



## **A MARXIST READING OF *LITTLE FIRES EVERYWHERE* (2017) BY CELESTE NG**

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### **Abstract**

This thesis is an analysis of a novel written by Celeste Ng entitled *Little Fires Everywhere* (2017). This analysis looks at the commodification and alienation that is experienced by women who involved in surrogacy and adoption. This analysis employs Marxist literary theory to explain the phenomena in the novel. The analysis focuses on two issues of commodification and alienation that are proposed by Karl Marx as seen through two female protagonists which are Mia Warren and Bebe Chow. This analysis also depends a lot on the narrator to determine which parts of the novel are used as the data. The result of the study shows that Mia Warren experienced commodification of the human body and four kinds of alienation such as alienation from the product of labor, alienation from the act of production, alienation from the species being, and alienation from other people because she becomes a surrogate mother. The other protagonist, Bebe Chow, also experienced four kinds of alienation because her child is adopted.

**Key words:** *surrogacy, adoption, commodification, alienation*

### **A. INTRODUCTION**

Having children can be a source of happiness for many people. Unfortunately, some people cannot have their own biological children. Sometimes, the couples who cannot have children biologically receive the unpleasant treatment from their surroundings. Lasker (2016) states that the involvement of childless couples for leading essential positions in family activities such as birthdays, marriages, and other celebrations involving children is excluded by a few societies. As a result, the pressure to have children becomes more intensive for the childless couple. Then, the childless couple will start to find a way to have children. Surrogacy is one of the ways for couples to have a child that is genetically linked with them. Surrogacy is when a surrogate mother will get pregnant, gestate, and giving birth in a reproductive work agreement between the intending parent and the surrogate mother (United Nation Special, 2018). This

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method allows people to have a child that is connected with them genetically. Even though there is voluntary surrogacy, most surrogacy is commercial in nature. Fronek (2018) states that in South America, Asia, Europe and Africa, women who sell their eggs and become surrogate mothers commonly live in poor conditions. This means that the poor conditions of women make the economy become the reason that often drives the women to be surrogate mothers. In contrast to surrogacy, there are also cases when parents give children for adoption. Then, the children will live with a new family. Couples or individual who want to become parents can also choose adoption. Atwell (1988) said that adoption is a method by which the state seeks to support adequate housing for children whose biological parent cannot give it to them. This means that the child will live with a new family that has a better condition than the biological parents.

Seen from Marxist perspective, surrogacy can lead the surrogate mothers to experience commodification. In Marxist terms, “commodification refers to the process of assigning market value to goods or services that previously existed outside of the market (Marx 1978)” (Constable, 2009, p.50). It means that, according to Resnik (1998), commodification is a social practice for viewing objects as goods or resources that can be purchased, traded or leased. Women’s body can be used as a way to get a child by people in surrogacy. According to Subedi (2015), the surrogate mother is viewed as a tool whose benefit can be turned for money in surrogacy arrangements. It clear that surrogacy can make women experience commodification due to the process when they get paid for their egg, renting their womb, and bear the child. Alienation is also experienced by the surrogate mother in surrogacy. Luk (2010) said that when the product of labor is being separated from the maker is called alienation. This shows that people who produce something will not own the product that they make. In surrogacy, the surrogate mother cannot claim and has a feeling to the baby as her own because the baby belongs to the commissioning parent after the surrogate gives birth. According to Anderson (1990), her labour is alienated, that she has to repress her personal ties to her own child, and she can be altered to redefine these ties in a downplaying way. This means that the surrogate mother should depress toward the child and it shows that she is alienated toward her own child.

