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First Draft

**“Intercultural relations, racialisation and experiences of international adoption in Europe: the Catalan Case”**

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In 1984, in an article entitled “International Adoption: the Quiet Migration,” followed by two articles updating the state of international adoptions in the world in 1993 (Kane 1993) and 2000 y 2002 (Selman 2002; Selman & British Agencies for Adoption and Fostering. 2000), Weil (Weil 1984) analysed the phenomenon of the international adoption in the United States.<sup>1</sup> Trying to contextualise the process, Weil pointed out that, since, with the exception of refugees, in most migrations the decision to move is basically made by the migrants (Roseman 1971), international adoption should not be considered as an international migration process (Weil 1984). But, following Peterson (Peterson 1970), Weil added that “in one sense this process is a type of forced migration, since orphans may have no control over whether or where they will be

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<sup>1</sup> Field research for this article was primarily carried out in Barcelona, Catalonia, Spain (2002-2005) as part of a research project, PUG (Public Understanding of Genetic: a cross cultural and ethnographic study of new genetic and social identity) founded by the European Commission. I have interviewed fifty adoptive families –married and non married couples, single mothers and fathers, and gay and lesbian couples- of Catalonia. These interviews were complemented by participant observation in ADDIF, the first association of adoptive families of Catalonia, and by informal “participant observation” in the Internet listservs of AFAC (Association of Adoptive Families in China) and ANSANM’s (one of the two associations of adoptive families in Haiti) lists that represent a more broadly Spanish population. I have been working mainly with adoptive families and material coming from these listservs, thus, my research results come essentially from there. The key to my work has had these families, their associations, listservs and chats as main source of information. The activities carried out by international adoptive parents through associations put them at the core of political decision regarding international adoption, legal considerations, and procedures, which makes for a unique relationship between the parts involved in the process.

moved” (Weil 1984). Recognising the difficult to categorize international adoption, Weil suggested to consider them as an international migration process, unusual but an international migration process after all, because they share a main characteristic with most international migrations: they tend to be “innovating” because they occur among different cultures. International adoptions processes, from Weil’s point of view, are “innovating” because “children rarely maintain elements of their natives cultures [...] even when adopters make strong efforts to preserve their children’s original heritages” (Weil 1984). Despite that, the author says nothing more on “native cultures” or “original heritages,” he says that the exceptions to those occurred “among areas of similar cultures, such as from English-speaking Canada to the United States” (Weil 1984: 277).

Twenty years have elapsed and many things have occurred, in many senses, since Weil analysed the 1970s United States’ international adoptions. Firstly, as we know, most of them emerged as an answer to Chick Harrity’s photograph taken of the little girl Nhanny sleeping near a box where her baby brother was sleeping in a Saigon’s street in 1973. Like in United States, in Europe the initial motivation was thus humanitarian as much as selfish. Similarly adoptions in Norway, one of the European countries with international adoptions from the 1970s and with one of the highest rates, started as a humanitarian act when children from South Korea and Vietnam arrived in the late 1960s. In the Spanish case in general and Catalanian in particular, many parents link the beginning of international adoption with the repeated broadcasting, at the end of 1995, of a series of British television’s programmes called “The Rooms of Death” from orphanages in China. They showed the conditions to be abysmal and many people in Spain (and elsewhere) reacted strongly and felt the need to help by offering to adopt. However, today a humanitarian rationale is not longer acceptable. The desire to have a child is the only criterion accepted by professionals, psychologists and social workers in charge of evaluating prospective adoptive parents. Although in Spain humanitarian reasons are increasingly frowned upon, many families mention solidarity and the need to help the poor and abandoned children as the main objective to adopt. From many adoptive families’ point of view, solidarity or the desire “to give to a child a better future” is as valid as the desire to become parents. In fact, involuntary childlessness is not a criterion. In Catalonia, 47% of the families engaged in an adoption process in 2004 had biological children. For them, adoptive parenthood is “another form” of parenthood; or rather another way to have a child. As I was told by more than one

adoptive mother, “I do not need to have my children through my body to feel them as mine.”

