after giving birth (Pande, 2010; Teman, 2010). Children conceived via surrogacy may also face uncertainty regarding their identities and parental rights. Although Nigeria is rapidly adopting assisted reproductive technology, there is an urgent need to have a wholistic examination of the ramification of this emerging phenomenon (Horsey, 2015).

From an Afrocentrist standpoint, commercial gestational surrogacy challenges traditional conceptions of kinship, motherhood, shared communal responsibilities toward children, and human dignity as defined within African communities (Asante, 2007; Gyekye, 1997). Most African cultural traditions emphasize the holiness and sanctity of reproduction and the collective nature of both child-bearing and child-rearing (Mbiti, 1969; Menkiti, 1984). Commercializing pregnancies may therefore run counter to long-standing African moral principles prohibiting the monetization of human life and biological functions (Gyekye, 1997; Bujo, 2001).

This interplay between modern reproductive biotechnologies and indigenous African moral philosophies regarding kinship, motherhood, and community care presents a unique philosophical and sociological challenge that requires thorough study. While numerous studies have explored surrogacy from a variety of biomedical, legalistic, and feminist approaches, few studies have specifically investigated the Afrocentric implications of commercial gestational surrogacy in Nigeria (Nwokocha, 2012; Oyekanmi & Ajayi, 2020). Moreover, much of what has been written regarding surrogacy has focused upon Western frameworks of ethics without adequate consideration of the cultural realities of Nigeria, indigenous value systems in Africa, and communal views of motherhood (Asante, 2007; Menkiti, 1984). Thusly, there exists a pressing need for an extensive Afrocentric investigation into the ways in which commercial gestational surrogacy is contributing to the commoditization of motherhood in Nigeria and to its consequences for women, children, families, and society at large.

This study relied on a qualitative methodology that combines philosophical analysis and critical evaluation. A qualitative methodology is most

appropriate in this case since we are focusing primarily on ethical, cultural, philosophical, and social aspects of commercial gestational surrogacy in Nigeria (as opposed to statistical or experimental data). Therefore, the study has a strong emphasis on normative inquiry and interpretive analysis of the commodification of motherhood within the Nigerian socio-cultural context. This study used an analytical method to analyse the concepts of motherhood, commodification, reproductive labour, gestational surrogacy, and Afrocentrism. By means of conceptual analysis, the study critically evaluated the meaning, assumptions, and implications of commercial gestational surrogacy as they relate to African ethical thought and communal values. The analytical approach allowed the study to investigate if the commercialization of reproductive functions undermines the dignity traditionally associated with motherhood in African societies.

Also, the study used a critical and normative philosophical method to assess the moral implications of commercial gestational surrogacy. The normative aspect of the paper is especially relevant because the study aims at determining whether it is ethically acceptable or not to treat reproductive capacities as market commodities. The study critically examined competing claims made by liberal theorists, feminist scholars, bioethicists, and Afrocentric philosophers regarding reproductive autonomy, bodily integrity, economic exploitation, and communal morality.

For the most part, the study depended upon African philosophy, and gender studies, consulted important philosophical texts by African authors including John Mbiti, Ifeanyi Menkiti, Kwame Gyekye, and Molefi Kete Asante so that there can be an Afrocentric theoretical basis for the study. In addition, the study examined feminist and Marxist scholarship on commodification and reproductive labour in order to provide more general theoretical perspectives about the commercialization of motherhood.

Additionally, the study employs an Afrocentric theoretical orientation as its major analytical tool. Afrocentrism was used to explore how African communal values, conceptions of personhood, kinship structures and maternal identities contribute to the development of moral explanations for commercial gestational surrogacy. Using Afrocentrism as an analytical tool permits the study to assess whether commercial surrogacy is consistent with or inconsistent with African culture and moral understanding of motherhood and human dignity.