In the adoption process, alienation also happens toward the birth parent. When the child already in an adoption, the feeling of rejection by adoptive family or their own child can appear to the birth mother. According to Christensen (2017) that said the birth parent in the background can sense the segregation as though they are not important in their child’s life while they are watching their child be bathed with affection and support by other people. It is clear that the birth mother can only watch her own child from far away and does not have control toward the child. The novel that was written by Celeste Ng entitled *Little Fires Everywhere* (2017) is one of the literary works that exposed the issue about commodification and alienation. The novel shows the life of a protagonist, Mia Warren, that is experienced commodification and alienation in her life because of surrogacy. The novel also shows the life of another protagonist, Bebe Chow, who is experienced alienation because of adoption process toward her child.

## B. RESEARCH METHOD

Research Method fontasi Times New Roman dengan ukuran 12 pt. The analysis of novel *Little Fires Everywhere* (2017) written by Celeste Ng based on Marxist theory such as commodification and alienation. The analysis of this novel is in descriptive way. The data based on the issue about commodification that is experienced by a surrogate mother in surrogacy process. The data also identified based on the issues about alienation that experienced by a surrogate mother in surrogacy process and birth mother in adoption process through the Marxist perspective. The based on preliminary reading of the novel, elements which will be looked closely are narrator, character, and setting. The narrator, third person narrator, helps to narrate the situation that is happened to the characters and also give a clue to the setting.

## C. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This chapter discusses the issue of commodification and alienation experienced by a surrogate mother in surrogacy process and a birth mother in adoption process from the novel *Little Fires Everywhere* (2017) by Celeste Ng. The analysis is structured based on two main female protagonists of the novel who involve in surrogacy and adoption. The first one is Mia Warren, who becomes a surrogate mother. The second protagonist is Bebe Chow, whose daughter is adopted. The analysis also relies heavily on the third person narrator which narrates how events unfold in the novel as well as gives a clue to the setting of the events in the novel.

### 1. Commodification

#### 1.1 Mia Warren

Commodification of the human body is one of the commodification that can be happened to human. The part of the human body can be used to get a benefit. Sharp (2000) said that the research on the donation of organ, acquisition, and transplantation has long been driven by accessible dialogues on body commodification. This shows that human body has a value to be used by people for a benefit. When it comes to reproductive capability, Sharp (2000) said that the particular subject is the women due to their ability in reproductive. Women's bodies like egg and their ability to pregnant or bear a child can be used in a commodification of the body. This kind of commodification look at certain ability that can be found in a person and it can be used to get some money. The protagonist, Mia Warren, is a right candidate to be a surrogate mother for the intending parent. She is offered an expensive fee is she becomes a surrogate mother. It can be seen on the auotation below:

“Instead, the Ryans had decided to take a more old-fashioned route: as old, Joseph pointed out, as the Bible. Sperm from the father, egg from—and carried by—a woman who seemed a suitable match. They had been advertising for months—discreetly, Madeline added—for a surrogate with the right characteristics, and had found no one. And then Joseph Ryan, riding the subway from a lunch



meeting, had spotted an eerily familiar face at the other end of the car, and it had felt like fate.” “Don’t think that we’re entering into this lightly,” Madeline said. “We’ve been thinking about this for a long time. And we’ve been looking for just the right woman.” She tipped the carafe of water and refilled Mia’s glass. “We think that woman is you.”

In her room now, Mia did calculations. Ten thousand dollars, they had offered, to carry a healthy baby for them. They had said this to her as if outlining the terms of a job offer, laying out the benefits package in the most attractive way. “And of course we’d pay for all your medical expenses,” Joseph had added.” (p. 166)

