



## Adoptions and their sociological context

The knowledge that we currently have in Spain about adoptions comes basically from the findings presented by disciplines such as anthropology, psychology, law and medicine. The fact that the phenomenon of international adoptions is very recent has caused initial research to focus on evaluating its impact on behaviour, adaptation, integration and identity, as well as studying the particularities with regards to medical care in adopted children. However, in spite of the great impact and social importance that adoptions have acquired in Spain for the last

decades, the sociological research still needs to develop in this line. With a double purpose of, on the one hand, broadening and complementing the knowledge that has been provided by other knowledge areas and, on the other hand, approach the sociological analysis of adoptive families in Spain, the University of Alicante conducted the following study: "*El (baby) boom de las adopciones internacionales en España. Una investigación sociológica de las familias adoptivas y sus estilos de vida.*" (*The (Baby) Boom of International Adoptions in Spain. A Sociological*

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*Research of Adoptive Families and Their Life Style*). The project was funded by Ministerio de Ciencia e Innovación (I+D+i 2008-2011) and is included in the multidisciplinary work which is coordinated by the researcher Diana Marre in an inter-university project “*Domestic and International Adoption: Family, Education and Belonging from Multidisciplinary and Comparative Perspectives*” (I+d+i 2008-2011).

This sociological research sought to describe new family realities which are present in our society. With this objective, the researchers adopted one of the most characteristic sociological data collection techniques: the structured questionnaire. The *ad hoc* survey “*Adoptive families and their life style*” was structured on six themed? Sections, which looked into the characteristics of mothers, fathers and adopted children as well as other sociologically relevant aspects in the study of the family and its dynamics. We assumed that adoptive families are very hetero-

geneous from the point of view of their access routes and, as a consequence, also from the perspective of their experiences and challenges. The questionnaire was distributed *online* and included the collaboration of nineteen associations of adoptive families. From their respective websites, distribution lists, blogs and social networks, they spread the research project, which allowed 230 parents who had adopted internationally to complete the whole questionnaire. We owe a lot to associations of adoptive families and parents who took part in the research. Without their participation, it would have not been possible to progress in the sociological approach to adoption and, especially, in the study of adoptive families.

The analysis and reflections that are presented point to new hypotheses for future work. The data obtained does not come from a representative sample of the universe of adoptive families. This prevents the generalisa-



tion of the results to the whole Spanish adoptive families. Therefore, we apply an exploratory approach to evaluate the findings as general tendencies.

### **Adoptions in the world of the “normal ones”**

Although a bit later than the rest of Europe, the institution of the family in Spain has experienced a strong transformation both in structure and processes of creation and functioning. From sociology, this change can be ex-

plained from the process of individualization that takes part in the most advanced societies. This refers to the greater importance that society gives to individual opinions and decisions in some environments such as the family. However, as the individual behaviour takes place in social contexts, the



growing autonomy that individual biographies are acquiring wouldn't have had their own space if Spanish society hadn't accepted the consequences of individual decisions, that is, if they hadn't accepted what in specialised texts is called "new family forms." The case of adoptive families can be used as an example of this thesis. Adoption, as a form of filiation, is not new. What is new is the visibility that it has nowadays, which is a consequence of a greater social tolerance towards behaviours that "deviate" from the "normal" family model: one built on heterosexual alliance, consanguineous filiations and racial homogeneity.

The path of social acceptance towards "new family forms" started with the loss of the importance of marriage leading to divorce and, as a consequence, also to assembled or reconstructed families and single-parent families. Nowadays, the adoptive filiation draws a new path, which is based on the loss of importance of

consanguineous descendants in processes of individual and familiar identity construction. In Spain, 70% of the population can imagine themselves as potentially adoption in the future, compared to only 2.6% that declares never to adopt a child from another country. However, studies that addressed adoption with regards to social attitudes and the impact on the adoptive families have highlighted its stigmatized character. From the discipline of sociology, the opposition between social attitudes and behaviour towards adoption raises some questions: Does the high positive evaluation that Spanish society declares regarding adoption reproduce concepts of social desirability? Is our expressed attitude towards adoption the "politically correct" option? Are we reluctant to publically penalise adoption, as well as we would never publically accept racist or xenophobic reactions? And, after all, how do opinions affect parents and children in adoptive families, since they have

done something considered “out of the ordinary”?