Therefore, the scope of the methodology is limited to a philosophical, ethical and socio-cultural analysis within the Nigerian context. While references could

possibly be made to international surrogacy practices for comparison purposes only, the main focus of the study is Nigeria and its unique cultural circumstances. This methodology adequately addressed the objectives of the study it was thus well suited in accomplishing these goals through providing a systematic structure for assessing the ethical complications of commercial gestational surrogacy and their consequences for motherhood in present-day Nigeria.

2. Conceptual Clarification

Commercial gestational surrogacy is an agreement between two parties; one party (the woman agreeing to bear the baby) will agree to carry and give birth to a child on behalf of the other party (the intended parent(s) in exchange for money. Gestational surrogacy is different from traditional surrogacy. Traditional surrogacy uses the surrogate's egg to create the baby she carries; therefore, the surrogate is biologically related to the child. Gestational surrogacy involves creating the embryo using the egg and sperm of the intended parents or egg/sperm donor via IVF and implanting the embryo into the uterus of the surrogate. Gestational Surrogacy subtypes include: Gestational Surrogacy with embryo from both intended parents (GS/IP): this is when both intended parents' gametes were used to create an embryo which was then transferred into the surrogate's uterus. Gestational surrogacy with egg donation (GS/ED): in this type of arrangement, a third party has donated their egg(s) for the creation of an embryo, which will be transferred to the surrogate who will carry it during pregnancy. Gestational Surrogacy with Donor Sperm (GS/DS): the donor provides sperm that has been fertilized by the intended mothers' eggs in order to produce embryos for transfer. Gestational Surrogacy with donor embryo (GS/DE): a couple or individual may use a donated embryo as opposed to creating embryos through egg and/or sperm donation.

The commodification of human resources is a form of capitalization; it represents the transformation of non-capitalizable elements into capitalizable ones. The first stage of this transformation lies in the assignment of an economic value to a resource which was previously non-economic. For example, reproductive labour, has been transformed into a product that can be bought, sold, rented or used as collateral.

The commercialization of one's own body parts such as eggs, uterus or milk; these are all examples of how a person can transform themselves into a product for sale on the open market. This type of commodification is seen as problematic from both a philosophical standpoint and a social perspective. Philosophically

speaking, this is problematic because it transforms what was once valued for its inherent value into a mere object of purchase or sale. From a social viewpoint this is problematic because it treats individuals and individual experiences as commodities rather than as members of society.

In commercial gestational surrogacy, a woman's womb and her reproductive labour become two separate products which she rents out. When a woman uses her body as a surrogate she transforms motherhood into a commodity, and she does so for the purpose of earning money. By renting out her womb and her reproductive processes to others, a woman reduces motherhood to its most basic element. She no longer sees herself as someone whose primary function is to bear children but rather as someone who provides a service to other people. That service being the rental use of her womb. And while some will say that this is merely a matter of personal choice, many believe that the transformation of the experience of bearing children into an experience based upon providing a product to another party devalues the experience of giving birth.

This same type of commodification is occurring in Nigeria. While there are different perspectives regarding the relationship between commodification and African culture, one perspective is that commodifying motherhood and childbearing goes against traditional African values. Traditional African cultures view motherhood and childbearing as not just biological events but also social events. They see them as ways to create and maintain family lineages and communities.

Marx (1979) stated that commodification is the result of capitalism where "social relations" are converted into things that can be bought and sold. Asante (2003), a leading proponent of Afrocentric philosophy emphasized that commodification is detrimental to African centered values that focus on community and humanity as opposed to commercialism.

Commodification is particularly relevant in Nigeria where the use of commercial gestational surrogacy is becoming increasingly popular. Many Nigerian women who cannot afford to have children are using commercial surrogacy as a means to have children. However, this trend has raised concern among many in Nigeria. One concern is that poor women are being exploited by wealthy couples who pay them large sums of money to carry their babies. Another concern is that the use of commercial surrogacy is creating ethical debates regarding whether women should be able to buy and sell their reproductive functions.