From the quotation above, it can be seen that the protagonist has the ability to be a surrogate mother in the eye of the intending parent. She is a right candidate for the intending parent in a surrogacy process because the protagonist not only can provide the egg for a surrogacy process but also has some similarities with the intending mother. The intending parent managed to attract the interest of the protagonist with the big payment that is given to the protagonist. Through the setting from the quotation above shows that there is a different economic condition between the protagonist and the intending parent because the intending parent is able to pay the protagonist with a big amount of money. The difference situation in economic between the protagonist and the other characters shows the different classes that exist in the novel. The protagonist also does not realize that the intending parent is interested to her because they can use her body to have a baby. The situation on the quotation above is in accordance with Resnik (1998) that said the social practice that views resources or goods can be purchased, traded, or leased is called commodification. The protagonist’s body that is able to give the egg for surrogacy process and she gets paid for it shows the commodification that happened between the protagonist and the intending parent. Furthermore, Sharp (2000) also said that women usually appear as targeted goals for commodification, where its body is mostly respected for its reproductive ability. This shows that the protagonist is respected by the intending parents just for her ability to bear a child. This also shows that the situation of the protagonist is pitiful because she is valued by the intending parent just for the needs of the intending parent.

Another quotation also shows the similarity of the protagonist’s appearance with the intending mother. It can be seen on the quotation below:

“Every time she looked at Madeline Ryan she saw herself; they shared not just the curly dark hair and similar features but some of the same mannerisms: the same tendency to bite their bottom lips, the same absent habit of pulling one curl down, like a spring, to their earlobes and letting it bounce back up. They were not identical—Madeline’s chin was a bit more pointed, her nose a little thinner, her voice deeper, richer, almost throaty—but they looked so similar they could have been mistaken for sisters.” (p. 165)

The quotation above shows that the intending parent is interested with the protagonist not only for the egg but also the appearance of the protagonist that looks alike with the intending mother. The protagonist does not realize her appearance is used by the intending parent to make people think the baby is theirs. This also implied that the intending parent does not want people to know the baby is born from a surrogacy process. The protagonist experiences commodification due to the similarity in characteristics between the protagonist and the intending parent. The similarity between the protagonist and the intending parent that makes the protagonist is suitable to be a surrogate mother. This is in accordance with Sharp (2000) that said genetic capacity for intellect, appearance, etiquette, education, body image, and poise are sought by people. These kinds of characteristics are sought by people in women when they want to find a surrogate mother.

The protagonist is in a difficult situation. She just accepted the offer due to the money that is offered by the intending parent. Her difficulties in financial make her compliant to be a surrogate mother. This can be seen on the quotation below:

“In the end, she told herself it was the math that decided her. The Ryans’ offer was enough to pay for three more terms of school. It would buy her time to earn enough money to pay for the rest. If she did this, she could continue. If she did not, she could not. Put that way, the choice seemed obvious. And she would be doing them a good turn. They were kind, sincere people; she could see that. How badly, she thought, they must want to have a child. She could help them. She would help them. She repeated this to herself, over and over, then lifted the receiver to dial their number.” (p. 170)

The quotation above shows that she is not able to find another way to solve her financial problem. There is only one way for her to solve her problem. The way the narrator portrays how the protagonist finally accepts the offer shows that there is commodification happens. According to Knop (2006), “A further definition of a commodity states that: ‘When one commodity is exchanged for another, on average, in the given society in which the exchange takes place, the two commodities exchanged for one another are of equal value’” (p. 2). The exchange between the protagonist and the intending parent has equal value. The protagonist needs money while the intending parent needs the egg and the protagonist’s body to bear the baby for them. The protagonist is brave enough to be a surrogate mother to solve her problem even though it might be risky for her life. This shows that financial problems become the main reason that makes her brave enough to do the offer. She does not think about the situation that happened during the process of becoming a surrogate mother or the bad effect that might come to her.

The protagonist follows the requirements that the intending parent sought for her. Her body and health become the main priority by the intending parent for a healthy surrogate mother. This can be seen on the quotation below:

“Three weeks later, she was leaving an obstetrician with a letter certifying her good health, her freedom from contagious diseases, and her properly configured

anatomy. “Perfect baby-birthing hips,” he had joked as she’d pulled her feet from the stirrups. “Everything in there looks fine. If you want to get pregnant, you shouldn’t have any trouble.” (p. 171)

The quotation above shows that the protagonist is prepared by the intending to be in a good condition as a surrogate mother. She is obedient to do all the requirements that are prepared by the intending parent. She is not hesitant to do all of that. This condition that happens toward the protagonist is in accordance with Sharp (2000) that said women usually appear as targeted goals for commodification, where its body is mostly respected for its reproductive ability. The protagonist does not realize that the intending parent only prepared the health of her body just for the baby that is conceived by her. Her worth is only to conceive the baby for the intending parent.