Secondly, international adoptions have increased many times in many countries in these last twenty years and “have become both visible and vocal” (Volkman 2003). In this sense, it is not probably seen as a “quiet” migration now. However, at least in Spain, international adoptions are neither treated nor considered international migration processes. A teacher of a Barcelona primary school placed in a high neighbourhood told me “we do not have immigrant children, we have children adopted internationally.” This phrase tend to confirm an idea suggested to me by a colleague: “when people see ‘different’ children in Barcelona’s low neighbourhoods think that they are immigrant children or immigrants’ children. But, when these children are in middle and high class neighbourhoods, people think that they are children adopted internationally.” In Spain, as in the rest of Europe, both immigration from outside Western Europe and international adoptions are increasing at the same time. Immigrants and adopted children come from the same regions: the poor South and the former Soviet Union. Both phenomena became socially relevant during the past thirty years in the European countries with many years adopting internationally like Scandinavian countries, and from the second half of the 1990s in Spain, the last country, with Italy, that began to adopt internationally. Today Spain is the second country in the world, after the USA, in actual number of immigrants received.<sup>2</sup> Also after USA, today Spain is the second country in the world in actual number of adopted children received. Paradoxically, in most European countries, also in Spain, the social and legal regulations vis-à-vis non-European immigrants and adoptees vary enormously; as does the general attitude of the populations at large. While considerations about immigrants are more and more controversial, there is a positive discrimination towards babies and children being adopted from other countries. This can be confirmed by testimonies provided by mothers with girls from Indian and Bolivian origin, for instance, and emphasized by the widespread media coverage about issues related to adoption. While immigration laws are becoming more and more restrictive all the time, in the adoption laws there is a tendency to ease the process. Public administrations are cautious and conservative when

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<sup>2</sup> Interestingly, during 2003, the Autonomous Communities of Madrid and Catalonia reopened national adoption - closed since 1997 - because now there are some children available to adoption coming from the immigrant population.

it comes to immigration issues. However, they are collaborative and even propose strategies in order to make the adoption process more flexible.

Nevertheless, thirdly and finally, most adoptive parents, as we will see, said that they want their adopted children to preserve their “cultural origins” in spite of what Weil said in his article and despite the attitudes to immigration or the fact that many immigrant children or immigrant’s children said to have difficulties because of their phenotypical traits, accent, names and/or religion and costumes. The “cultural origins” is a recurrent theme among adoptive families despite the fact that, many times, they are not so clear about what “cultural origins” mean for them. The adoptive mother of an eleven month old baby adopted in China who arrived in Barcelona when she was three, emphatically said in a prime time TV show that she wanted her baby not to lose her cultural origins. “I want her to learn her language and maintain her culture” (TV1, 8/10/2003). Evidently, this does not happened exclusively in Spain. Volkman wrote a long article dedicated to understanding American parents’ fascination with the imagined ‘birth culture’ of their adopted children (Volkman 2003). Interestingly and in order to point out the ambiguity found between “cultural origins” and physical traits, Volkman began her article quoting Isabelle, a six old year adopted girl of a first grade class at a school in New York City. The little girl explained to her mother that she had made a list of children she knew that were as she was, adopted, with those who ‘looked adopted,’ this is Chinese (Idem).

In this paper, I explore the significance of “cultural origins” and the uncertain boundary between nature and culture that exists in the adoptive families’ narratives related “cultural origins” with children born in Asia or Africa, with children that do not look like them. I examine the attitude before the “difference”, adoptive parents’ social construction of “difference”, using Spanish ethnographic data on how international adoptive families understand “culture,” “cultural origins” and “race” trying to contrast their situation with that of other immigrants in Catalonia and Spain managing questions of race and racism. I discuss the central role of the associations of adoptive families as groups formed to share and emphasise the common experience of difference, face questions of race and racism and build “new ways of imagining race, kinship and culture”(Volkman 2003: 29) in Spain.

### *A bit of background on international adoption in Europe and Spain*

Before going further, I will provide a certain background on international adoption in Europe and Spain.

International adoption has become a major means for involuntarily childless people to obtain a child and thereby become a family, or for people who want another child but who are not willing to go through biological procedures and who view international adoption as a solution. Since the 1970s, the movement of children from countries in the poor South, and more recently from former Soviet Union countries, to prospective adoptive parents in the rich North has seen a dramatic increase in the number of countries engaging in sending children abroad for adoption and the number of children being adopted. In 2004, according to Selman, people in Western Europe and North America adopted more than 40,000 children and the demand is steadily rising –because, among other reasons, several European countries that previously did not engage in the practice (e.g. Spain and Italy) have started to do so, and in these countries the demand is growing rapidly. Today, in terms of international adoptions per capita, the Autonomous Community of Catalonia in Spain shows the world's highest rate with 0.23 children adopted per each thousand inhabitants (Spain as a whole has 0.12) and 51% more international adoptions in 2004 than in 2003.