The North American sociologist Erving Goffman offered in his book *Stigma* (2010 [1963]) some theoretical keys that we can use to approach the social dimension of adoptive families. From the Goffmanian tradition, the term *stigma* is applied to express a discredited attribute (which is manifest and known) or a discreditable one (which is hidden and unknown). From the identification of the stigma symbols, an ideology is built, which not only accounts for the social inferiority of those who carry them but also is used to justify their rejection in the interactions of everyday life. Following Goffman, in contexts of a common social interaction, the “normal” people are those who conform to the relevant social expectations. Adoptive families and their protagonists would belong to the world of the “abnormal”, since they have distanced themselves from the model of a “normal” family.

### Perceptions of Spanish adoptive families

The hegemony in Western culture of a system of kinship defined by the ideology of the genetic family (biological and *natural*) leads to the fact that any form of family that is not constituted through consanguineous links has been defined as “abnormal” by society. The experiences of adoptive families is considered to be not be as good, real or true as those of the biological families, because society identifies the biological link as a previous condition for a “true” union and loving filial relationship. That is why adoptive families are considered “second-rate families” or the “last resource” when it becomes impossible to have biological children. Adoption lacks the social legitimacy that consanguinity provides.

The survey ‘*Adoptive families and their lifestyle*’ examined the perception that adoptive parents have regarding



the social status of their model of family in relation to the social norm. The study asked whether Spanish adoptive families perceive themselves as “abnormal” – and, as a consequence, stigmatised – or whether the recent appearance of the adoptive family in a postmodern context of family culture places it on the same level as the other “new family models,” thus protecting it from stigma.



I. The daily routine of adoptive families is delimited by the perception that their families belong to an inferior status. 54.3% agree that their family is judged as a “less satisfactory alternative”, which can contribute to the perception that their families are not “real.” In addition,

in a complementary way, 37.9% feel that their adopted children are socially valued as “second-rate children.”

II. Adoptive parents confront the conception of biological family, from which the feeling of a “genuine” and “true” maternity creating an unbreakable blood union that links mothers and biological children is socially constructed. 29.1% declares that people not related to adoption believe that adoptive parents have a weaker “instinct” to look after and bring up their children efficiently.

III. With the objective to explore the dimension of stigmatisation of the adoptive family, the respondents were asked to identify the reasons of people who maintain that they will never adopt. The reason that reached the highest consensus is the one related to the social belief that the union and love of an adopted child aren’t so “genuine”

because of the absence of blood ties. This is the opinion of 57.2% of the respondents.

IV. When adoptive parents informed others about their idea to start an adoption process, they received a lot of support. The majority of objections came from the future grandparents of the adopted children and the main argument for their rejection (with a 38.9%) was disappointment of not having a blood child.

V. According to the adoptive parents who participated in the survey, the media doesn’t portray the reality of adoptive families accurately. 51.5% thinks that, in general, the media distorts the reality of the adoptive family.

Since adoption is detached from the social norm of biological reproduction, it becomes for both parents and children a potential mark of inferiority? that is difficult to hide when the process involves children with origins

in other countries. In these cases, in a common social exchange context, the people involved are exposed to informal sanctions that remind them of the “abnormality” of the situation, following Goffman’s principles. The expressed reflections highlight the need to observe the impact that society has on the processes of adaption and integration in adoptive families.