## **2. Alienation**

The protagonist, Mia Warren, experienced alienation because she becomes a surrogate mother. She becomes a surrogate mother for a wealthy couple. The other protagonist that experienced alienation is Bebe Chow. Bebe Chow has a baby but the baby gets adopted. The people who adopts her child has a more secure financial situation than her. She is alienated toward her own baby due to this adoption.

### **2.1 Mia Warren**

#### **1. Alienation from the product of labor**

The protagonists, Mia Warren, must give the baby to the intending parent after she gives birth. She cannot claim the child that is carried by her. This can be seen on the quotation below:

“I’m a surrogate. I’m carrying it for this couple.” Mia found herself trying to explain: about the Ryans, about how kind they were, how much they wanted a baby, how happy they would be. She tried to focus on how much she was helping them, as if this were a charitable deed, purely altruistic: like volunteering at a soup kitchen, or adopting a dog from a shelter. But her mother understood immediately. “These Ryans,” she said. “I suppose you’re doing this for them just out of the goodness of your heart?” “No,” Mia admitted. “They’re paying me. When the baby is born.” (p. 175)

The quotation above shows that the protagonist cannot have a relationship after the baby is born. The baby does not belong to her even though she is carried and give birth to the baby. This condition is in accordance with Shah (2015) that said when a person makes an item by virtue of his labor, the item is in dispute with itself. The protagonist relation with the baby will end up after she receives the money that is offered by the intending parent. She just works for the intending parent. The quotation also shows that the protagonist is not steadfast enough to give the baby for the sake of money. The protagonist is a hypocrite person because she cannot be honest to her parents about her reason to be a surrogate mother at the beginning.

The protagonist, Mia Warren, run away from the intending parent. However, she cannot be free from her work as a surrogate mother. This can be seen on the quotation below:

“she sat down with a pen and a piece of paper. She’d been thinking about what to say all the long drive from Pittsburgh, and in the end, she’d decided to lie. “There is no easy way to say this,” she wrote. “I lost the baby. I’m so ashamed and so sorry. You don’t owe me anything from our agreement, but I feel I owe you. Here is money to pay you back for the medical appointments. I hope it’s enough—it’s all I can spare.” (p. 177).

A few weeks after Mia had left, a lawyer had phoned the Wrights, asking if they had a way to get in touch with her. “He sent us a card,” Mrs. Wright remembered. “In case she ever sent us her address. But we never heard from her again.” She dabbed at the corner of her eye again with a tissue. (p. 183).

The quotation above shows that the protagonist cannot be separated from her responsibility. She must finish her work with the intending parent. The way the intending parents try to find her using a lawyer shows that she breaks the agreement with the intending parent. Her action that is to run away with the baby cannot stop the alienation between her and the baby. This is in accordance with Shah (2015) that said when a person makes an item by virtue of his labor the item is in dispute with itself.

After years, the protagonist's decision to run away is still wrong and it makes her might face the law. The intending parents still trying to find her. It can be seen on the quotation below:

“Hello,” Mrs. Richardson began. “I’m calling regarding a case Mr. Riley was working on quite some time ago.” She paused, thinking quickly. “I have some information that my client thinks may be relevant. But before I pass along any information, I wanted to be sure Mr. Riley is still representing the Ryans. As you can imagine, this information is rather sensitive.” The secretary paused. “Which case did you say you were involved with?” “The Ryans. The information I have regards a Mia Wright.” There was the sound of a drawer opening and a rustling of files. Mrs. Richardson held her breath. “Here we are. Joseph and Madeline Ryan. Yes, Mr. Riley is still on retainer for them, though”—she paused—“this file hasn’t been active in quite some time. But Mr. Riley is in the office currently and I’d be happy to put you through to him. What did you say your name was?” Mrs. Richardson hung up. Her heart was pounding. (p. 184)



