

The discursive construction of intended parents from surrogacy: A corpus-based Critical Discourse Analysis of Italian and Canadian news reports

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The present study examines how surrogacy-related parenthood has been represented in news discourse in Canada and Italy. These two countries present contrasting approaches to surrogacy, with Canada allowing formal surrogacy arrangements while Italy maintains some of the strictest laws on assisted conception and surrogacy in Europe. The analysis is based on two corpora consisting of online news reports from Canadian and Italian sources spanning from 2016 to 2023, focusing on stories concerning surrogacy and alternative forms of parenthood, particularly emphasizing the representation of gay couples. Employing a methodological framework that combines Critical Discourse Analysis methods with a Corpus-based approach, the study aims to uncover the ideological underpinnings in the discursive portrayal of intended parents from surrogacy. Results show that the Canadian corpus (Can_SUR) features medical information and personal surrogacy accounts, with limited focus on intended parenthood narratives. Conversely, the Italian corpus (Ita_SUR) portrays surrogacy and alternative parenthood as political struggles within the legal framework, suggesting these issues are debated in Italian courts rather than treated as personal matters. Overall, in Canadian news discourse alternative parenthood is represented as legitimate, whereas in Italy surrogacy and same-sex couples' rights are represented in opposition to discourses of biological kinship and nature, thus echoing a heteronormative framework.

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1. Introduction

In the last fifty years, advances in medicine have resulted in the overcoming of barriers connected to human reproduction through Assisted Reproductive Technologies (ARTs). The term ARTs is an umbrella term that encompasses various techniques or “therapies used to treat infertilities [including] pharmacological stimulation of ovaries, intrauterine insemination (IUI), in-vitro fertilization (IVF), and IVF with intracytoplasmic sperm injection (ICSI)” among others (Chuck and Yan 2009, 1). These technologies have gained significant attention since 1978, when the first “test-tube baby” was born in the UK (Lie and Lykke 2017), therefore potentially disclosing new possibilities for allegedly equal access to childbirth and family-building. The availability of these technologies varies from country to country, and so do the groups of people they are accessible to, depending on the presence or absence of specific legislations disciplining such practices. Despite being practices that deal with intimate aspects of people’s lives, ARTs have become part of the public debate as a biopolitical matter. This is because they arise political, social, cultural, religious, legal and biological concerns that have triggered ongoing negotiation processes of procedures, regulations and rights.

As an ART practice, surrogacy is one of the most controversial and highly debated across the globe, “shaped not only by politics but also by each culture's key values” (Teman 2010, 10). Consequently, multiple voices as well as different social and cultural responses to surrogacy and commercial in-vitro fertilization have risen, more or less influenced by religious positions, legal prohibitions, women’s rights concerns, ethical issues, and moral dilemmas in regard to “natural” vs. “unnatural” parenthood. The reason is that surrogacy challenges the “traditional”, heteropatriarchal view of family formation and has gradually led to a reconceptualization of the concept of family (Franklin 2013). The alleged commercialization of parenthood has also been problematized in relation to global inequalities. For instance, surrogacy has often been represented as being exploitative of low-income women, who are driven by poverty towards becoming surrogate mothers.

The present study aims at filling a gap in the current critical debate on surrogacy (Riggs and Due 2019) and parenthood, by proposing an analysis of how parenthood from surrogacy has entered news discourse, comparatively, in Canada and Italy. These are two geopolitical arenas where surrogacy has been dealt with in opposite ways. While in Canada formal arrangements for surrogacy are possible, Italian laws around the use of assisted conception and surrogacy are some of the most restrictive in Europe. The analysis herein proposed will be both quantitative and qualitative. It will be conducted on two corpora collecting online news reports from Canadian and Italian outlets between 2016 and 2023, covering stories on surrogacy and (the possibility of) alternative parenthood. More specifically, the focus of the analysis is placed on the representation of gay couples. The methodological framework is the result of a combination of Critical Discourse Analysis methods driven by a Corpus-based approach (Baker et al. 2008; Baker and McEnery 2005; Baker and Levon 2015), so as to unveil the ideological implications in the discursive construction of intended parents from surrogacy, encompassing contrasting political viewpoints. The aim of the study is to unveil discourses on parenthood and ideological positionings with regard to gender roles, kinship, social vs. biological parenthood. It will therefore single out the narratives on heteronormative vs. alternative families.

2. A brief history of surrogacy

Surrogacy consists in an arrangement in which a woman - the surrogate - bears a child for someone else - the intended parent(s) - whether an individual or a couple (Yee and Librach 2019). Intended parent(s) may or may not be genetically related to the child. In any case, they agree to be the child's social and legal parent(s) and raise the child from birth (Fantus 2021). The practice began flourishing in the USA in the 1980s. Ever since, it has turned into a global trend (Payne, Korolczuk and Mezinska 2020). Arrangements between intended parents and surrogates can be altruistic, therefore not involving any direct form of payment if not reimbursements, or, conversely, commercial, which is the most common form of surrogacy. In this case, the arrangement is usually between intended parents from industrialized countries and surrogates from non-industrialized countries, and it implies payments beyond direct expenditures. When the surrogate's eggs are used, the surrogate and the surrogacy-conceived child are genetically related and the surrogate is defined as a genetic carrier. This form of surrogacy is known as traditional surrogacy. In gestational surrogacy, the surrogate's eggs are replaced with either anonymously donated eggs or with the intended mother's. Embryos from fertilized donor gametes are implanted in the gestational carrier who therefore has a gestational relationship with the child.

While surrogacy is not a new practice, it has recently seen a growing increase which also includes arrangements that cross national borders. However, a study by the European Parliament's Directorate General for Internal Policies states that, as of 2013, precise statistics are hard to estimate for three reasons: firstly, traditional surrogacy often goes undetected as it does not require medical intervention and can therefore be arranged informally between the parties; secondly, while gestational surrogacy does require medical intervention, usually only the IVF procedures are registered; lastly, in many countries lacking regulations in this regard there are no formal reporting procedures available, whereas in countries where surrogacy is illegal it is simply impossible to collect data as the people involved may face criminal prosecution (Brunet, Carruthers and Davaki 2013). However, the rise of this practice is visible from the number of clinics and agencies devoted to surrogacy arrangements, as well as from the media visibility of surrogacy stories, for instance in news outlets, movies and shows.

A common practice that has been tracked by social scientists is that of cross-border reproductive care (CBRC), that is the mobility of intended parents who travel beyond national borders in search of ARTs. Couples or singles reach Southeast Asia, the Middle East and North America (Speier 2020) mainly to get access to commercial surrogacy. India, Thailand and Nepal used to be popular destinations for CBRC, generating a phenomenon that has been defined as "reproductive tourism" (Nahman 2013) or "reproductive mobilities" (Schurr 2019). However, in recent times, most of these hot destinations have drastically reduced accessibility to ARTs to curb procreative traveling and counter the alleged commodification of reproduction. In the US and Canada, regulations are still permissive (more in the former than the latter where surrogacy can be altruistic only). However, the high cost of reproductive technologies has been discouraging intended parents from reaching North America for treatments. Until 2016, Israel was one of the busiest markets for fertilization clinics in the world, whereas, as of 2023, Barbados (*Forbes* 2023) is becoming a leading destination. Other reproductive markets include Kenya, Mexico and Albania (Aznar and Peris 2019).

Commercial, either gestational or traditional, surrogacy has become a prominent solution for individuals facing infertility as well as singles and queer couples, especially

same-sex male couples, seeking parenthood through transnational surrogacy services. Since its beginnings, though, it has been surrounded by controversy and suspect. This is due to cultural, ethical and moral issues pertaining to women's rights, reproductive rights, gender roles, kinship and conceptualizations of parenthood and family. Remuneration for commercial surrogacy, for example, has often been criticized because of its potential to lead to the exploitation of the surrogates, especially when these women live in economically disadvantaged countries. On the other hand, altruistic surrogacy, although less common than commercial surrogacy, seems to be more morally acceptable (Ammaturo 2020), as it allegedly prevents surrogacy from becoming a paid occupation. Both forms of surrogacy have been harshly criticized, anyway, by opposite factions. Some critics believe that commercial surrogacy may turn into a financial gain for women who have limited employment options (Capron and Radin 1990) thus pushing them towards choosing reproduction over other forms of occupation. There is also a common belief that paying for parenthood entails the commodification of women and babies (Anderson 1990). In sharp contrast with these positions, those who support commercial surrogacy believe that altruistic surrogacy enforces gender stereotypes as it frames reproduction as an act of love or another form of women's domestic labor (Snow 2016). Some feminist scholarship supports commercial surrogacy as an empowering source of income (Pande 2014).