The process of creating and supporting children begins long before they are born, continues through their growth into adulthood, and includes the transmission of knowledge and values from generation to generation. While many people associate motherhood exclusively with having given birth to a child, it is clear that there are many other elements involved in this experience. Mothering involves a combination of caregiving, emotional support, education, socialization, and passing down values and traditions from parents to their children.

As with so many other aspects of family and community life in Africa, motherhood is held in high esteem by many people across the continent. Women who give birth to children are often recognized as being at the heart of family life and are frequently viewed as playing the greatest single role in the upbringing and development of their children. Because of the significant role women play in these areas, motherhood is very much tied to a woman's sense of self and her position within the family and community. As a result, when women bear children, they are often looked upon with great pride and respect.

Sociologists recognize two basic aspects of motherhood. One is biological: pregnant women carry their babies inside them until the baby is ready to be born. Breastfeeding is also part of this biological aspect of motherhood. The second is social and cultural. Societal and cultural aspects of motherhood involve caring for a child after birth. This includes providing emotional support and teaching a child how to navigate their world. Many African communities view child-rearing as a group effort. Instead of focusing solely on the immediate family unit, many cultures believe that multiple generations should contribute to the care and well-being of young children.

Mbiti (1990) emphasizes the importance of procreation and continuing the family line as fundamental parts of African society. He believes that without motherhood, family and societal existence would be impossible. Similarly, Amadiume (1987) argues that in many African societies, motherhood is a source of social power and defines a woman's identity. Amadiume states that the expectations surrounding what a good mother will do are shaped by culture. The definition of motherhood today differs significantly from previous definitions due to advances in technology such as artificial insemination and surrogate pregnancies. Additionally, the feminist movement has contributed to changes in the way people define motherhood. Finally, modern families

come in many shapes and sizes, which further expands our understanding of motherhood.

Commercial surrogate pregnancy presents additional complexities regarding motherhood. When commercial surrogacy takes place among three parties (for example, if one woman provides the eggs used during IVF treatment, a second woman carries the resulting embryo for nine months, and a third individual or couple raise(s) the child after birth), each party performs a distinct set of maternal tasks. The potential exists for conflicting maternal identities, attachments between caregivers and children, conflicts over cultural values, and commodifying motherhood.

Ethics regarding reproduction (reproductive ethics) relates to the area of ethics that evaluates and studies the moral and societal questions and problems which relate to human reproduction and assisted reproductive technology (ART). The primary objective of reproductive ethics is to provide guidance regarding what is ethically acceptable and unacceptable in relation to conception, pregnancy, childbirth, fertility treatments, birth control, abortion, surrogacy, genetic modification and the role/obligations of parents.

With the growth of ART, there are now many more options available for those experiencing infertility. However, there are many new and complex ethical dilemmas that surround ART. Some of these include questions related to consent, exploitation, commodification, the identity of parents, and the status and moral value of human embryos.

There are two areas in particular that raise significant challenges in reproductive ethics. First is the challenge of balancing individual reproductive rights with other values including human dignity, social justice, cultural values and the greater good of society. Second is the challenge of protecting and ensuring the reproductive health, safety and rights of individuals whose ability to reproduce is compromised by virtue of their physical condition.

For example, if a woman becomes a gestational surrogate due to economic disadvantage and poverty-related pressures she may not be able to exercise her own free will relative to her body. Thus, she may be coerced into becoming a gestational surrogate under the threat of losing basic necessities. Such an environment raises serious questions regarding an individual's true freedom of choice and creates an imbalance of power within the relationship between potential surrogate mothers and would-be-parents.

Another area of importance in reproductive ethics is the protection of human dignity. Human reproduction

should not simply be viewed as a commodity for purchase and sale. If human reproduction were reduced to nothing more than commerce then women and children would likely be treated as objects and commodities rather than as human beings deserving of dignity. In some instances, reproductive technologies have been used to facilitate the purchase and sale of human eggs and sperm. There are legitimate fears that reproductive technologies could ultimately result in human beings being bought and sold like goods or services on the open market.