If we examine the statistics for international adoptions, the current amount of adopted children steadily increasing and the profile of the countries (both donor and receiving) are changing.

*Receiving States with highest number of international adoptions 1980–2003 by rank in 1998*

| Country                                     | 2003          | 2001          | 1998          | 1988             |
|---|---------------|---------------|---------------|------------------|
| <b>US</b>                                   | 21,616        | 19,237        | 15,774        | 9,120            |
| <b>France</b>                               | 3,995         | 3,094         | 3,777         | 2,441            |
| <b>Italy</b>                                | 2,772         | 1,797         | 2,233         | 2,078            |
| <b>Canada<sup>1</sup></b>                   | 2,181         | 1,874         | 2,222         | 232 <sup>1</sup> |
| <b>Spain<sup>2</sup></b>                    | 3,951         | 3,428         | 1,487         | 93 <sup>2</sup>  |
| <b>Sweden</b>                               | 1,046         | 1,044         | 928           | 1,074            |
| <b>Germany<sup>3</sup></b>                  | 674           | 798           | 922           | 875 <sup>3</sup> |
| <b>Netherlands</b>                          | 1,154         | 1,122         | 825           | 577              |
| <b>Switzerland</b>                          | 366           | 457           | 686           | 492              |
| <b>Norway</b>                               | 714           | 713           | 643           | 566              |
| <b>Denmark</b>                              | 522           | 631           | 624           | 523              |
| <b>Belgium<sup>4</sup></b>                  | 281           | 255           | 310           | 662              |
| <b>Australia</b>                            | 278           | 289           | 245           | 516              |
| <b>Finland</b>                              | 238           | 218           | 181           | 78               |
| <b>Total for 14 states</b>                  | <b>39,696</b> | <b>34,870</b> | <b>30,801</b> | <b>19,327</b>    |
| <b>Estimate for 20 States (Selman 2005)</b> | <b>40,791</b> | <b>35,903</b> | <b>31,720</b> |                  |

*Selman's Sources:* Kane (1993); Lehland (2000); Selman (2002 and 2005)

1. For 1980-89, Canadian figures are for Quebec only (Kane 1993)
2. Underestimate due to incomplete data (Kane 1993)
3. Estimate based on 4 northern lander (Kane 1993)
4. For 1993 – 2003 figures are French agencies + 1 “EurAdopt” Dutch agency

Source: Selman 2000, 2002, 2005

*Major Sending Countries – by number of children: 1980-2003*

| Rank by number sent | 1980-89            | 1995               | 1998             | 2003             |
|---------------------|--------------------|--------------------|------------------|------------------|
| <b>1.</b>           | <b>Korea</b>       | <b>China</b>       | <b>Russia</b>    | <b>China</b>     |
| <b>2.</b>           | <b>India</b>       | <b>Korea</b>       | <b>China</b>     | <b>Russia</b>    |
| <b>3.</b>           | <b>Colombia</b>    | <b>Russia</b>      | <b>Vietnam</b>   | <b>Guatemala</b> |
| <b>4.</b>           | <b>Brazil</b>      | <b>Vietnam</b>     | <b>Korea</b>     | <b>Korea</b>     |
| <b>5.</b>           | <b>Sri Lanka</b>   | <b>Colombia</b>    | <b>Colombia</b>  | <b>Ukraine</b>   |
| <b>6.</b>           | <b>Chile</b>       | <b>India</b>       | <b>Guatemala</b> | <b>Colombia</b>  |
| <b>7.</b>           | <b>Philippines</b> | <b>Brazil</b>      | <b>India</b>     | <b>India</b>     |
| <b>8.</b>           | <b>Guatemala</b>   | <b>Guatemala</b>   | <b>Romania</b>   | <b>Haiti</b>     |
| <b>9.</b>           | <b>Peru</b>        | <b>Romania</b>     | <b>Brazil</b>    | <b>Bulgaria</b>  |
| <b>10</b>           | <b>El Salvador</b> | <b>Philippines</b> | <b>Ethiopia</b>  | <b>Vietnam</b>   |

