

*Fertility Holidays: IVF Tourism and the Reproduction of Whiteness.* By Amy Speier. New York: New York University Press, 2016. 167 pp. Notes. Bibliography. Index. Photographs. Table. Paper.

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*Fertility Holidays* by Amy Speier documents the stories of lower-middle class and lower class North American couples who, finding themselves suffering from infertility and unable or unwilling to pay exorbitant amounts for (often repeated) treatment in the United States, travel to the Czech Republic in the hope of conceiving a child there. Fluidly written, Speier's text brings to life the emotional journeys these couples engage with as they attempt to have children. Her brief introduction presents Speier's specific cohort of research participants and her research methods, which included interviews with American patients, Czech doctors and nurses, as well as Czech fertility brokers, surveys of former clients, and participant-observation in and around two Moravian fertility clinics, as well as a solid overview of the key texts and theories in anthropological and sociological research on fertility and assisted reproduction. Then, the book's five central chapters traverse the common pathways that many couples follow in their quest to find success in fertility services.

Chapter one, "From Hope to Alienation: North Americans Enter the Baby Business," considers the central role of hope in driving couples to repeatedly make use of fertility services whose odds of success are low (often less than 30%), but whose potential rewards are considerable—but not always, as Speier convincingly argues, priceless (31). Cash-strapped couples, not uncommonly advised by infertility clinics to remortgage their homes in order to raise funds for continuing treatment, are quickly disillusioned by the American "baby business" and look elsewhere to recoup not only the chance of having a child, but also their sense of dignity and self-worth. Chapter two, "Virtual Communities and Markets," reveals the central role of Internet searches and web forums in introducing American women to the possibilities of travelling overseas for reproductive care. It shows the first steps in building virtual biosocial communities, in which many couples sustain a role even after their reproductive journeys have concluded.

Chapter three, "Intimate Labor within Czech Clinics," examines doctor-patient relations at two Czech infertility clinics, one in Brno and the other in Zlín. Here Speier argues that their newfound financial leverage (i.e. the power of the American dollar in the Czech Republic) often encourages couples to laud the services and care they receive and turn a blind eye to the profit-making tactics that are at play. In reference to how clinics spruce up their facilities and overall image for American consumers, Speier comments that "[f]unding extensive renovations and building of ensuite accommodations is like the claw of capitalist venture that feeds this medical business growth. Yet North Americans, strangely, do not see the profit motives" (100). As Speier later sums up, "As patients interpret Czech doctors and nurses as compassionate, and low prices

as a symbol of their empathy, they will not extend their legitimate critique of the North American ‘baby business’ to the Czech context” (137). Chapter four, “Contradictions of Fertility Holidays,” suggests some of the ambiguities at play as infertile women feel *compelled* to “relax” and have a real “holiday” (109) in the midst of overseas fertility treatments, as stress and worry are widely viewed by both themselves and Czech medical personnel as among possible factors determining their inability to conceive. Chapter five, “Separate but Connected Paths,” looks at the sustained interactions that occur between American couples not only prior to their visit and while in the Czech Republic undergoing treatment, but also once they return home. While some of the American couples who first meet as patients in the Czech clinic remain in contact through public exchanges in internet forums, others create kin-like bonds, staying in regular touch through phone or email and meeting up annually to celebrate their fertility successes. As one participant noted, “... [W]e have a lot in common because of infertility struggles and then having babies at the same time. One of the husbands likes to joke about the fact that our babies were all conceived in the same room on the same day. It makes people’s heads turn, that’s for sure” (140).

Though there is a good deal of humor running throughout the text, taken together, the chapters paint a different portrait, describing desperate couples, driven by not only their own hopefulness, but also the “compulsion” inherent in an industry that states outright, in the words of one Czech fertility clinic coordinator, that “the only people who do not get pregnant are those that stop trying” (137). At the same time as they embrace the American ethic of being responsible for crafting their own (familial) destinies and work hard to have a successful pregnancy or two, these infertility clients embrace not only the chance to have a child, but also to relax and make the most of their overseas holiday, noting that even if they don’t come home with a pregnancy, they will have had a very pleasant experience, being tourists in Europe in the process. Virtual communities both fuel and ameliorate these dynamics, introducing couples to the promising possibilities of overseas IVF while enabling relationships of care and compassion between infertile couples as they embark on their journeys to improve their chances of having a child.

A slim and very accessible volume, this book will be of interest to anthropology, sociology and gender studies undergraduate students who wish to know more about North Americans’ perspectives on infertility treatments and the care they receive both at home and abroad. While its key contribution to medical anthropology is its unique consideration of how fertility treatments in Czech clinics cater to foreigners, this is also an area that Speier could have said more about. Given her wealth of experience working in the Czech health care institutions, in particular health spas in Mariánské Lázně (also widely known as Marienbad), it would have been excellent to see more discussion of the Czech health care context, an accounting of how infertility is viewed in Czech society, and, in particular, to learn more about the experiences of the Czech women who donate eggs to fertility clinics. Perhaps such material will make for a much welcomed follow-up volume. This quibble aside, *Fertility Holidays* is a welcome and notable addition to anthropological and sociological research on East and Central European health care institutions—a fascinating area

that promises many new and important insights into East and Central European culture but that has not yet been adequately explored.