The quotation above shows that the protagonist, Mia Warren, is not ready to cut her ties with the baby that is carried by her. She is not responsible to be a surrogate mother. Her responsibility to give the baby for the intending parents should be finished by her. The protagonist's action that is run away with the baby is wrong. The intending parent that is tried to find her by using a lawyer shows that the protagonist is alienated toward her own child. This is in accordance with what Karl Marx said that cited in Fromm (2004), "The object produced by labor, its product, now stands opposed to it as an alien being, as a power independent of the producer." The baby is no longer for the protagonist. She does not have any right to keep the baby because she must give the baby to the intending parent. The situation that happened toward the protagonist is pitiful because she cannot escape from her responsibility as a surrogate mother.

## 2. Alienation from the act of production

The protagonist, Mia Warren, does not feel happy with the work that she does. This can be seen on the quotation below:

"It'll take a while," Madeline said as July came to a close. For four months now, no luck. "We always knew this. It doesn't happen right away." But Mia was worried. According to the contract they'd signed, the Ryans were free to call off the agreement after six months if no pregnancy resulted. She had kept her jobs at the diner and the bar and the art store—and had dodged questions from her fellow students, back from their summers off, buying supplies for the new term, wondering why she wasn't coming back. "I'm taking a year off to earn money," she'd said, which was true, and what she had told Pauline and Mal when, tactfully, they'd hinted at offering her a loan she was too proud to accept. But she knew, too, that if no baby arrived, she would get nothing, and she would have dropped the entire year for nothing, and her leave of absence would likely become permanent." (p. 171)

From the quotation above, it can be seen that the protagonist is anxious about the result of her work. She does not want to lose everything that is sacrificed by her. In this agreement, she is the one who is at the most disadvantage. The protagonist is working under an agreement that makes her have a heavy thought. This is in accordance with Marx, cited in Fromm (2004), that said "the act of production is viewed "as something alien and not belonging to him, activity as suffering (passivity), strength as powerlessness, creation as emasculation". The protagonist does not have any power to get a good deal if there is no baby coming. She just follows the agreement that is offered by the intending parents. This shows that the protagonist does not think enough about her works and not make herself prepared about bad possibility that might be happened.

The protagonist, Mia Warren, must repress her own feeling toward the baby that is carried by her. It can be seen on the quotation below:

"In a few months the baby would be born, she would go back to her old life, and things would be as they had been. "Don't



get attached,” she said to her belly when the baby nudged her with a foot. It was never clear to her, even then, whether she was speaking to the baby, or to her belly, or to herself.” (p. 172)

The quotation above shows that the protagonist cannot have a feeling like a normal mother to her child. She tries hard to repress her feeling. She struggles to not make any connection to the baby in her belly. She denies the feeling that appears toward the baby. According to Shah (2015), an individual starts to doubt his own existence, and does not state himself that this triggers self-destruction, the individual is unhappy, dissatisfied, and sad and he is unwilling to nourish or improve his mental strength or physical ability. The condition of the protagonist that repress her feeling toward the baby shows that she is unhappy. It is difficult for a mother to negate her feeling toward her own baby. This shows that she is not ready to remove her own feeling for the baby.