An additional area of inquiry in reproductive ethics is that of social justice and equality. Who can gain access to reproductive technologies? Will such technologies further exacerbate existing inequities among various groups of people? For example, in developing countries such as Nigeria it is argued by some that reproductive technologies favour the interests of wealthy elites while leaving poor women vulnerable to exploitation as gestational surrogates or egg donors.

Commercial Gestational Surrogacy in Nigeria: Nature and Degree of Commodification of Motherhood

Reports have shown that Nigerian women have begun using surrogacy as an additional way to earn money. Many of them now act as surrogate mothers for individuals or couples who cannot reproduce biologically and offer to carry a pregnancy on behalf of others for payment (Independent Communications Network, Cited in P.M. News, 2014). This growing trend towards commercializing surrogacy also shows itself in many online sites such as Surrogate Finder (<https://surrogatefinder.com>) and Find Surrogate Mother (<http://nigeriansurrogates.com>), where potential surrogate mothers and egg and sperm donors can post profiles for contact by intending parents. A report based on the information available at both of those websites demonstrates that a large proportion of all registered surrogate mothers live in urban areas. Lagos had the largest amount of registered surrogate mothers, followed by Edo State, Abuja FCT, Rivers State, Ogun State and several other states throughout the country (Ebhomele, 2014). These statistics demonstrate that there has been a steady development toward establishing a commercial market for reproductive services within Nigeria.

Financial reasons may be one of the primary motivations for many of the women who agree to act as surrogate mothers. For example, Temitayo stated she was motivated to become a surrogate because her father and mother died she was young leaving her financially alone and needing to support herself and

her younger sister (P.M. News, 2014). Additionally, many of the surrogate mothers are presenting themselves as acting out of a sense of altruism by stating they feel sorry for childless couples and want to bring joy to families who are having difficulty with reproduction (Ebhomele, 2014).

Although surrogacy is still viewed as a rare and somewhat taboo practice in Nigeria, there are many indications that it may be becoming increasingly accepted. As an illustration of this trend, Professor Osato Giwa-Osagie, founder of the fertility clinic at OMNI Advanced Medical Centre in Lagos, was able to announce the successful birth of one of the first surrogates in Nigeria in 2007. Although the surrogate mother reportedly was paid a small sum (approximately N200,000) for her role in the pregnancy, the total cost of the procedure and subsequent delivery costs would have exceeded N1million (Omo 2014).

As reported in *The Nation* (April 9, 2014) "Surrogacy", according to fertility specialist Abiola Adewusi, Manager of the Medical Assisted Reproductive Centre (MART), is "the most viable reproductive option" available to those whose uteri have developed abnormalities and/or health issues that render pregnancy either extremely dangerous or unlikely. According to Ms. Adewusi, since surrogacy is still so new in Nigeria; however, "more and more people are now coming to us seeking our assistance with their infertility-related challenges".

In addition to such medical professionals as Dr. Adewusi, several well-known Nigerians have recently come forward and spoken out about their experiences with surrogacy. Perhaps the best known of these is Miss Universe Nigeria 2008 winner Adenike Oshinowo, who gave birth to twins via gestational surrogacy in the U.S. following years of battling with endometriosis. When asked why she had decided to speak publicly about the surrogacy process; however, she indicated that because she wanted to help educate others about how surrogacy can provide alternatives to traditional methods of childbearing.

Notwithstanding the fact that there appears to be greater levels of acceptance than previously existed for both the medical and personal aspects of surrogacy; however, there remain strong moral objections to the commercial nature of gestational surrogacy. These objections are perhaps most vocally represented by the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Nigeria (CBCN); which recently spoke out against commercial gestational surrogacy at the International Family and Pro-Life Conference held in Abuja on June 7th, 2014. Speaking specifically about his own concerns

regarding surrogacy; then-President of the CBCN Ignatius Kaigama stated that he believes that women's reproductive capacities are rapidly becoming commodified due to a growing global biotechnology industry. Furthermore, Kaigama argued that any practices that involve paying a woman for access to her womb, eggs and ova will ultimately result in a devaluation of all women and in the reduction of human fertility to simply another product available in a marketplace.