## REFLECTIONS

On the 30<sup>th</sup> April, the French National Assembly passed a law that provides equal protection to same-sex marriage as heterosexual marriages. In addition, the law that legislates same-sex marriage also legitimates adoption by gays and lesbians. France becomes the 14<sup>th</sup> country in the world to recognise family rights to homosexual couples. The passing of the law has inspired polemics both inside and outside the French Parliament. The agreement was reached after 136 hours and 56 minutes of debate, which has only helped the left-wing absolute majority to keep an electoral promise. In fact, the opposition has already appealed the legal text to the Constitutional Council. In the streets, there has been an intense protest. Protests and demonstrations have accompanied the parliamentary debate, thus providing us with the opportunity to observe how “normal people” apply several discriminating strategies that restrict in everyday life the choices and rights of the people who transgress the borders of the norm. In France, like in the majority of countries that have already put on the same





level as the rest the rights of gays and lesbians, protests have been focused on the rights of homosexuals to adopt. The media has transmitted the ideology behind the opposition, which could be summarised as: "adoption from homosexual couples is un-natural". The international reaction to the passing of homosexual marriage was immediate. Among congratulations and recognition of the progress in the rights of French society, Vladimir Putin, President of Russia, has declared that he will find a way to modify the agreement regulating the process of adoption of Russian children from French families by exposing that the law of same-sex

marriage goes against traditional Russian values: "We respect our partners, but we ask them to respect our cultural traditions and the ethical, legislative and moral norms of Russia." It is a declaration of principles that, obviously, has nothing to do with the post-modern trend in the culture of family that is underway in Western Europe..

## INTERESTING LINKS

[Centro de Investigaciones Sociológicas](#)

[Evan B. Donaldson Adoption Institute](#)

[Research Group 'Población Medio Ambiente y Desarrollo'](#). (Universidad de Alicante, Spain).

## FURTHER READING



Beck, U.; Beck-Gernsheim, E. 2012  
***Amor a distancia: Nuevas formas de la vida en la era de la globalización***  
 Barcelona: Paidós

In 2012, one of the last books of the sociologists Ulrich Beck y Elisabeth Beck-Gernsheim was translated into Spanish: *Distant Love*. Although the authors don't include the adoption of a child from another country among the several contexts and circumstances that they collect in order to give examples of their thesis of a "global family", it does include interesting reflections on strategies that adoptive parents activate in contexts of social interaction. Difference and normality are two aspects that interact in their narrative. However, as these authors point out, it is a constant in the narrative of couples of different nationalities. Beck and Beck-Gernsheim present statements such as "we are not different" act like a defensive wall, as a protection from intolerance, critical views and prejudices which question their normality in the society.



Goffman, E. 2010[1963]  
***Estigma: La identidad deteriorada***  
 Buenos Aires: Amorrortu

Society establishes the ways to categorize people and their natural attributes. When we are facing a stranger, the first look allows us to classify the person into a category and guess their "social identity". The person might show an attribute that separates them from the others and makes them less appealing. At this point we can't see the person as someone "normal" anymore, the person becomes underrated. Such an attribute is a stigma, especially when this causes a discredit. The familiarity of Goffman with the world of the "abnormal" from the boarding school, as well as his studying of the social game (which can be seen in *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*), get together in his third book: a psycho-social study of the "abnormal", the ones who carry the differentiating mark of the stigma.



Winterson, J. 2012  
***¿Por qué ser feliz cuando puedes ser normal?***  
 Barcelona: Lumen

"Why be happy when you could be normal?", Mrs Winterson asked to her daughter Jeanette when she confessed to have fallen in love with a girl at the age of 16.

Strange question, but what else could you expect from a woman who had adopted a daughter to have an ally in her religious mission and, instead, had to deal with a strange being who asked for her portion of happiness? With two sets of false teeth and a gun hidden under the kitchen towels, Mrs Winterson tried her best to discipline Jeanette: books were prohibited at home, friends were badly considered, kisses and hugs were extravagant and any flaw would be punished with entire nights outdoors. Everything was useless. The ginger girl who looked like the daughter of the devil rebelled by seeking pleasure in the skin of other women and finding novels and poems in the library that would help her grow. Much more than this is what you can find in the pages of this outstanding book, where happiness and anger go together.

## FURTHER VIEWING

**Comme les autres**

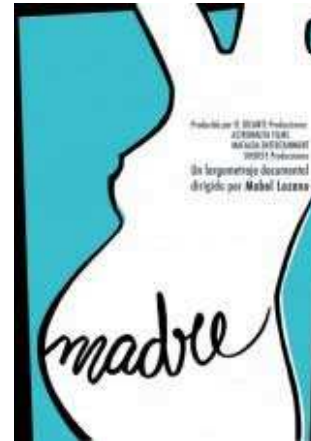
Garenq, V.  
France 2008, 98 min.