### 3. Alienation from the species being

The protagonist, Mia Warren, is supervised by the intending parent. This can be seen on the quotation below:

“Weeks passed. The Ryans moved her to a little studio apartment they owned, a quiet walk-up just off West End Avenue. “We rent it out but the tenants just left,” Madelinesaid to Mia. “Quieter for you. More space. Fewer people coming and going. And you’ll be so much closer to us, for when things start happening.” Mia quit her job at the art store—her belly was starting to show—but kept her other jobs, though she allowed the Ryans to linger under the impression that she had stopped working.” (p. 172)

The quotation above shows that the protagonist cannot get a freedom. Her life is watched by the intending parent. She is not able to do other activities as she wants. She cannot refuse the decision that is made by the intending parent for her. She has no power to say her own opinion about the intending parent’s decision. This is in accordance with Shah (2015) that explained the expression of the important nature of a man is making of anything freely and he is estranged from his community when his work activity is diminished to an animal or mechanical role of estranged work. The protagonist cannot do her work freely. She just obeys what the intending parent wants. She is not able to gain the trust of the intending parent.

### 4. Alienation from other people

The relationship of the protagonist and other people around her becomes deteriorated. This can be seen on the quotation below:

“But don’t you think it’s going to be hard to give it up?” Warren asked. “I don’t think I could do it.”  
“Well, you’re not the one doing it, are you.”  
“Don’t get pissy with me,” Warren said. “If you’d asked me, I’d have told you not to.”

“Just don’t tell Mom and Dad,” Mia said again. “I won’t,” Warren said at last. “But I’ll tell you this. I’m the baby’s uncle, and I don’t like it.” There was an anger in his voice she had never heard before, at least not directed at her.” (p. 172)

The quotation above shows that the protagonist, Mia Warren, only thinking about herself. She only thinks about how to solve her own problem but she does not think about the feelings of the people that care to her. She is selfish toward herself because she thinks she can do it by herself and not asking her family opinion. There is a disappointment of her brother toward her. She is not able to give a proper explanation for her decision to be a surrogate mother to her brother.

The protagonist’s parent is disappointed to her. This can be seen on the quotation below:

“Mia glanced at her father. She felt exactly as she had as a child, when she’d broken something or ruined something or spent on film the money that her mother had meant for clothes: in those moments her mother would rage and scream and run to her room, leaving Mia with her father, who would squeeze her hand and let the quiet lap over them like milk, then say quietly, “Buy a new one,” or “Give her an hour, and go apologize,” or sometimes, simply, “Fix it.” This was how they’d always fought. But this time her father did not take her hand. He did not say to her, Fix it. Instead he looked at her belly, as if he couldn’t bear to look at her face. His eyes were wet and his jaw clenched. “Dad?” she said at last. She would have preferred shouting to this protracted, knife-sharp silence. “I can’t believe you’d sell your own child,” he said, and then he, too, left the room.” (p. 175 )

From the quotation above, it can be seen that Mia Warren is not honest toward her own parent. She is buried in her own problem and does not ask her family to help her. She takes a heavy decision that is not approved by her father. The protagonist does not think enough about the effect in her family that is appeared because of her decision. The protagonist’s relationship with her father is ripped off. She cannot realize that her decision to get money by being a surrogate mother is wrong in her family view. The protagonist relationship with her brother and parents that are being ripped off shows that she is alienated from her own family. This is in accordance with Shah (2015) that said the sudden impact of man’s alienation from his work influence the life of a man and his associated activities and the man feels estrangement from his own being, family member, and colleagues. Her choice to accept the work as a surrogate mother has a bad effect towards her relationship with her own family.

The protagonist has a connection only about her work with the intending parent. This can be seen on the quotation below:

“Mia thought of the tray still sitting in the guest room, of Madeline rinsing the baster and the cup in the kitchen sink, readying them for their next use. “Of course,” she said. “Of course.” She was quiet all through the ride back to the Village, as Joseph Ryan chattered to her about how he and Madeline had met, where he’d grown up, the things they had planned for their child.” (p. 171)

The quotation above shows that the protagonist’s relation with the intending parent only about her work as a surrogate. The intending parent only cares about the baby that is carried by the protagonist. They are not thinking about the future of the protagonist’s life. Instead, they are just thinking about the future of the baby that will be born. There is a selfishness of the intending parent. They are not prepared about the protagonist’s life after she gives the baby to them. The protagonist cannot say her opinion about this. She has no power toward the intending parent because she get paid by them. This is in accordance with Christ (2015) that said the interaction between humans and goods, the creating of goods, and other human beings are self-reproducing. This shows that the relationship between the protagonist and the intending parent is all about the baby.