Source: Selman 2005 taking into account Selman 2002 and Kane 1993

*Adoption Ratio (per 1,000 Live Births) in States of Origin 2003*  
*Adoptions to 20 receiving states*

| Country            | Number of Adoptions<br>2003 | Adoption Ratio<br>(per 1,000 live births)<br>2003 |
|--------------------|-----------------------------|---|
| <b>Bulgaria</b>    | <b>939</b>                  | <b>15.1</b>                                       |
| <b>Guatemala</b>   | <b>2,656</b>                | <b>6.3</b>  |
| <b>Russia</b>      | <b>7,632</b>                | <b>6.2</b>  |
| <b>Kazhakstan</b>  | <b>853</b>                  | <b>5.6</b>  |
| <b>Ukraine</b>     | <b>1,951</b>                | <b>4.8</b>  |
| <b>Cambodia</b>    | <b>286</b>                  | <b>4.6</b>  |
| <b>Haiti</b>       | <b>1,051</b>                | <b>4.2</b>  |
| <b>S Korea</b>     | <b>2,306</b>                | <b>4.1</b>  |
| <b>Belarus</b>     | <b>633</b>                  | <b>2.5</b>  |
| <b>Romania</b>     | <b>409</b>                  | <b>1.8</b>  |
| <b>Colombia</b>    | <b>1,718</b>                | <b>1.8</b>  |
| <b>Poland</b>      | <b>343</b>                  | <b>0.9</b>  |
| <b>China</b>       | <b>11,181</b>               | <b>0.6</b>  |
| <b>Vietnam</b>     | <b>889</b>                  | <b>0.54</b>                                       |
| <b>Madagascar</b>  | <b>375</b>                  | <b>0.52</b>                                       |
| <b>Philippines</b> | <b>355</b>                  | <b>0.51</b>                                       |
| <b>India</b>       | <b>1,106</b>                | <b>0.04</b>                                       |

Source: Selman P (2005) *Trends in Inter-country Adoption 1998-2003: a review of recent statistics for receiving States*. Adoption Working Paper 1, School of Geography, Politics and Sociology, University of Newcastle upon Tyne, UK

In Spain, except for isolated cases, international adoption began in the early 1990s. Slightly prior to this date –as the co-ordinator of the Association of Adoptive Families in China (AFAC) declared— people from other countries came to Spain to adopt.

Like in other countries in Europe, Spain adopt from abroad due to a paucity of native-born children given up for adoption. The difference with other European countries is that in Spain the process of a paucity of native-born children is a result of a relatively recent process. During “the Transition” to the democracy and the end of Franco’s dictatorship in 1975, there had been many changes in the Spanish families and women’s lives. The Catholic Church started to weaken and lose its presence in the Spaniards’ daily life, a situation that facilitated the changes regarding families and women like women’s incorporation to the labour market.<sup>3</sup> Contraception was forbidden in Spain

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<sup>3</sup> However, in comparison with the social situation in other European countries, the incorporation of women into the work-force is very slow, salaries and conditions of work remain unequal and old stereotypes of gender relations remain fairly unchallenged. For many years, women and young people in Spain had (and have) the highest rate of unemployment, the worst type of job contracts and the lowest salaries. The salary difference between men and women at the same work positions is around 30.7 per cent on average in Spain. Although the current Spanish government has done some symbolic gestures

until 1978, during Franco's regime, but in October 1978 was legalized by a Real Decree (2275/78) that abolished the Penal Code's articles according to which "to sell, to prescribe, to disseminate or to offer anything to avoid procreation was considered a crime" (Ruiz Salguero 2002).<sup>4</sup> In 1981, the Divorce Act (Law 30/1981) was approved and amended in July 2005 (Law 15/2005). The voluntary sterilization surgery was legalized in 1983 by a new modification of the Penal Code. In 1985<sup>5</sup> the Organic Law 9/1985 was approved legalizing the abortion.<sup>6</sup> Nevertheless, legal abortion on demand is still not available.<sup>7</sup>

Regarding adoption, single parents, women and men have been able to adopt from the very beginning in Spain. In June 2005, the Parliament approved a modification of the Civil Code to allow homosexual marriages and, as a direct consequence, children adoption by those couples. Until then, homosexuals were not allowed<sup>8</sup> to adopt and they had to do it as single parents.