Love and life are perfect... Or, almost: Emmanuel wants a baby, Philippe doesn't. However, one day Emmanuel decides to take things in hand, even if it means he'll lose Philippe. But how do you go about having a baby when you're a gay guy?

**Relative Strangers**  
(Relative Strangers)

Glienna, G.  
USA 2006, 86 min.

Love and life are perfect... Or, almost: Emmanuel wants a baby, Philippe doesn't. However, one day Emmanuel decides to take things in hand, even if it means he'll lose Philippe. But how do you go about having a baby when you're a gay guy?

**Madre**

Lozano, M.  
Spain 2012, 81 min.

The film follows the gestation process of five women of different regions in Spain, different social context and origins with the objective to show the different physical and emotional changes, the everyday life and the extraordinary moments of a woman during pregnancy. The film is a vindication of the difference in maternity, since every mother is a unique and different vital project.

**The big wedding**

Zackham, J.  
USA 2013, 90 min.

Because of the wedding of the adopted son Alejandro (Ben Barnes) with Missy (Amanda Syfried), Ellie Griffin (Diane Keaton) has to go back home 10 years after her ex-husband Don (Robert De Niro) deceived her with her best friend Bebe (Susan Sarandon), with which they have a relationship ever since. However, when Alejandro tell them that his biological mother (Patricia Rae) will be attending the wedding and that her religious beliefs don't accept divorce, Ellie and Don will be forced to pretend to a happy married couple and Bebe will have to disappear.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR OF THE TEXTS

### María José Rodríguez Jaume

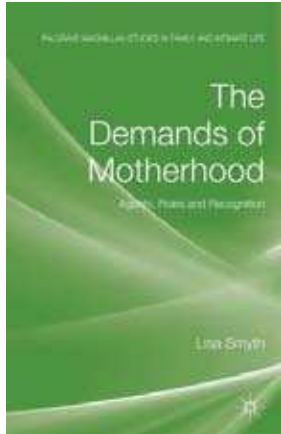
María José Rodríguez Jaume received her undergraduate degree in Sociology from the University of Alicante. In 2000 she obtained the degree of Doctorate. Since 2007, she has been working as a Professor at the University of Alicante, where she teaches in the area of population sociology and, especially, in the areas of population theory, demographic analysis, family and childhood. She is a professor in the PhD programme of the Faculty of Social Sciences at the University of Buenos Aires (Argentina), where she tackles issues related to the sociology of the family. In 2005, she created the research group of the University of Alicante "Población, Medio Ambiente y Desarrollo". She is currently its coordinator and is developing two research lines: maternities and transnational families, as well as international adoptions and adoptive families in Spain. She is the chief researcher of the project: "El (baby) boom de las adopciones internacionales en España. Una investigación sociológica de las familias adoptivas y sus estilos de vida (I+D+i, CSO2009-14763-C03-03)." (*The (Baby) Boom of International Adoptions in Spain. A Sociological Research of Adoptive Families and Their Life Style*). She has participated with several contributions to conferences and seminars. Some of her publications are: "Las transiciones demográficas en la segunda modernidad" (2012); "Proyecto migratorio y familia transnacional: las argentinas en España (2012)"; "Matrimonios del mismo sexo y su impacto demográfico" (2009); "Mayores y envejecimiento" (2009); "Familia, hogar y cambio social en España" (2008); "Hogares y Familia" (2008); y "Crispación social y violencia en los entornos familiares" (2008).

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR OF THE IMAGES

### Tania Lázaro

"I've always been interested in body, but a woman's body which I could feel identified with in order to explore my inside. In all previous works I always represented myself, I did not want other bodies, but in the end neither is it so important. No matter who I paint, they are not portraits, I am not interested in people behind them. They are anonymous subjects anyone could feel –or could not feel identified with and which I identify myself. In purple, blue and red backgrounds, bodies without heads emerge, with framings that are out of the box; rounded breasts and hips, torsos slightly deformed, showing themselves to the viewer. Pain? What is not pain? Solitude? What is not solitude? A way of being? Without being, a change that shows itself in the evolution of my work".