New reproductive possibilities have also challenged traditional concepts of parenthood and family, consequently sparking off intense debates in public discourse over family, parenthood and gender roles. The reason for this may be traced back to the traditional, commonsensical Christian conceptualization of family, still deeply entrenched in conservative, populist and nationalist ideologies. In fact, the role of blood ties and genetic bonds has always been crucial in defining parenthood (Birenbaum-Carmeli and Rudrappa 2022), and still is for some. On the other hand, surrogacy challenges the centrality of genetic bonds, especially when gestational, as it allows the disentanglement of biological relatedness from social parenthood. As a matter of fact, surrogacy implicates new declinations of parentage while also questioning the standard forms of family conceptualization. However, the idea that parental relationships are grounded in the natural derivation of one person from another and, therefore, in genetics and DNA, is still quite valued. So much so that a persistent genetic bias in perceptions and definitions of parenthood is key to a genetic discourse dominating public debates over surrogacy. A connected criticism is the claim that surrogacy endangers the welfare of the children because it produces harmful environments that ultimately may inflict psychological harm on the children born out of surrogacy (Oultram et al. 2016).

These objections usually rely on claims of parenthood authenticity and traditional nuclear family values, i.e. the "real" parent is the biological one and therefore the best one. Therefore, "artificial" forms of gestation, defying genetic norms, are often demonized, especially in countries where religious pressures are exercised. This genetic discourse is also picked up in nationalist narratives and then naturalized in nationalist discourses of far-right parties across the globe, where it also intertwines with conservative values and gender stereotypes.

3. Surrogacy regulations in Canada and Italy

Due to the above-mentioned cultural, moral and ethical issues, regulatory frameworks operate quite differently in each country on a global scale, making it hard for couples and individuals seeking surrogacy to navigate the wide variety of laws and

jurisdictions. Regardless of the many differences, all regulations range from permissive to restrictive in regard to ARTs, parenthood and surrogacy. In some cases, these regulations reflect a heteronormative orientation on the basis of which surrogacy is constructed “as the domain of married, heterosexual couples” (Leibetseder and Griffin 2020, 312). As a consequence, it can be hypothesized that experiences of parenthood derived from ARTs are framed and construed in ways that tend to perpetuate and echo heteronormativity.

For the purpose of this study, we are interested in comparing and contrasting two different cultural, legal and geographical scenarios where surrogacy regulations stand at the two opposite sides of the permissive/restrictive scale, i.e. Canada and Italy. The reason why we chose these countries is that, given the differences in ARTs regulations in general, the way parenthood is talked about in news discourse may consequently differ. The comparison would therefore allow the identification of possibly different discourses of parenthood. Before turning to the analysis, it is important to clarify in what ways Canada and Italy differ in terms of ARTs regulations, by briefly referring to the legal framework within which surrogacy is disciplined.

Surrogacy in Canada is regulated under the *Assisted Human Reproduction Act* (2004), a piece of federal legislation adopted by the Parliament of Canada in 2004, ten years after a Royal Commission report urged the Canadian government to regulate the growing issues (legal, ethical and social) connected with ARTs (Lemmers and Flavelle Martin 2016). The Act criminalizes commercial surrogacy which means that a strict set of restrictions prohibits the commercial sale of human reproductive material as well as the compensation of surrogates. Even though commercial surrogacy is forbidden, altruistic surrogacy is accepted. Therefore, reasonable expenses connected with pregnancy are allowed. Both gestational and traditional surrogacy are permitted, provided that the agreement relies on altruistic intentions and that a surrogacy agreement is established between parties prior to initiating pregnancy. This means that the carrier can still be reimbursed for medical expenses, although the regulation of financial reimbursements is still vague (Fantus 2020). Typical out-of-pocket expenses that are reimbursed include maternity clothing, prenatal vitamins, travel and accommodation costs, childcare and lost wages or medications associated with pregnancy (Fantus 2021, 1362). The practice has grown rapidly, also as an effect of prohibitions imposed in other countries like India or Nepal. While heterosexual couples represent the majority of people getting access to surrogacy in Canada, statistics show that 21% of intended parents from surrogacy are same-sex male couples (White 2017). Parental rights are recognized upon registration of the birth. Parentage laws vary from province to province, though. In Ontario, for example, unless the surrogacy agreement provides otherwise, the surrogate and the intended parents share the rights and responsibilities of a parent in respect of the child from the time of the child’s birth until the court makes a declaration of parentage (All Families Are Equal 2016). In March 2023, the federal government led by PM Justin Trudeau announced the implementation of a new parental benefit offering parents who adopt or grow their families with the help of a surrogate more time at home with their newborn.

The situation is completely reversed in Italy, where surrogacy is mainly forbidden, whether it be traditional or gestational, commercial or altruistic. The Italian parliament provided very strict guidelines in matters of ARTs in 2004. Act n. 40 of 19/2/2004, entitled *Rules about Medically Assisted Reproduction*, prohibits the employment of gametes from donors, and specifically decrees that anyone who, in any form, realizes, organizes or commercializes gametes, embryos or surrogate motherhood is sentenced to 3 months

to 2 years' imprisonment and to pay a 600,000 to 1,000,000 euro fine. However, surrogacy can be carried out in case of gametes provided by one of the intended parents and a third party. This option, though, is accessible to heterosexual couples only, whereas same-sex couples or single individuals are not allowed to access any form of ARTs.

The political debate over surrogacy in Italy has seen the struggle between supporters of ARTs and its legalization and extension to singles and LGBTQ+ couples, and opposers of the so-called “womb for rent” (“*utero in affitto*”), a derogatory term that has become the preferred term to discuss surrogacy by those opposing the practice. As a matter of fact, the non-scientific terminology stresses the commodification dimension of the practice by foregrounding the alleged economic outcomes for surrogates. Reasonably, in the last twenty years or so, Italy has seen an increasing demand for the recognition of such practices as legal, especially coming from LGBTQ+ associations, led by “Rainbow families” (same-sex family association). In the meantime, Italian couples, especially same-sex male couples, embarking in journeys abroad for accessing CBRC do not always know the legal effects of their choices upon return to Italy. That of foreign-born babies from surrogacy abroad is, in fact, a grey area in the Italian legal system as no Italian legislation entails the legal recognition of children born out of CBRC. While there have been cases of foreign-born children being legally certified upon return with the indication of both parents, out of Supreme Court judges decisions, the legislative vacuum has often led to long and excruciating battles for the recognition of legal parentage, identity rights and citizenship (Lavacchini 2021). This is especially true when it comes to same-sex couples. Stepchild adoption (or adoption in particular cases) has sometimes been allowed by the Supreme Court to protect the best interest of foreign-born children, although the legal status of same-sex couples adoption is still under debate.¹ As a matter of fact, even though civil partnerships for same-sex couples were legalized in 2016 (in Italian: *unioni civili*), adoption rights are currently lacking.

While in Canada a new parental benefit is being planned for people who choose surrogacy, in March 2023 in Italy the far-right government led by Giorgia Meloni announced stricter rules regarding cross-border surrogacy, accusing intended parents of enslaving female bodies. As a consequence, PM Meloni ordered municipalities to stop certifying foreign birth certificates for same-sex couples who used surrogacy, thus leaving some babies in a legal limbo (*The New York Times* 2023).