While supporters of commercial gestational surrogacy see it as a method by which individuals experiencing infertility can become parents; opponents, including those affiliated with the Catholic Church; see it as nothing short of the commodification of women and human reproduction. Thus, as surrogacy becomes more widespread in Nigeria, it is likely that there will continue to be extensive debate surrounding the ethics of commercial gestational surrogacy.

Commercial Gestational Surrogate Mothers in Nigeria are increasingly being used to facilitate assisted reproduction between intended parents and a woman who carries the pregnancy in exchange for compensation. To understand the extent to which the commodification of motherhood occurs through the use of commercial gestational surrogate mothers in Nigeria, one needs to consider the commercialization of women's reproductive capacity, the contractual treatment of pregnancy and childbirth, and the ways in which maternal relationships are being converted into a form of transactional activity.

A major factor contributing to the level of commodification occurring in commercial gestational surrogacy is the fact that a woman's ability to carry a pregnancy is being treated as a service that can be purchased. In order for commercial gestational surrogacy to occur, both parties need to enter into a contract that outlines how they will proceed in terms of the pregnancy and birth. Once a contract is signed, the surrogate mother agrees to undergo all necessary medical interventions related to her pregnancy, including those associated with maintaining the health of the foetus she is carrying. At the same time, the intended parents agree to compensate the surrogate mother financially for her involvement in the pregnancy. In this way, commercial gestational surrogacy introduces a new layer of commercialism to what was once a culturally and morally based relationship.

One reason why commercialization of gestational surrogate mothers may be particularly prevalent in Nigeria is due to socioeconomic factors. A large number of women who choose to become surrogate

mothers do so out of necessity due to economic hardship. As such, these women cannot make informed decisions about whether or not to become surrogate mothers. Therefore, some individuals argue that commercial surrogacy exploits poor women by treating them as commodity owners whose reproductive capacities can be bought and sold on the open market. Furthermore, because many of these women are acting under duress and are unable to make informed choices regarding their own bodies and reproduction, their experiences should be viewed as examples of reproductive exploitation rather than as reproductive choices.

The degree to which commodification occurs through commercial surrogacy in Nigeria is quite high. Because money is typically at the centre of these relationships, it is clear that commercial surrogacy creates a space where a woman's reproductive body is reduced to nothing but a product that can be bought and sold. While altruistic surrogacy exists where a woman decides to bear a child for another family without receiving payment for doing so, commercial gestational surrogacy establishes that there is a price tag attached to a woman giving birth. This process could potentially cause a woman's role in reproducing life to resemble nothing more than labour in a capitalist system. Marxist theory defines commodification as the transformation of human capacity and social relationships into items for sale and barter. In Nigeria, reproductive labour has been rendered subject to market valuation through commercial surrogacy. Commercial Gestational Surrogate Motherhood is being used in Nigeria to demonstrate how much of a commodity motherhood has become due to the commodification of reproductive labour, contractualization of pregnancy and market value placed on birth.

3. Afrocentric Ethical Implications of Commercial Gestational Surrogacy

From an Afrocentric perspective, commercial gestational surrogacy rises some fundamental issues of interest: First, the commodification of motherhood and the female body. Motherhood is viewed as a very respectable and dignified activity in many African cultures and is closely tied to community continuity. With the commercialization of pregnancy via surrogacy, however, motherhood becomes devalued when pregnancy is treated as a commodity.

Second, the risk of exploitation of economically vulnerable women. Women may be pressured into becoming surrogate mothers due to poverty, joblessness, and/or other forms of social inequality in

Nigeria. In terms of the principles of Afrocentric ethics, these activities would fall under the category of unjust and exploitative, as they violate principles of justice, care for others in the community, and protecting those who are vulnerable.