## 2.2 Bebe Chow

### 1. Alienation from the product of labor

The other protagonist, Bebe Chow, also experienced the alienation from the product of labor. She cannot meet her child that is adopted by a wealthy couple. This can be seen on the quotation below. This can be seen on the quotation below:

“The rest of the story poured out haltingly, as if Bebe were only now piecing the scene together herself. Sometime later a Lexus had pulled up, with a police car right behind it, and Mr. McCullough had emerged. He had told Bebe to leave the property, two police officers flanking him like bodyguards. Bebe had tried to tell them she only wanted to see her baby, but wasn’t sure now what she had said, if she had argued or threatened or raged or begged. All she could remember was the line Mr. McCullough kept repeating—“You have no right to be here. You have no right to be here”—and finally one of the officers took her by the arm and pulled her away. Go, they had said, or they would take her down to the station and charge her with trespassing. This she recalled clearly: as the policemen pulled her away from the house, she could hear her child crying from behind the locked front door.” (p. 96)

The quotation above shows that the protagonist does not have any power towards the adoptive parent. She is prohibited to meet her child as if she is not important in her child life. The protagonist also receives an unpleasant action that is done by the adoptive parent toward her. The protagonist cannot defend herself from the unpleasant treatment that she gets. This shows that there is a different power status between the protagonist and the adoptive parent. The protagonist condition is in

accordance with what Karl Marx said, “The object produced by labor, its product, now stands opposed to it as an alien being, as a power independent of the producer.”(cited in Fromm, p. 39, 2004). It is difficult for the protagonist to meet her own child as if her child is not hers anymore. The setting is in the adoptive parent’s house and the situation that happened toward the protagonist is chaos. This because she cannot protect herself from the unpleasant treatment that she gets from the adoptive parent.

## 2. Alienation from the act of production

The protagonist, Bebe Chow, struggles to keep her mind stable. This can be seen on the quotation below:

“Under the stress of the impending hearing, with news crews filming outside the restaurant one day and a journalist stopping her on the street to shove a microphone into her face the next, with a story about the case out every other day, it felt like, and her boss grumbling about the time she’d have to take off for the hearing—she had given in to junk food cravings: Oreos, French fries, once an entire bag of pork rinds, ballooning up fifteen pounds in a month. She’d put in extra hours to make up for the time she’d be taking off, working until two or three on the nights she closed and arriving at nine to open the next morning. That time, in her memory, existed only as a blur. And then she’d gotten food poisoning—a box of leftovers that had sat too long in the fridge—and thrown up right in the library, in front of the social worker. She hadn’t been able to eat for days afterward, and when she recovered, she found that, with the hearing mere weeks away, she was too nervous to eat. By the time the hearing began she had lost the extra fifteen pounds plus ten more.” (p. 217)

From the quotation above, it can be seen that the situation of the protagonist is pathetic. The protagonist is under pressure. She is not able to keep her mental stable. She is too anxious about the adoption process of her child. The situation is hard for her to face the final decision about her child adoption. This is in accordance with Shah (2015) that said an individual starts to doubt his own existence and does not state himself that this triggers self-destruction, the individual is unhappy, dissatisfied, and sad and he is unwilling to nourish or improve his mental strength or physical ability. The protagonist found its difficult to keep her mental health healthy. She is not able to keep her mind strong and it leads her to a self-destruction.

## 3. Alienation from the species being

The protagonist, Bebe Chow, is excluded in the process of adoption. This can be seen from the quotation below.