4. Previous studies on surrogacy and parenthood

Surrogacy and parenthood have been analyzed from several perspectives, including legal, psychological, political, philosophical, sociological and anthropological perspectives. For example, a growing body of empirical studies has focused on the psychological aspects of surrogacy, including cross-border experiences, intended parent(s) motivations and parental relationships (Jadva 2020, Joseph et al. 2018). Studies focusing on parenthood experiences from surrogacy, in particular, have been limited. Much research concentrates on intended parents' relationship with the surrogates and/or the reasons why they decided to pursue surrogacy (Gunnarsson et al. 2020), whereas there

¹ The lack of legislation regarding same-sex couples adoption seems to be directly connected to same-sex couple marital status in Italy. The request of same-sex couples to get access to marriage rights has partly been accepted in 2016, when same-sex civil unions (i.e. “*unioni civili*”) were finally legalized, after a long battle. However, adoption rights are still lacking.

is still a lack of studies covering single and same-sex couples' experiences of surrogacy (Blake et al. 2017). Ethnographic research has shown that surrogates defy gendered ideas of maternal obligation, but, at the same time, the experience of surrogacy reinforces genetic notions of kinship (Markens 2012). Research has also investigated the impact of surrogacy on women who act as surrogates (Bakshi et al. 2018), especially by critical and feminist scholars in studies approaching the political and socio-cultural dimension of surrogacy (Becker 2000). A more discourse oriented work is that by Eyal and Moren (2017), in that it provides insights into how the international surrogacy market is construed by surrogacy agencies, concluding that there is a significant difference in discourse practices when reproductive labor is rhetorically distanced from commodification processes and when it is linked to those processes. However, the amount of works on surrogacy and parentage is still mainly ethnographic.

Another strand of research is that of media studies focusing on media representations of surrogacy and parenthood. An extensive body of research has shown how “the media is an important claims-maker” and source of information about health issues, including reproductive practices (Mankens 2011). Therefore, what the general public knows about surrogacy and alternative forms of parenthood mainly derives from the media. Media can also influence group members' perceptions of their status and place in society, as well as public attitudes and policies (Tukachinsky 2015, Boomgaarden and Vliegenthart 2009). Some works have dealt with popular representations of surrogacy and connected parenthood. According to Sarah Franklin, “popular representations are a powerful force in the social world and cultural construction of reproduction” (Franklin 1990, 227). This is why studies by Le Vay (2019) and Cavalcante (2014), among others, have tackled the issue of TV representations of non-normative families and same-sex parenting from surrogacy. These studies found that same-sex parenting is usually represented in a positive way so as to manage the cultural anxiety generated by LGBTQ+ issues and themes and normalize gay characters (Cavalcante 2014). Soap operas, in particular, were identified as being the most successful in encouraging empathetic representations of surrogacy. In *Surrogacy and the Reproduction of Normative Family*, Le Vay (2019) concludes that non-normative representations of family have as their primary aim to placate social anxieties of homosexuality and that, for this reason, they end up reproducing heteronormativity by means of references to monogamy, domesticity and romantic love placed at the forefront of the narratives.

Fewer studies have dealt with the analysis of parenting from surrogacy in news media, in a discourse-analytical perspective. One example is that of Landau (2009) who investigated same-sex parenting in US print news stories, concluding that same-sex relations are usually framed within homophobic, heterosexist and heteronormative norms, and that same-sex parenting is represented through an assimilating verbal and visual rhetoric that can be ultimately damaging. In her work on U.S. media framings and public discourse about transnational surrogacy, Susan Markens (2012) conducted a qualitative analysis of news accounts of surrogacy published between 2006 and 2010. She identified some key frames including exploitation/inequality and opportunity/choice and highlighted that parenting from surrogacy is portrayed as a social problem because the media reports on it, while dramatic frames shape the way surrogacy is seen by the public. At the same time, intended parents try to distance themselves from accusations of commodification and draw on “discourses of altruism” (Markens 2012, 1750). Another study by Carlile and Paechter (2018) examines various aspects of the media landscape concerning LGBTQ+ parents in the UK thus providing an insight into how media influences and is influenced by policy decisions. The research

was conducted on a sample of 144 newspaper articles from various news media in the UK and Ireland published between 2014 and 2015. Some patterns were identified, for example news reports acknowledged lesbian mothers in dramatic stories of child abuse and death. Also, negative moral judgement on LGBTQ+ parents passed on average or low incomes. Lastly, reports of alternative families “often tended towards the spectacle or carnivalesque” (Carlile and Paechter 2018, 42).

To our knowledge, none of the above mentioned studies combines Corpus Linguistics and Critical Discourse Analysis to investigate the representations of intended parenthood from surrogacy. This lack represents a gap in the current research on the representation of families, especially families from surrogacy, which the present study aims at filling. In fact, using a corpus-based approach to the analysis of how intended parents from surrogacy are discursively produced across news media allows for a more systematic examination. For instance, quantitative data from corpus analysis can help identify patterns, trends, and frequencies of certain words, phrases in news media discourse. Also, key themes and keywords can be identified in recurring linguistic features used to represent alternative families. This helps in understanding the dominant narratives and discursive strategies employed by the media.

5. Corpus Design and Methodology

The aim of this study is to unveil discourses on parenthood from surrogacy as well as contrasting ideological positionings with regard to gender roles, kinship, and social vs. biological parenthood. Two are the research questions that we will address:

1. How are parental experiences and/or parenthood from surrogacy represented in news discourse in Canada and Italy?
2. What are the mainstream/alternative narratives circulating through Canadian and Italian news outlets?

In order to undertake the analysis, two specialized corpora were assembled for the purpose of this study: the Can_SUR Corpus and the Ita_SUR Corpus. Specialized corpora are corpora “of text of a particular type” that are “used to investigate a particular type of language” (Hunston 2002, 14). Both corpora contain news articles from online newspapers, including broadsheets and tabloids, and press release sources, retrieved from ProQuest, an online database, using advanced research tools. The time-span was set to January 1, 2016 - May 18, 2023. The year 2016 was particularly significant in Italy as it marked the legalization of civil unions. As a consequence, the public discourse on fertility rights saw a remarkable increase. In October 2016 Health Canada signaled its long-overdue intention to regulate reimbursement of surrogacy expenses, which led to an intensification of news reports covering issues related to surrogacy and parenthood as well. Over the years, in both Italy and Canada, news media outlets have covered stories concerning experiences of surrogacy either national or international, political debates, LGBTQ+ requests to legalize the practice in Italy and, more recently, attempts to further restrict cross-border surrogacy. The selection of the query terms to extract corpus data from the ProQuest database was carried out in advance using the *Assisted Human Reproduction Act* and the *Legge 40* (2004), the Italian act disciplining assisted reproduction, as a starting point, so as to identify the key words that have featured the Canadian legal discourse on fertility rights and ARTs. The texts were

processed in search for relevant keywords that might facilitate the selection of our query terms.

The Can_SUR Corpus comprises 690 news articles, written in English, rounding up 728,171 tokens and 609,729 words. Can_SUR collects news articles from national daily broadsheet newspapers like *The National Post*, *The Vancouver Sun* and *The Toronto Star* and local tabloids like *The Toronto Sun*. Our search terms for collecting the articles were “surrogacy” or “surrogate” and “parenthood” or “intended parents” or “intended parent” or “surrogate carrier” or “surrogate mother” or “family”. We then sorted the results in chronological order and eliminated any duplicates, based on identical titles. Table 1 displays the distribution of articles across newspapers. As expected, some newspapers have devoted more coverage to issues pertaining to surrogacy and parenthood than others. For example, *The Toronto Star* and *The National Post* published 26.8% and 25.5% of the articles in our dataset, respectively. The distribution of articles seems quite homogeneous if we compare *The Toronto Star*, *The National Post* and *The Toronto Sun*, as almost the same amount of articles was published in these newspapers. The sources are diverse, though, in their ideological orientation, format, geographical representation and circulation. *The Calgary Herald*, *The National Post*, *The Vancouver Sun* and *The Toronto Sun* lean towards right-center/right political orientation, whereas *The Toronto Star* is more left-centered (Media Bias Fact Check 2023).