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such as founding the Executive Government with the same quantity of men and women among Ministers, the percentage of women in the economic and labour Spanish life is still very low. In 2003, only 12% of mayors, 27% of city councillors, 32% of Autonomous Communities' Ministers, 36% of parliamentarians were women in Spain. On the other hand, Spanish husbands, unlike other European ones, regard household and family matters to be the sole responsibility of their wives. Besides, in 2003, in relation to the conciliation between family and labour life, 98.46% of paternity's leave at children's births and taking care of a child during sickness were given to women.

4 One of the most important changes in the contraception has been the increasing use of the condom (5% of the population in 1977 and 25% in 1995). The pill has not been adopted in the same proportion than in other European countries. At the same time, the coitus interruptus is maintaining in high rates (11% in 1995) whereas the IUD is used in lower proportions. The voluntary sterilization surgery is increasing at the same level among men and women (12 y 8% in 1995).

5 The current annual abortion rate is of six women per one thousand. Only the Community Autonomous of Valencia and Andalusia pay the practice related to abortion.

6 Abortion may only be performed if the health of the woman or the foetus is in danger or if the pregnancy is the result of rape. Proposals to legalise abortion on demand have been rejected several times

7 Three years after of the abortion law and four years after the birth of the first IVF baby in Barcelona, in November 1988, the Assisted Reproduction Law (35/1988) was approved, amended in 2003 and now in a new process of getting amended. According to Spanish laws, a woman at the age of eighteen is free to decide whether to become a user or patient of assisted reproduction technologies. Married women, on the other hand, have to get authorisation from her husband. Single women and lesbian couples may receive assisted conception, donor sperm and donor eggs are both allowed – as is surrogacy. The election of the appropriate donor is a responsibility of physicians and biologists. Their selection has to guarantee the highest phenotypic and immunologic resemblance among the donor and the receptor woman and her family context. Donor children are authorised to know their donor's identity in case of a serious risk for their life and/or health. Donor children and their mothers may ask for general information about the donors, but not for their identity.

8 The Autonomous Community of Navarre allowed to homosexuals to adopt before the new Spanish's law of homosexuals' marriages.

In part as a result of these changes, Spain had the EU highest birth rate (2.8 children per a woman) in 1975 and also the lowest one (1.17 children per woman) in 1995.<sup>9</sup> As it was mentioned previously, international adoption began in Spain due to the decline of local children being given up for adoption, which in turn was due less to a new-found liberal social benefit system and the direct result of feminism in Spain, but more to the fact that Spanish women chose to delay childbirth and/or to remain childless. On the other hand, the law 21/1987 1987, considered “the starting point of the modern regulation on adoption”<sup>10</sup>, suggested that one cause for the scarcity of national adoption in Spain was, and still is, a legislation “excessively” protective of biological parents’ rights. This has led some adoptive parents not to adopt children in Spain even if there were children available to be adopted (Marre & Bestard 2004).<sup>11</sup> This situation, at the same time, “produces a certain feeling of failure that makes national children remain institutionalised until they reach the adult age,” as pointed out the former President of the Catalonia Autonomous Community.<sup>12</sup> In order to provide an example, at the end of 2004, in Catalonia, there were 6,152 children under Government’s care. Also at the end of 2004, international adoption in Catalonia had had an increase of 51% compared to 2003 and 1,562 children had been adopted internationally.

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9 Also the marriage rate decreased from 7.60 per cent in 1975 to 5.04 per cent in 2004, currently at the same level to EU rate. Also the maternity age at first child has increased from 28 in 1976 to 31 in 1997, the highest in the EU.