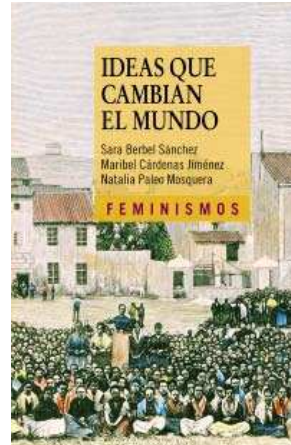
## NEW BOOKS



Smyth, L. (2012)  
***The Demands of Motherhood: Agents, Roles and Recognition***  
 Basingstoke:  
 Palgrave Macmillan

Motherhood is the focus of much public scrutiny, situated as it seems to be at the frontier of processes of social order and change. Much has been written about the difficulties of mothering in a context of ever-expanding expert advice, as well as apparently increasing expectations that the mother-child bond be cultivated through intensive care-giving.

This study returns to neglected sociological questions concerning the connections between agency and normative complexity, through the pragmatist interpretation it offers of the recognition dynamics shaping this deeply contested and emotionally fraught role.



Cárdenas, M.; Berbel, S.; y Paleo, N. (2013)  
*Ideas que cambian el mundo: Una mirada desde la izquierda feminista*  
 Madrid: Cátedra

Contradicting postmodernism that praises the end of ideologies, this book supports the validity of the ideas which transformed Western societies and led them to unexpected rates of equality, freedom and social justice. It recovers these ideologies from the voices of women who from the 18<sup>th</sup> Century organised themselves collectively in order to achieve a social change. Thus, it becomes a posthumous tribute to a great number of fighting women who dedicated their lives to achieve a better world for them, but also for men, by fulfilling the principle that any feminist conquest is as well a conquest for all human beings.

## AFIN NEWS

**AFIN Seminars**

We have begun a new term of AFIN Seminars. The first seminar was directed by Tomasa Báñez on the 30<sup>th</sup> October 2013,



when she presented the initial results of her research on the 'Need for support of adoptive families with teenager children.' The results show an increase in demands for help by adoptive families with an adolescent child. The seriousness of many of these situations leads us to consider the need to study factors that influence the perception of families with regards to their need for help.

On the 18<sup>th</sup> of December there was the last seminar of 2013, where Susan Frekko, PhD in Anthropology and Professor at Groucher College (USA) presented "*Parenting as the management of the talk*".

## VII International AFIN Conference



On 23-24 November, the *VII International AFIN Conference* entitled 'A 10 años del boom de la adopción: abriendo nuevas perspectivas' was held in Pontevedra (Galicia, Spain). It was divided into ten sessions which dealt with the following topics: families, professionals and ADHD; the redefinition of "special needs"; the origins of adopted people and their contact with adoptive families and biological families; the public policies supporting family responsibilities; legislation that protects children; parenting and the need for support in childrearing; diagnoses and pathologies in children and teenagers; surrogacy and "irregular" adoptions/apropriations in Spain. We will soon present a monograph of the Conference.

## AFIN Workshop on Surrogacy

In order to take advantage of the presence in Spain of international professionals and academics during the conference, an event on surrogacy was held in Barcelona on the 25<sup>th</sup> of November: "*Surrogacy: personal experiences and interdisciplinary analysis*", with the presence of the following specialists: Diana Marre, who contextualised the situation of maternity and paternity in Spain; Vasanti Jadva, who presented research from the Center for Family Research of the University of Cambridge or children from surrogacy and their psychological health; Myriam Reynolds, psychologist and art-therapist in Denver (USA), who explained her personal experience as a counsellor in surrogacy processes as well as the carrier of the son of Vicent Borrás; Vicent Borrás, Professor of Sociology in the Autonomous University of Barcelona and Vice-President of the Association of Gay and Lesbian Families, who explained his personal experience as a father through surrogacy and the process of negotiation and gestation of his son, Joan; Diana Guerra, PhD in Psychology and working in the IVI in Barcelona to offer psychological support for parents through assisted reproduction, who described the technical trans-