The Ita_SUR Corpus gathers 830 news articles, written in Italian, ranging to 392,223 tokens and 324,859 words. A detailed distribution of articles according to newspapers is provided in Table 2. Our research terms used to retrieve articles from ProQuest were “maternità surrogata” or “utero in affitto” or “gestazione per altri” and “famiglia” or “genitori” or “genitore”. The term “genitori intenzionali” (“intended parents”) is not commonly used in Italian and for this reason it was not included in the selection of query terms. Common terms that feature the public discourse on surrogacy were added to the legal terminology extracted from *La legge 40 - Procreazione assistita* in order to widen the selection of articles and diversify the ideological orientation of each source. The retrieved articles were published in national daily newspapers like *Corriere della Sera* and *La Stampa*, regional broadsheets like *Il Resto del Carlino* and newspapers published in compact-formats like *La Nazione* and *Il Giornno*. It must be noted that the segmentation differentiating quality newspapers from tabloids is typical of English speaking countries, whereas in Italy tabloids are rare. Regardless, the political leaning of the Italian newspapers in the Ita_SUR Corpus includes more left-centered, liberal newspapers like *La Stampa* and *Corriere della Sera* and right-oriented, conservative outlets like *La Nazione*, *Il Giornno* and *Il Resto del Carlino*, all belonging to the same media group (RCS). *Il Fatto Quotidiano* is politically close to the Five Star Movement and has often been accused of both right-wing or left-wing populism, alternatively. ANSA (National Associated Press Agency) is the leading news agency in Italy and, interestingly enough, in this corpus its coverage accounts for 59.7% of the overall number of articles in the Ita_SUR corpus.

| Name | n. of reports |
|---------------------------|---------------|
| <i>The Calgary Herald</i> | 81 |
| <i>The Toronto Star</i> | 185 |
| <i>The National Post</i> | 176 |
| <i>The Vancouver Sun</i> | 84 |

| | |
|------------------------|-----|
| <i>The Toronto Sun</i> | 164 |
|------------------------|-----|

Table 1: Articles included in the Can_SUR Corpus, by newspaper

| Name | n. of reports |
|-----------------------------|---------------|
| <i>La Stampa</i> | 50 |
| <i>Il Resto del Carlino</i> | 74 |
| <i>Il Giorno</i> | 33 |
| <i>La Nazione</i> | 42 |
| <i>ANSA</i> | 496 |
| <i>Corriere della Sera</i> | 123 |
| <i>Il Fatto Quotidiano</i> | 7 |

Table 2: Articles included in the Ita_SUR Corpus, by newspaper

The study conducted herein draws from quantitative and qualitative techniques, using corpus tools to complement Critical Discourse Analysis (hereafter CDA). CDA consists of “attempts to study the organization of language above the sentence or above the clause, and therefore to study larger linguistic units such as conversational exchanges or written texts” (Stubbs 1983, 1). The combination with a CDA-informed approach is particularly fruitful to interpret the ideological implications in patterns of language. Such an integrated approach, which combines qualitative readings with a corpus-linguistics approach, creates a methodological synergy (Baker et al. 2008) that has proven to be a reliable method to track down discursive patterns. The synergy between qualitative and quantitative methodologies addresses the limitations of both. In other words, “by using computer software, analysts can deal with much larger quantities of data, and so put forward more convincing evidence in support of their claims” (Cameron and Panovic 2014, 81).

For the quantitative informed analysis, the online software program *Sketch Engine* (Kilgarriff et al. 2014) was employed as a corpus manager and text analysis software. Our first stage of analysis focused on keyness and collocations. Keyness refers to the level of significance of higher or lower frequencies (keywords). Keyness values were generated automatically based on log-likelihood calculations. Keyword analysis was therefore employed to find out which words were significantly most frequent in the Can_SUR and in the Ita_SUR, respectively. The keyness analysis of the Can_SUR corpus was conducted using the SiBOL corpus, an English corpus made up of articles collected from various English language newspapers of the years 1993-2021, containing around 850 million words. The analysis of keywords was useful for identifying particular themes in both corpora. The Ita_SUR keywords were retrieved using the Italian section of the Timestamped JSI web corpus, a corpus made up of news articles gained from their RSS feeds. The corpus consists of news articles gained from newfeed created by the Jozef Stefan Institute, Slovenia. The general JSI Timestamped Italian corpus is a clean, continuous, real-time aggregated stream of semantically enriched news articles from RSS-enabled sites across the world. The corpus is updated with new texts daily and grows by ca 200 million words each month. The Italian section of the Timestamped JSI web corpus comprises Italian news articles from 2014 to 2021. The analysis of collocates in corpus linguistics is often used to identify discourses, through the investigation of words co-occurring within a pre-set span. Collocational analysis served as a gateway to CDA as it provided indications of discourse prosody (Baker et al. 2008), i.e. the

associations of a given word or phrase with other words or phrases which are positive or negative in their evaluative orientation. The analysis of collocates can provide a helpful sketch of the meaning/function of the node within a particular discourse. Discourse prosody indexes the topics and issues associated with a given key word. *Topoi* or *loci* can be described as parts of argumentation which belong to the obligatory, either explicit or inferable premises: they are “content-related warrants or ‘conclusion rules’ which connect the argument or arguments with the conclusion, the claim” (Wodak and Meyer 2001, 76). According to specific topics or “argumentative topoi” (Baker 2006), words can be grouped to identify types of discourses. Richardson explains the *topoi* in terms of “reservoirs of generalised key ideas from which specific statements or arguments can be generated” (Richardson 2004, 230). Another useful notion was that of agency (Van Leeuwen 1996) as well as taxonomy to understand how social actors are represented. In Fairclough’s words, “social actors are usually participants in clauses” (2003, 145) although they may be represented as agents or patients in specific contexts.

6. Results

This study takes a comparative approach in that its ultimate goal is comparing Italian and Canadian news discourse in an attempt to shed some light on the picture of parenthood from surrogacy in Italy and Canada as seen through the lens of the news media. To this end, this section was structured into two main parts. In 6.1, a presentation and analysis of the data retrieved from the Can_SUR corpus is introduced, whereas 6.2 comprises the interpretation of the results obtained from the Ita_SUR corpus. The last block, section 6.3, provides a comparative analysis between data from 6.1 and 6.2.

6.1 Analysis of the Can_SUR corpus

The first stage of analysis is informed with quantitative methodologies. A list of keywords was automatically retrieved from *SketchEngine* using the SiBOL corpus as a reference corpus. Non words and strings of symbols were deleted, since they were not relevant to the analysis. The query terms used for retrieving the articles from the ProQuest database were also manually removed, in order not to hamper the results. Identifying keywords was necessary so as to reveal broad trends in the Can_SUR corpus. We obtained a list of the top 50 keywords, their frequency in the focus corpus and reference corpus as well as their relative frequency in both the focus and the reference corpus along with their keyness scores. The initial list was further revised. Each keyword was checked by screening manually through the news articles where they occurred in order to confirm the coherence of the results with our research aims. We obtained a final list of 28 keywords displayed in Table 3.

| Item | Freq. (focus) | Freq. (reference) | Relative freq. (focus) | Relative freq. (reference) | Score |
|----------|---------------|-------------------|------------------------|----------------------------|--------|
| jonathon | 242 | 571 | 332,33951 | 0,56578 | 212,89 |
| ailah | 150 | 0 | 205,99557 | 0 | 207 |

| | | | | | |
|---------------------|-----|------|-----------|---------|--------|
| kristin | 181 | 1315 | 248,56799 | 1,30297 | 108,37 |
| health-care | 106 | 735 | 145,57021 | 0,72828 | 84,807 |
| roseanne | 85 | 499 | 116,73082 | 0,49444 | 78,779 |
| caryn | 58 | 67 | 79,65162 | 0,06639 | 75,631 |
| sperm | 307 | 5070 | 421,60428 | 5,02363 | 70,158 |
| embryo | 242 | 3920 | 332,33951 | 3,88414 | 68,249 |
| uterus | 94 | 1004 | 129,09056 | 0,99482 | 65,214 |
| fertilization | 52 | 177 | 71,4118 | 0,17538 | 61,607 |
| paulin | 53 | 260 | 72,7851 | 0,25762 | 58,67 |
| honjo | 42 | 3 | 57,67876 | 0,00297 | 58,505 |
| fertility | 332 | 7043 | 455,93686 | 6,97858 | 57,27 |
| trudeau | 95 | 1385 | 130,46387 | 1,37233 | 55,415 |
| chalke | 47 | 254 | 64,54528 | 0,25168 | 52,366 |
| audia | 36 | 2 | 49,43894 | 0,00198 | 50,339 |
| ndp | 44 | 227 | 60,42537 | 0,22492 | 50,146 |
| hospitalizat ion | 74 | 1059 | 101,62448 | 1,04931 | 50,077 |
| crockett | 50 | 437 | 68,66519 | 0,433 | 48,615 |
| shermans | 34 | 13 | 46,69233 | 0,01288 | 47,086 |
| vitro | 44 | 418 | 60,42537 | 0,41418 | 43,435 |
| parentage | 30 | 2 | 41,19912 | 0,00198 | 42,116 |
| gestational | 39 | 307 | 53,55885 | 0,30419 | 41,833 |
| ivf | 163 | 4446 | 223,84853 | 4,40533 | 41,598 |
| gamete | 31 | 78 | 42,57242 | 0,07729 | 40,446 |
| mom | 234 | 8270 | 321,35309 | 8,19436 | 39,876 |
| fetus | 46 | 875 | 63,17197 | 0,867 | 39,372 |
| dads | 152 | 5454 | 218,3553 | 5,40411 | 38,952 |