Third, commercial gestational surrogacy will cause problems with how Africans perceive lineage, family identity, and what constitutes a "family" since traditionally families were formed based on childbirth in communities where all members were part of a larger family unit. In traditional African societies, childbirth has historically been a communal event and was considered a way to connect with ancestors. Through surrogacy, there is now a separation between genetic motherhood, gestational motherhood and social motherhood which could potentially cause problems in defining the role of a mother.

Fourth, one of the most concerning aspects of commercial gestational surrogacy is the desacralization of the act of procreation. In African culture and philosophy, procreation is considered to be a spiritual process that involves divine blessings and ancestral continuity. According to John S. Mbiti (1990), in many African cultures, procreation is believed to play a key role in ensuring the continuation of life as well as connecting the living with previous generations. Therefore, when people make money off of a process that is so sacred to the African experience, it could potentially be damaging to the sanctity of procreation.

Fifth, From an Afrocentric perspective, there are also concerns related to the emotional well-being and dignity of surrogate mothers. Many times, during pregnancy, a strong bond develops between the mother and her developing foetus. For example, in commercial surrogacy arrangements, at the time of birth, the surrogate mother is typically required to hand over custody of the child to its intended parents as stated in a contract. This separation may result in emotional trauma for both parties involved. An African centered morality places great emphasis on the importance of being emotionally connected with each other and maintaining communal ties. The instant separation of the baby from his/her mother may be considered unethical.

Finally, due to the lack of complete regulation of surrogacy laws in Nigeria, many risks exist for surrogate mothers including physical harm, mental anguish and identity confusion. Similarly, children conceived through surrogacy may have questions regarding their identity and citizenship status as well as who their rightful parents should be. Afrocentric

ethics emphasize creating harmony among people, justice and collective responsibility for the common good. Therefore, the absence of sufficient legislation that protects people's rights is detrimental to the creation of an environment of responsible reproductive practices.

While critics see several reasons why surrogacy might create negative consequences for women, proponents see surrogacy as providing fertile couples with new options for having children without facing the societal pressures associated with infertility in Africa. The idea behind this is that if fertility treatments become available then men will no longer feel ashamed of their inability to father children. However, an Afrocentric ethicist would recommend that any form of reproductive solution take in cognizance the precedence of human dignity, community values and cultural integrity before making decisions based on money.

An Afrocentric view sees motherhood as sacred and communal instead of commercialized. The primary themes present throughout the majority of African cultural philosophy include the value placed on women's lives, the reverence of childbirth itself, and the shared importance of raising future generations. From an Afrocentric perspective then, it could be argued that the commercialization of reproductive services erodes the fundamental cultural significance associated with motherhood

Afrocentrism represents an intellectual, philosophical, and cultural approach that centres the lives, beliefs, histories, and experiences of African peoples. The goal of Afrocentrism is to interpret social, political, cultural, and historical phenomena through an Africa centred lens, instead of through the lens of Western or Eurocentric worldviews. Thus, it highlights the significance of African identity, traditions, community values, and indigenous knowledge systems in understanding the complexities of African reality.

Asante (2003) significantly advanced the idea of Afrocentrism by arguing that African peoples should be seen as active agents of their own history and cultures and not simply as passive recipients whose existence has been defined through Western interpretations. For example, Asante argues that Afrocentrism serves to restore African cultural awareness, dignity and self-determination by placing African values and experiences at the centre of research and social thought.

African communities have responded to the marginalization of African civilizations which reduces African societies to assumptions based on Western

stereotypes. Therefore, Afrocentric researchers are working towards having the legitimacy of African philosophies, traditions, religions, languages and social systems recognized as authentic ways of epistemology and axiology.

Communalism is one of the key tenets of Afrocentrism. In contrast to American capitalist ideology of over emphasis on individual success, most African societies place greater emphasis on collective responsibility, family ties, community solidarity and peace among members of society. In addition to emphasizing collectivism over individualism, Afrocentrism also prioritizes human dignity, spiritual development, respect for elder persons and interconnectedness of all people within their respective communities. Examples of these communalistic principles can be observed throughout various aspects of life including marriage, motherhood and parenting, kinship relations, moral reasoning and social justice.