“She had gone over the very next day to meet the baby and in between cooing over the child heard Linda recount the story—how she’d gotten the call and had driven directly to Babies “R” Us, buying everything from a complete wardrobe to a crib to six months’ supply of diapers. “Maxed



out the Visa,” Linda McCullough had said with a laugh. “Mark was still putting the crib together when the social worker pulled up with her. But look at her. Just look at her. Can you believe this?” She had bent over the infant cradled against her, with a look of pure astonishment. That had been ten months earlier, and the adoption process was well underway now. They hoped to have it finalized in a month or two, Mrs. McCullough told Mrs. Richardson as she handed her a mimosa.” (p. 87)

The quotation above shows that the protagonist does not get any chance in the process of adoption toward her own child. She does not know who is the person that adopts her child and where they bring her child. The protagonist does not meet the people who adopt her child. The people who make the child get adopted by other family does not include her in the process of adoption. The way the narrator describes the story shows that the protagonist position as a mother is not important anymore in her child life. This is in accordance with Karl Marx that said "a means for his individual existence. It [alienated labor] alienates from man his own body, external nature, his mental life, and his human life." (cited in Fromm, p. 43, 2004). As a human and a mother, the protagonist does not get a part or any information about the adoption process toward her own child.

#### 4. Alienation from other people

The protagonist, Bebe Chow, receives unpleasant treatment from other people. This can be seen on the quotation below.

“Was that—Mirabelle’s mother?” Lexie asked, when Mia had hung up the phone. To her embarrassment, she could not remember the baby’s birth name. “She’s a friend of mine.” Mia settled herself back at the table and Lexie pulled up a chair alongside her. “There was an article today in the paper that said some unkind things about her. It suggested she was an unfit mother.” She glanced at Lexie. “Maybe you knew that already. With your father representing the McCulloughs, of course.” (p. 103)

From the quotation above it can be seen that the protagonist social relations become unsteady. She cannot protect herself from the bad things that are told by people. She is not capable enough to keep her honor. This shows that people think negatively toward her. This is in accordance with Shah (2015) that said the sudden impact of man’s alienation from his work influence the life of a man and his associated activities and the man feels estrangement from his own being, family member, and colleagues.

## D. CONCLUSION

This analysis looks at the commodification and alienation experienced by mothers in surrogacy and adoption processes from the novel entitled *Little Fires Everywhere* (2017) by Celeste Ng. This analysis is analyzed with the concept of Marxist theory such as commodification and alienation by Karl Marx. The

commodification in this analysis refers to the commodification of the human body that is experienced by the protagonist in a surrogacy process. This analysis also shows that there are four types of alienation such as alienation from the product of labor, alienation from the act of production, alienation from the species being and alienation from other people experienced by both of the protagonists.

Through this analysis, it can be seen that the economic problem becomes the main reason for someone to involve in a surrogacy process. This analysis also shows that women often experienced commodification than men due to the ability on their body in the reproductive part. When a woman is involved in a surrogacy process, she also experienced alienation. The protagonist in this novel has a financial problem that makes her becomes a surrogate mother for a wealthy couple. She experienced commodification because she gets paid for her egg and bears the baby for the intending parent. She also experienced four kinds of alienation. The alienation that is experienced by her makes her alienated toward her own child, repress her own feeling toward the baby, supervised by the intending parent and her relationship with her family becomes deteriorated. The economic condition can also make someone lose parental rights due to an adoption process. The other protagonist has a baby who gets adopted by other people who has a secure financial condition than her. This situation makes her experienced alienation such as prohibited to meet her own child, she is excluded in the process of adoption, she feels under pressure, and her social relations become unsteady.

In conclusion, it can be inferred that the different financial condition make the commodification and alienation experienced by the protagonists. The financial condition of both protagonists shows that there is different social classes exist in the novel. The literary elements such as characters, setting, and the narrator helps to unfold the events in the novel.

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