Table 3: Final 28 keywords in the Can_SUR Corpus

In order to detect discourse patterns in the focus corpus, the 28 keywords were then coded to identify thematic patterns and the prominence of certain themes over others. As a result, we obtained three broad categories based on the semantic similarities between keywords:

| Item | Category |
|--|--------------|
| <i>jonathon (242), ailah (150), Kristin (181), Roseanne (85), caryn (58), paulin (53), Shermans (34), audia (36), honjo (42), chakle (47), crockett (50), trudeau (95)</i> | NAMES |

| | |
|---|-------------------------|
| <i>health-care (106), sperm (307), embryo (242), uterus (94), fertility (332), fertilization (52), hospitalization (74), vitro (44), gestational (39), ivf (163), gamete (31), fetus (46)</i> | ARTs TERMINOLOGY |
| <i>dads (152), parentage (30), mom (234), ndp (44)</i> | MEMBERSHIP |

Tab. 4: Keyword categories in the Can_SUR Corpus and their raw frequencies

Most of the keywords in our list are personal names, including first and/or last name of either lay or famous people experiencing surrogacy, or having to do with surrogacy to some extent. These encompass the following: *jonathon, ailah, kristin, roseanne, caryn, paulin, shermans, audia, honjo, chakle, crockett*. One name only, *trudeau*, pertains to the sphere of politics as it stands for Justin Trudeau, Canada's current PM. Specialized terminology is also common among our keywords. This category includes terms that pertain to the specialized field of ARTs. Fewer keywords fall into the category of membership. These can be further divided into family membership (*dads, mom, parentage*) and political membership (*ndp* i.e. New Democratic Party). Based on preliminary results, it could be assumed that there is a relevant tendency in the Canadian press to cover personal experiences of surrogacy, especially by reporting extraordinary stories of gestational carriage. The lack of names related to political actors, on the other hand, may suggest that surrogacy is not a political theme and that the coverage of surrogacy in Canada in the selected time-span does not include political debates over the issue. Similarly, the lack of terms related to parentage, especially legal terms like "intended parents", may suggest that the coverage relies on personal stories of surrogacy from the point of view of the gestational carrier, rather than the experiences of parenthood that emerge from that. At the same time, we may also hypothesize that parenthood from surrogacy is a normalized topic in Canada, therefore not calling for media attention. Based on the keyword categories in Tab. 4, the following themes were identified:

| Theme | Frequency | Prominence |
|---------------------|------------------|-------------------|
| Medical information | 1530 | 49.95% |
| Personal accounts | 978 | 31.92% |
| Kinship | 416 | 13.58% |
| Politics | 139 | 4.53% |

Table 5: Most frequent themes and prominence rates in the Can_SUR corpus

Prominence was established by calculating the frequency of each theme as a percentage of the overall number of occurrences of each item associated to that theme. Based on the results in Tab. 5, keywords vehiculating meanings related to medical information account for 49.95% of the total number of keywords, meaning that medical discourse is more frequent in the coverage of surrogacy stories in the Can_SUR compared to other themes.

While it would have been interesting to look at the usage of specialized ARTs terminology in this corpus, the analysis would have stretched too far beyond the scope of this research. Given the purpose of this study, and because of space constraints, we only focused on the theme of kinship by zooming into the context of use of *dads*. In so doing we tried to narrow down the analysis to experiences of parenthood from surrogacy, as they are more common among gay couples. To this end, contexts of usage were further investigated through collocational analysis. In analyzing collocates, the word span was set to 3L/3R in the collocate window. The minimum frequency of a collocate to co-occur with the node was set to 5.

| Keyword | Collocates |
|-------------------|--|
| <i>dads</i> (152) | <i>moms</i> (3), <i>gay</i> (4), <i>two</i> (9), <i>how</i> (4), <i>surrogate</i> (3), <i>are</i> (5), <i>who</i> (4), <i>be</i> (3), <i>have</i> (3), <i>with</i> (3) |

Table 6: Collocates of *dads*

Collocates of *dads* include words pertaining to kinship (*moms*), surrogacy (*surrogate*), relationship and gender identity (*gay*), quantifiers (*two*) and verbs (*are*, *be*, *have*). *Two*, *gay* and *moms* are its strongest collocates based on log likelihood scores (77.11, 43.42 and 37.65, respectively). A collocational analysis was conducted on these collocates.

Occurrences of “two dads” feature news stories about surrogacy experiences for gay couples (extract 1) and father’s day celebrations (extract 2):

Extract 1: Milo’s *two dads* hold him close, their faces awash with emotion as they meet their baby boy for the first time. In 2014, a photo of Toronto couple BJ Barone and Frankie Nelson cradling their newborn went viral. “That image has probably been seen in every country” said Lindsay Foster, who took the photo and is a friend of Milo’s surrogate mother.

(*The Toronto Star*, March 1, 2016)

Extract 2: “Not all families are the exact same,” he said. “It’s a beautiful thing to see different types of families being accepted.” His husband, Shaw, a manager at Whitehorse General, said a Father’s Day story about *two gay dads* puts the focus on parenting. “It talks about the commitment and love that people have for their children regardless of the boundaries of sexual orientation,” he said.

(*The Vancouver Sun*, June 19, 2021)

In both articles, published at different times by two different newspapers, the representation of “gay dads” relies on positively connoted words (*emotions*, *love*, *beautiful*, *commitment*) that bring about a positive discourse prosody about non-heteronormative families. In **extract 1**, the reporter refers to a photo of two dads holding close their newborn baby from surrogacy. The photo went viral worldwide in 2014 but, in 2016, when the article was published, it was used by the conservative Italian Fratelli d’Italia party, without permission, in their campaign against gay parenthood, as the article explains. The positive, normalizing representation of gay parenthood stands in contrast with the illegal usage of their images for anti-gay propaganda. A legal/illegal framework is therefore employed in such a way that the same-sex couple and their baby are represented as legitimate, whereas the improper usage by Italian politicians is construed as illegal and illegitimate. In **extract 2**, the normalization of gay parenthood is embedded in the narrative of inclusive Father’s Day stories, by means of references to

the diversification of family structures and love for children, regardless of sexual orientation, as opposed to heteronormative understandings of fatherhood, traditionally attached to the celebration of Father’s Day.