formation during the biological process that allows people to become parents through the assisted reproduction; Carla Vidal, heterosexual mother through surrogacy, explained her personal experience during the surrogacy process and the construction of her maternity without having gestated nor given birth to her son; finally, Ester Farnós, Professor of Civil Law at the Autonomous University of Madrid, who confirmed the legal contradiction in the registration of children born through surrogacy in other countries, as there is a lack of legal coherence depending on the person who registers these children. At the end, there was an open debate where some personal experience and doubts were expressed, as many of the participants had personal experience with processes of surrogacy.

## FUTURE EVENTS

### CONFERENCES

*International Conference on ASEAN Women: 'Empowerment: Issues and Challenges'*. Bandung, Indonesia, 10-12 December.

*2nd Hong Kong International Conference on Education, Psychology and Society*. Hong Kong, China, 19 December 2013.

*Early Years Conference 2014 - Shaping Childhood: Factors that Matter*. Utrecht, Holanda, 30 y 31 de enero del 2014.

*2014 Asia-Pacific Social Science Conference*. Seoul, South Korea, 8 - 10 January 2014.

*2014 3rd International Conference on Government, Law and Culture - ICGLC 2014*. Toronto, Canada, 13 - 14 January 2014.

*2014 International Conference on Culture, Knowledge and Society - ICCKS 2014*. Macau, Macau, 24 - 25 January 2014.

### CALL FOR PAPERS

*Invisible work. Eastern Sociological Society 2014. Sociology of Reproduction MiniConference*. Baltimore Hilton, USA, 20 - 23 February 2014. Deadline: 15 de December 2013.

*Memory and Recovery. Anthropological Association of Ireland*. Sligo Institute of Technology, Sligo, Ireland, 14 - 15 February 2014. Deadline: 1 December 2014.

*Visual anthropology and contemporary South Asian history*. University of Cambridge, Great Britain, 4 - 5 April 2014. Deadline: 3 January 2014.

*50 th Anniversary Conference of the Society for Latin American Studies*. Birkbeck, University of London, Great Britain, 3 - 4 April 2014. Deadline: 4 December 2013.

*Risk in Health and Social Care: Politics, Theory and Practices*. Risk and Society Study Group. Londres, Gran Bretaña, 28 de febrero del 2014. *Deadline*: 17 de enero del 2014.

*Panel: Facing outwards: anthropology beyond academia*. ASA 2014: Anthropology and Enlightenment. Edinburgh, Escocia, del 19 al 22 de junio del 2014. *Deadline para abstracts*: 5 de enero del 2014.

*Panel: Linking the moral and the political economy in the European periphery*. ASA 2014: Anthropology and Enlightenment. Edinburgh, Escocia, del 19 al 22 de junio del 2014. *Deadline para abstracts*: 5 de enero del 2014.

### CALLS FOR PROPOSALS

*The stranger. (Altérités)*. Deadline: 30 January 2014.

*Birth and its Meanings: Representations of Pregnancy, Childbirth and Parenting*. Editors: Dr. Nadya Burton. Demeter Press. Deadline for abstracts: 15 January 2014.

*Mothers and Food*. Co-editors: Dr. Florence Pasche Guignard and Dr. Tanyia M. Cassidy. Demeter Press. Deadline for abstracts: 1 February 2014.

*Mothering, Mothers and Sex Work*. Co-editors: Rebecca Jaremko Bromwich y Monique Marie De Jong. Deadline for abstracts: 1 March 2014.

*Motherhood and Lone/Single Parenting: A 21st Century Perspective*. Editor: Dr. Maki Motopanyane. Demeter Press. Deadline para abstracts: 15 de febrero del 2014.

*Mothering, Mothers and Sex Work*. Co-editores: Rebecca Jaremko Bromwich y Monique Marie De Jong. *Deadline para abstracts*: 1 de marzo del 2014.