In terms of motherhood and childbirth and reproduction, Afrocentrism views childcare and pregnancy as communal duties that require shared responsibility between parents and families rather than simply being personal and commercial decisions. Childbirth and motherhood are seen as a way to maintain lineage continuity and preserve one's cultural heritage. Therefore, Afrocentric scholars will sometimes oppose those practices which attempt to commodify women's bodies (such as commercial gestational surrogacy) as well as those practices which view human reproduction as nothing other than economic activity or exchange.

John S. Mbiti (1990) explains that African philosophy focuses greatly upon the value placed on relationships with others, the strength of community and the connection between generations. These emphases represent some of the same core values emphasized by Afrocentric thought as well as provide a similar type of critique against globalization/modern technology.

Today, Afrocentrism is employed in academic fields such as philosophy, sociology, history, literature, religion, gender studies and political science to critically analyse the experiences of Africa from the standpoint of indigenous cultures. Using Afrocentrism as a framework to study the effects of reproductive technologies upon Nigerian families, cultural values, women's dignity, traditional understandings of motherhood is an example of employing Afrocentrism in modern scholarship.

Viewed from an Afrocentric perspective, commercial gestational surrogacy may conflict with several African cultural norms. These include respect for human dignity, collective well-being, and sanctity of birth. Molefi Kete Asante (2003) suggests that communitarianism (the emphasis on group rather than individual interests) and morality (respecting others' rights and responsibilities) take precedence over commercialism in an African centered worldview. Additionally, John S. Mbiti (1990) notes that historically, in many African societies, procreation has represented communal and sacred responsibility toward one's lineages (ancestors). Thus, the commercialization of bearing a child may represent an erosion of the moral and cultural substance of motherhood. Therefore, an Afrocentric analysis suggests that there should be stronger ethical and legislative guidelines established to protect the dignity of all females while maintaining the African cultural values surrounding motherhood and family life.

4. Conclusion

Commercial gestational surrogacy poses numerous concerns from an Afrocentric perspective in regards to: commodification of motherhood and the female body; exploitation of economically vulnerable women; disruptions in kinship; human dignity; and the sacral nature of motherhood. Reproductive technology can provide solutions for childless couples; however, an Afrocentric approach promotes caution in order to avoid reducing motherhood and human reproduction to only commercial ventures.

An Afrocentric perspective understands motherhood beyond market exchange and view motherhood as something that transcends individual rights and market exchanges. Historically, African societies view reproduction as a form of communalism and kinship obligation, as well as a social obligation. Afrocentric philosophers emphasize human dignity, community interdependence and familial obligations. A person is understood relationally rather than individually. In Afrocentric philosophy, commercializing reproductive work contradicts values in Africa that define motherhood as a holy social obligation rather than a private contractual agreement.

Additionally, commercial gestational surrogacy generates many other difficult ethical dilemmas relating to exploitation, informed consent, physical autonomy and reproductive justice.

Therefore, the numerous ethical concerns raised by commercial gestational surrogacy warrant philosophical analysis in light of the deep-rooted

cultural significance of motherhood within Nigerian society. While extant literature exists today addressing the issue of surrogacy globally, very little academic research examines commercial gestational surrogacy from an Afrocentric philosophical viewpoint within Nigeria. Much literature focuses on legal, medical or feminist perspectives toward surrogacy while ignoring the philosophic implications of motherhood as an African communal value and conception of personhood. This study addresses this gap by providing an Afrocentric review of commercial gestational surrogacy in Nigeria, and arguing that while commercial surrogacy may provide reproductive alternatives for infertile couples, its commercialization poses potential threats to maternal dignity, devalues women's reproductive capacity as a saleable commodity and threatens African communal ideals of motherhood.

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