Co-occurrences of *moms* and *dads* appear in three concordance strings, as Fig. 1 shows:

| | Details | Left context | KWIC | Right context |
|---|--|--|---------------|---|
| 1 | <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="radio"/> doc#0 | body of brain research suggests yes, giving hope to adoptive parents, | dads | , lesbian moms - and maybe some Peppa Pig fans The Toronto Star Or |
| 2 | <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="radio"/> doc#0 | whole root causes let cops be social workers and surrogate moms and | dads | to kids lacking good parenting thing has been the same talking point for |
| 3 | <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="radio"/> doc#0 | whole root causes let cops be social workers and surrogate moms and | dads | to kids lacking good parenting thing has been the same talking point for |

Figure 1: Concordance strings of co-occurrences of *moms* and *dads*

In concordance strings #2 and #3, which are identical quotes picked up by two different newspapers, the reference to “surrogate moms and dads” is not related to surrogacy but to experiences of adoption and guardianship, as the context of the sentence reveals (“surrogate moms and dads to kids lacking good parenting”). In string #1, the experience of adoptive parents, dads and lesbian moms is presented in relation to an experiment conducted by American anthropologist Sarah Blaffer Hrdy, supporting the evidence that mothers who give birth and those who adopt could reasonably be considered as capable of love and care as biological mothers. While the article’s focus is on experiences of gestational parenthood by two lesbian mothers, it also presents parenthood from surrogacy as a positive experience for the newborn, given the evidence provided by Hrdy’s and previous experiments that non-biological parents have the same nurturing instincts as gestational moms, even in the case of gay fathers from surrogacy:

Extract 3: For example, a 2014 study out of Israel by researchers Ruth Feldman, Eyal Abraham, and others, compared the brain responses of gay and straight couples raising children. The study looked at 41 heterosexual biological parents in which women were the primary caregivers, and 48 **gay fathers** who had their babies through surrogacy. What they found, writes Conaboy, were “similarities in amygdala activation between primary caregiving fathers and primary caregiving mothers.” And there were no major differences “in brain region activation” between the biological gay fathers and the adoptive ones.

(*The Toronto Star*, October 8, 2022)

The article represents non-heteronormative parenthood by referring to the natural/unnatural framework that is usually adopted in political debates over birth control, abortion and surrogacy. The reporter’s position aligns with that of Hrdy’s and other researchers’ in saying that science marches on towards the understanding of non-heteronormative parenthood as perfectly “natural”. It therefore subverts the categorization of gay parenthood as unnatural by reporting on scientific evidence supporting the opposite. Interestingly, it also refers to Giorgia Meloni’s opposition to surrogacy and adoption by gay couples, referred to by Meloni’s culture spokesman, Federico Mollicone, as unnatural. Meloni’s and associates’ positions are harshly criticized for being “regressive”.

Overall, the analysis of the Can_SUR showed that, in the representation of surrogacy in Canadian newspapers, not much space is devoted to experiences of parenthood from surrogacy, although personal, extraordinary accounts of surrogacy are common. Nonetheless, whenever issues concerning kinship and surrogacy are brought

into the discourse of news media, this is done in such a way that alternative experiences of parenthood are praised as being positive and a positive discourse prosody is therefore activated by means of positively connoted words as well as in the framework of normality and legitimacy. Although the presence of a positive discourse prosody is not immediately evident from the collocational analysis, the analysis of concordances revealed that references to love, affection and nurturing do occur in the surroundings of relevant keywords like *dads*. Personalization seems to be a common strategy in the Can_SUR corpus. Based on the list of collocates as well as the analysis of Extract 1 and 3, it is also worth noticing how *dads* is activated as the query occurs as subject of verbs like *hold* and *have (babies)*. Therefore gay fathers from surrogacy are represented as active participants performing activities that characterize them as dads in relation to their babies (es. holding their babies or having their babies). The stories of personal experiences are told by referring to lay people by means of nomination, i.e. using personal names and details of their life as parents. In the Can_SUR corpus gay fathers from surrogacy are discursively construed as legitimate parents. A common trend is also an emerging opposition between the positive representation of alternative parenthood from surrogacy in Canadian newspapers and regressive/repressive policies disciplining surrogacy elsewhere, criticized by Canadian reporters of *The Toronto Star*, specifically (as Extract 1 and 3 showed).

6.2 Analysis of the Ita_SUR corpus

The keyword analysis of the Ita_SUR corpus was conducted through *SketchEngine* using the Timestamped JSI web corpus as a reference corpus. Non words and strings of symbols were deleted, as well as all the query terms used for retrieving the articles from the ProQuest database. We gathered a list of the top 50 keywords, their frequency in the focus corpus and reference corpus as well as their relative frequency in both the focus and the reference corpus along with their keyness scores. As with the Can_SUR keyword list, the initial list was further revised by checking each keyword manually through the screening of the news articles. A final list of 29 keywords was obtained and displayed in Table 7.

| Item | Freq. (focus) | Freq. (reference) | Relative freq. (focus) | Relative freq. (reference) | Score |
|----------------|---------------|-------------------|------------------------|----------------------------|---------|
| giudici | 144 | 24 | 367,13809 | 0,00232 | 367,286 |
| stepchild | 153 | 13703 | 390,0842 | 1,3248 | 168,223 |
| gpa | 74 | 1621 | 188,66818 | 0,15672 | 163,971 |
| gandolfini | 75 | 4405 | 191,21776 | 0,42587 | 134,807 |
| genitorialità | 117 | 13666 | 298,29968 | 1,32123 | 128,94 |
| omogenitoriali | 55 | 1346 | 140,22635 | 0,13013 | 124,965 |
| roccella | 106 | 14558 | 270,25443 | 1,40746 | 112,672 |
| vendola | 118 | 17864 | 300,84927 | 1,72709 | 110,686 |
| unioni | 58 | 3861 | 147,87506 | 0,37328 | 108,408 |

| | | | | | |
|----------------|-----|-------|-----------|---------|---------|
| filiazione | 54 | 2956 | 137,67679 | 0,28579 | 107,854 |
| coghe | 47 | 1259 | 119,82979 | 0,12172 | 107,718 |
| gameti | 48 | 3169 | 122,37936 | 0,30638 | 94,444 |
| zan | 83 | 15475 | 211,61432 | 1,49612 | 85,178 |
| procreazione | 70 | 11749 | 178,46989 | 1,13589 | 84,026 |
| trascrivere | 80 | 16786 | 203,96561 | 1,62287 | 78,146 |
| gabicce | 39 | 3017 | 99,43323 | 0,29168 | 77,754 |
| tobia | 53 | 7835 | 135,12721 | 0,75749 | 77,456 |
| fecondazione | 79 | 17856 | 201,41603 | 1,72631 | 74,245 |
| schuster | 36 | 3373 | 91,78452 | 0,3261 | 69,968 |
| nichi | 49 | 8401 | 124,92893 | 0,81221 | 69,489 |
| eterosessuale | 57 | 12112 | 145,32549 | 1,17099 | 67,4 |
| trascrizione | 156 | 51151 | 397,73291 | 4,94527 | 67,067 |
| cirinnà | 94 | 26916 | 239,65958 | 2,60223 | 66,808 |
| omosessuale | 240 | 86635 | 611,89679 | 8,37585 | 65,37 |
| gestante | 39 | 5845 | 99,43323 | 0,56509 | 64,171 |
| Arcobaleno | 130 | 44864 | 331,44409 | 4,33744 | 62,285 |
| donatrice | 35 | 6060 | 89,23495 | 0,58588 | 56,899 |
| mercificazione | 29 | 3405 | 73,93753 | 0,32919 | 56,378 |
| famiglie | 51 | 14809 | 130,02808 | 1,43173 | 53,883 |

Table 7: Final 29 keywords in the Ita_SUR Corpus

The keywords were coded to identify thematic patterns and the prominence of certain themes over others. As a result, we obtained three broad categories based on the semantic similarities between keywords:

| Item | Category |
|--|------------------------------|
| <i>coghe (47), tobia (53), schuster (36), nichi (49), cirinnà (94), zan (83), vendola (118), roccella (106), gandolfini (75), gabicce (39)</i> | NAMES |
| <i>Trascrizione (156), trascrivere (80), unioni (58), stepchild (153), giudici (144)</i> | LEGAL TERMINOLOGY |
| <i>Eterosessuale (57), omosessuale (240), omogenitoriali (55), genitorialità (117), arcobaleno (130), famiglie (51)</i> | MEMBERSHIP |
| <i>Gestante (39), fecondazione (79), procreazione (70), gameti (48), filiazione (54), gpa (74), donatrice (35)</i> | ARTs TERMINOLOGY |
| <i>Mercificazione (29)</i> | ECONOMICS TERMINOLOGY |

Table 8: Keyword categories in the Ita_SUR Corpus and their raw frequencies

Most of the keywords from Table 7 are names of politicians who were involved in different ways in the Italian political debate over surrogacy in the last seven years. Among the most prominent, Nichi Vendola, former Italian left-wing politician and LGBTQ+ activist who, together with his husband Edward Testa, became father through surrogacy in California of a child whose name also features in the keyword list (*tobia*). Other political actors include Monica Cirinnà, a Senator of the Democratic Party from 2013 to 2022, known to be the author of the Unioni Civili (civil unions) Bill approved in 2016, also known as Legge Cirinnà. Other public figures in this category include Alexander Schuster, an Italian attorney as well as an independent legal expert to the EU Commission on civil rights; Jacopo Coghe, president of the Pro Vita & Famiglia Onlus, a pro-life, anti-gay and conservative organization; Eugenia Roccella, current minister of the newly re-named Family, Natality and Equal Opportunities Ministry in Giorgia Meloni's government; Alessandro Zan, an Italian left-wing politician and LGBTQ+ activist; Massimo Gandolfini, leader of the so-called "Family Day", a pro-life demonstration opposing same-sex marriage, surrogacy and civil rights for LGBTQ+ people. Legal terminology is also common in the Ita_SUR corpus. It encompasses words related to legal decisions, the act of transcribing babies born abroad from surrogacy, civil unions and the much debated stepchild adoption law that was never approved. Membership terms include terminology related to sexual and gender identity like *eterosessuale* (heterosexual), *omosessuale* (homosexual) and *famiglie arcobaleno* (rainbow families) and also terms referring to alternative parenthood like *omogenitoriali* (same-sex parenthood), or parenthood in general (*genitorialità*). ARTs terminology is also present in the Italian press coverage of surrogacy and alternative parenthood in the form of specialized terms related to the gestational process like *fecondazione* (fecundation), *gameti* (gametes) as well as the technical acronym used for gestational carriage (*gpa*) and names referred to the women carriers/eggs donors (*gestante* and *donatrice*). One last category is that of economics terminology. Here we found only one keyword (*mercificazione*) indicating the accusation of commodification that usually features public debates about surrogacy, childhood, parenthood and women's bodies. Based on preliminary data, the coverage of surrogacy in Italian newspapers seems highly politicized as an ongoing political debate featuring opposite voices and factions. The occurrences of legal, medical and economics terminology in combination with the names of politicians may suggest that surrogacy is treated as a political issue, rather than a personal matter. So much so that in the membership category we found no reference to family roles (e.g. mother, father, parents etc.). On the contrary, parenthood from surrogacy seems to be covered as a political theme (*genitorialità* i.e. parenthood), rather than an experience that people undergo when choosing surrogacy. However, references to "rainbow families" indicate that the existence of alternative forms of parenthood is acknowledged in Italian news media discourse, although these are not conceived as civil entities in the Italian legal system.

The categories in Table 8 were associated with the themes displayed in Table 9. As anticipated, politics, in the form of politicians' names, dominates the corpus as a persistent theme across news articles. Law and legislation register a slightly lower percentage, though still being quite present. This suggests that surrogacy and the recognition of family rights is a political issue also debated in courts.

| Theme | Frequency | Prominence |
|----------|-----------|------------|
| Politics | 700 | 29.54% |

| | | |
|--|-----|---------------|
| Law and legislation | 591 | 24.94% |
| Medical information | 399 | 16.84% |
| Kinship | 353 | 14.90% |
| Gender identity and sexual orientation | 297 | 12.53% |
| Commodification and usurpation | 29 | 1.22% |

Table 9: Most frequent themes and prominence rates in the Can_SUR corpus

As in 6.1, we focus our attention on the Kinship category. Both *genitorialità* and *famiglie arcobaleno* were selected for a deeper investigation of their contexts of usage and collocates. The same settings were used: word span set to 3L/3R in the collocate window and minimum frequency of a collocate to co-occur with the node set to 5.

| Keyword | Collocates |
|----------------------------|---|
| <i>genitorialità</i> | <i>Modello</i> (5), <i>piena</i> (5), <i>desiderio</i> (6), <i>forme</i> (4), <i>riconoscendo</i> (3), <i>doppia</i> (3), <i>riconoscimento</i> (6), <i>nuove</i> (3), <i>principio</i> (3), <i>progetto</i> (3), <i>materia</i> (3), <i>naturale</i> (4), <i>certificato</i> (3), <i>entrambi</i> (3), <i>riconosciuto</i> (3), <i>diritto</i> (3) |
| <i>famiglie arcobaleno</i> | <i>Rete</i> (4), <i>associazione</i> (5), <i>esistono</i> (4), <i>associazioni</i> (4), <i>festa</i> (3), <i>manifestazione</i> (3), <i>gruppo</i> (3), <i>legale</i> (3), <i>figli</i> (4), <i>diritti</i> (3) |

Table 10: Selected keywords and their collocates

Based on preliminary considerations, the collocates of *genitorialità* encompass some positively connoted terms like *desiderio* (desire), *riconoscendo* (recognizing), *riconoscimento* (recognition) and *riconosciuto* (recognized). The last three collocates lead back to the theme of Law and Legislation, as surrogacy in Italy is illegal and therefore intended parents from cross-border surrogacy have to be legally registered as parents upon their return. However, the practice falls into a legal void and is often a struggle. *Modello* (model) and *piena* (full) are its strongest collocates (53.67 and 48.30 rates). Both collocates feature in extracts where the traditional model of parenthood and the right to full parenthood were discussed in court cases, as extracts 4 and 5 show:

Extract 4: Secondo la Corte, infatti, “l’insussistenza di un legame genetico tra i minori e il padre non è di ostacolo al riconoscimento di efficacia giuridica al provvedimento straniero: si deve infatti escludere che nel nostro ordinamento vi sia un **modello di genitorialità** esclusivamente fondato sul legame biologico fra il genitore e il nato; all’opposto deve essere considerata l’importanza assunta a livello normativo dal concetto di responsabilità genitoriale che si manifesta nella consapevole decisione di allevare ed accudire il nato”.

(ANSA, February 28, 2017)

Extract 5: “In tema di genitorialità, la sentenza della Corte d’Appello di Trento finalmente ci libera dall’ossessione del biologico e rimette al centro l’interesse dei bambini e delle bambine”: così Gabriele Piazzoni, segretario nazionale di Arcigay, commenta la sentenza che ha riconosciuto la **piena genitorialità** ad una coppia di padri che hanno fatto ricorso alla gestazione per altri.

(ANSA, February 28, 2017)

Both extracts were taken from the same press release by *ANSA* covering a 2017 court case that recognized full parenthood to a same-sex couple from Trento whose baby was born abroad through surrogacy. Extract 4 quotes from the final verdict, whereas in Extract 5 the decision is commented by Arcigay president Gabriele Piazzoni who foregrounds the importance of such a crucial moment in the history of same-sex parenthood as it finally liberates LGBTQ+ people from the obsession of biology and blood relationships when it comes to parenthood. In both cases, parenthood is represented within the legal framework by referring to issues like responsibility, children's rights and legal efficacy. While the court's decision is praised in these extracts, other examples show the co-existence of an opposite trend in public discourse, i.e. the defense of a traditional model of parenthood grounded in biological kinship:

Extract 6: Con questa decisione il giudice milanese “sembra trascurare - sottolineano Gambino e Bilotti - la recente presa di posizione del giudice delle leggi, secondo cui la pratica della maternità surrogata ‘offende in modo intollerabile la dignità della donna e mina nel profondo le relazioni umane’”. “In particolare - proseguono i civilisti all'Università Europea di Roma - ciò che il giudice milanese sembra trascurare del tutto è l'implicazione necessaria che sussiste tra il modello costituzionale della genitorialità naturale e la norma personalista posta a fondamento di quel grandioso progetto di emancipazione umana e sociale che è racchiuso nelle norme della nostra Costituzione. Laddove infatti la libertà di dare la vita si traduce nel riconoscimento del diritto di essere genitori, il figlio degrada inevitabilmente a oggetto di un diritto degli adulti”.

(*ANSA*, November 29, 2018)

In Extract 6, Gambino and Bilotti, vice-rector and chair of the Law faculty at the European University in Rome, harshly criticized the court's decision to recognize full parenthood to a gay couple who was officially transcribed as fathers of twins from surrogacy abroad. The article quotes from an interview with Gambino and Bilotti, signaled by quotation marks, where they discuss surrogacy as offensive and delegitimize non-biological parenthood as being unnatural. It is worth noticing how surrogacy is referred to as “surrogate motherhood” in Extract 6 and “gestation for others” in Extract 5, thus unveiling the occurrence of either negative or positive discourse prosodies when one term is preferred over the other.

Collocates of *famiglie arcobaleno* encompass words that categorize rainbow families as a network (*rete*), an association (*associazione*), a demonstration (*manifestazione*) or a group (*group*). Considering its collocates, rainbow families seem to be treated in this corpus as a political entity fighting for their children's rights and for the full recognition of their existence. As a matter of fact, *rete* and *associazione* are its strongest collocates (45.37 and 50.81 LL rates). It is also worth noticing how, among the node's collocates, there is only one verb *esistono* (exist). Despite being discursively construed as political entities, rainbow families are not represented as agents performing activities. When co-occurring in the surroundings of *rete* and/or *associazione*, rainbow families are represented in relation to their struggles for the recognition of egalitarian marriages, same-sex couples' children and reproduction rights, or their path towards the full recognition of their own existence.

Extract 7: Sono 1741 le persone (1391 famiglie) che hanno risposto a un questionario online (compilazione anonima) promosso dal Centro Risorse Lgbtqi, in collaborazione con le associazioni **Famiglie Arcobaleno** e Rete Genitori

Rainbow nell'ambito del progetto finanziato da Ilga-Europe, con l'obiettivo di raccogliere dati sulle famiglie composte da coppie omosessuali con o senza figli, genitori transessuali, famiglie ricomposte, genitori Lgbtqi single.

(ANSA, May 10, 2017)

Extract 8: Albini ricorda che alla Camera è stato depositato ad inizio della legislatura un testo di legge sull'uguaglianza della famiglia proposta da **Famiglie Arcobaleno** e Rete Lenford. “Quattro - spiega - sono i punti fondamentali: matrimonio egualitario, riconoscimento alla nascita per i figli di coppie dello stesso sesso, accesso alle adozioni per i single a prescindere da orientamento sessuale e identità di genere e coppie dello stesso sesso e accesso ai percorsi di procreazione assistita per le donne single e coppie di donne”

(*Corriere della Sera*, March 16, 2023)

Similarly to the representation of *genitorialità*, *famiglie arcobaleno* are discursively construed within a legal and political framework, therefore as political actors rather than as lay individuals. No personal account is provided in relation to rainbow families and same-sex parenthood. On the contrary, the public dimension of parenthood is preferred over the narrative of private experiences, probably due to the fact that same-sex parenthood is still an ongoing struggle rather than a normalized experience, as Extract 9 shows:

Extract 9: La ministra aveva precisato poco tempo fa che “dire che un bambino può avere due mamme e due papà non è la verità”, negando così con un pugno di parole l'esistenza e la legittimità di migliaia di **famiglie arcobaleno** i cui figli non sono certo meno amati - o meno validi - a causa del genere dei genitori, sottolineano.

(ANSA, December 22, 2022)

Extract 9 provides an example of how rainbow families in Italy are still invisible to the Italian legislation and to Italian political institutions, as the words of Eugenia Roccella, Minister of the Family, Natality and Equal Opportunities ministry, exemplify. While directly quoting from the Minister's statements, ANSA also gives voice to the Circolo di cultura omosessuale “Mario Mieli”, a cultural group who publicly responded to Roccella's words. Here a discourse of love and kinship intertwining with that of legitimacy is included in reference to the relationship between same-sex parents and rainbow children, who, as said by the Circolo's spokesperson, are not less loved, or less legitimate, than any other children, and therefore should not be discriminated against on the basis of their parents' gender identity.

7. Concluding remarks

The present study offered an analysis of how parenthood from surrogacy has entered news discourse, comparatively, in Canada and Italy, in the years 2016-2023. Canada and Italy are two different geopolitical arenas when it comes to reproduction rights, surrogacy and alternative forms of parenthood. While in Canada altruistic surrogacy is allowed, Italian laws around the use of assisted conception and surrogacy are some of the most restrictive in Europe. The analysis conducted on the Can_SUR corpus and the Ita_SUR corpus was quantitative and qualitative. News coverage of surrogacy and parenthood was analyzed in the Canadian and the Italian press. Recurrent

themes were identified in each corpus, with significant differences between the Canadian and Italian news discourse.

In response to research questions 1 (how are parental experiences and/or parenthood from surrogacy represented in news discourse in Canada and Italy?) and 2 (what are the mainstream/alternative narratives circulating through Canadian and Italian news outlets?), the analysis showed that the Can_SUR corpus is dominated by the theme of medical information and personal accounts of surrogacy. Not much space is devoted to the narrative of intended parenthood. However, when same-sex family stories enter the news, same-sex couples and their babies are usually represented as legitimate, in an oppositional framework that marks the difference between the Canadian law and that of more restrictive countries like Italy. Overall, alternative experiences of parenthood are openly praised and a positive discourse prosody is activated by means of references to discourses of love, affection and nurturing, as well as within the framework of normality and legitimacy. Personalization is the main strategy featuring Canadian news discourse as personal experiences are told by referring to lay people's personal names and details about their intimate life as parents.

In the Ita_SUR corpus, surrogacy and alternative parenthood are represented as political struggles within the legal framework of law and legislation. The analyzed extracts suggested that surrogacy and the recognition of family rights is a political issue also debated in Italian courts, rather than a personal matter. Family roles (e.g. mother, father, parents etc.) do not feature the keyword list retrieved from the Ita_SUR corpus, however parenthood from surrogacy is still covered, although using different discursive strategies compared to the Can_SUR corpus. Parenthood enters the Italian news discourse through impersonalization, therefore as a theme rather than a personal experience that single individuals or couples undergo when choosing surrogacy. The existence of alternative forms of parenthood is still acknowledged in Italian news media discourse by means of references to rainbow families presented as a network or an association within a legal and political framework, therefore as political actors rather than as lay individuals. Impersonalization seems to be preferred to more personalized renditions of surrogacy and parenthood. This may come as an effect of the coverage of surrogacy and alternative parenthood as a political struggle which is still far from being a normalized experience. It could also be hypothesized that, in so doing, the Italian coverage grants rainbow families authority or power, although, as the analysis showed, non-heteronormative families are not represented as active participants in their own struggles.

Overall, in both corpora, alternative forms of parenthood tend to be associated mainly with gay couples experiencing parenthood from surrogacy. Consequently, less space is devoted to lesbian couples, trans couples or other forms of alternative parenthood, and both mainly rely on frameworks of legitimation and opposition. In the Can_SUR Corpus alternative parenthood is represented as legitimate as opposed to other countries like Italy; in the Ita_SUR Corpus, surrogacy and same-sex couples' rights are represented in opposition to discourses of biological kinship and nature. Contrasting political viewpoints emerge from both corpora. However, while Canadian reporters seem to openly align with same-sex couples and their "healthy" experiences of alternative but legitimate parenthood, Italian reporters, especially from *ANSA*, are less explicit about their ideological positioning. It could be argued that the way alternative parenthood is framed in the Can_SUR Corpus is consistent with Le Vay's study (2019) as references to legitimacy, love and care may placate social anxiety in regard to homosexuality and parenthood. As these themes lack in the Ita_SUR Corpus, media

framings of alternative parenthood in Italy still echo the heteronormative framework identified by Landau (2009).

To conclude, we are aware that the present analysis has shown only a partial understanding of how surrogacy and alternative parenthood is treated in Italian and Canadian news discourse. Given the ongoing debate over surrogacy in Italy and the struggles of LGBTQ+ associations, more critical studies addressing the role of the news media in the public perception of non-heteronormative families are necessary. For instance, additional research work is needed in order to examine how the representation of surrogacy and parenthood has changed over time, and the impact that specific discourse themes still have onto the exclusion of LGBTQ+ people from surrogacy and parenthood, in Italy and elsewhere.

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