10 BOE 17-11-1987, n° 275, [page. 34158].

11 The co-ordinator of one of the associations of adoptive parents in Catalonia criticising the treatment given by law and government administration mentioned he knew of parents who even three years after having children from national adoption, when taking them to see a doctor at the National Health Service, the children were still named and asked by their biological parents’ surnames (Interview in Barcelona, 05/06/2003). A Catalan politician and journalist, Member of Parliament and the City Council, is the mother of a biological daughter, an adopted son from national adoption, and a daughter from international adoption. She complained bitterly about the special attention given by public administrations to biological parents who keep their rights further than they should be allowed to (Interview in Barcelona, 04/08/2003). A well-known journalist who formed a single-parent family with an adopted daughter expressed herself in similar terms regarding national adoptions. In her public defence of international adoption before the Special Commission on International Adoption in the Senate (SCIAS) operative between May 2002 and December 2003, she explained that after having finished all the procedures for a national adoption, she renounced it when a social worker that was visiting her started crying suddenly. When she asked what the matter was, the social worker replied that, obeying a judge’s decision every month she had to accompany an eight-year-old girl to visit her father who was in jail. The girl would remain speechless in front of him because he had raped her repeatedly since she was three (SCIAS, 7/10/2002 <http://www.asfaru.org/pagines/comisionadopcionintern3.pdf>). One jurist stated that one of the issues that gives more problems in Provincial Audiences is when biological parents take part in adoption processes, especially when authorities ask them for their authorisation or when they only have to be heard Fraguas, M.B. 2002. La Adopció: cuestión jurídica, problema humano. Boletín Aranzadi Civil-Mercantil 39.

12 Keynote address to a Catalan Conference devoted to adoption: “Adoption in Catalonia and International Adoption: Complexities and New Horizons”, May 29-31, 2003.

| Place                    | Children    | Percentage |
|--------------------------|-------------|------------|
| In their nuclear family  | 832         | 13.6       |
| In their extended family | 2423        | 39.4       |
| In an alien family       | 501         | 8.1        |
| In a pre-adoptive family | 535         | 8.7        |
| In a foster centre       | 301         | 4.9        |
| In an orphanage          | 1560        | 25.3       |
| <b>Total</b>             | <b>6152</b> | <b>100</b> |

Source: Generalitat de Catalunya, Departament de Benestar I Família. *Atenció a la Infancia i l'adolescència, 2004.*

The years 1995 and 1996, years with the lowest birth rate in Spain<sup>13</sup>, are also recognised by adoptive parents and their associations<sup>14</sup> as the years in which international adoption started in earnest.

In this sense, international adoption in Spain is a ten-year-old process with an annual increase of adoptions in unprecedented numbers, specially this last one.

| Years    | 1997 | 1998 | 1999 | 2000 | 2001 | 2002 | 2003 | 2004 | Total |
|----------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|-------|
| Adoptees | 942  | 1487 | 2006 | 3062 | 3428 | 3625 | 3951 | 5541 | 24042 |

Source: Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, *Labour and Social Affairs Statistics Yearbook, 2004*

According to the information given by the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, during the first months of 2005, Spain has become the second country in the world in number of international adoptions. The United States is the first with 22884 children adopted in 2004.<sup>15</sup>

| Origen        | 1997      | 1998      | 1999       | 2000       | 2001       | 2002       | 2003        | 2004        | Total       |
|---------------|-----------|-----------|------------|------------|------------|------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| Total         | 942       | 1487      | 2006       | 3062       | 3428       | 3625       | 3951        | 5541        | 24042       |
| Europe        | 97        | 216       | 645        | 1439       | 1569       | 1395       | 1913        | 2111        | 9385        |
| <i>Russia</i> | <i>70</i> | <i>91</i> | <i>141</i> | <i>496</i> | <i>652</i> | <i>809</i> | <i>1157</i> | <i>1618</i> | <i>5034</i> |
| Africa        | -         | 16        | 23         | 32         | 31         | 51         | 163         | 268         | 584         |

13 Since 1995, the birth rate is increasing because of the international adoptions and of the high birth rate of immigrant women (15% of the total births in 2004). Nevertheless, today the Spanish birth rate is 1.32 children for a woman. *La Vanguardia*, 25/10/2005.

14 Public Administrations also tend to place the beginning of international adoption around those years. In fact, there are only statistics on international adoption since 1997.

15 [http://www.travel.state.gov/family/adoption/stats/stats\\_451.html](http://www.travel.state.gov/family/adoption/stats/stats_451.html)

|                 |     |     |     |     |      |      |      |      |      |
|-----------------|-----|-----|-----|-----|------|------|------|------|------|
| <i>Ethiopia</i> | 0   | 0   | 0   | 0   | 0    | 12   | 107  | 220  | 339  |
|                 |     |     |     |     |      |      |      |      |      |
| Americas        | 631 | 960 | 895 | 905 | 721  | 593  | 679  | 585  | 5969 |
| <i>Colombia</i> | 250 | 393 | 361 | 414 | 319  | 271  | 285  | 256  | 2549 |
| <i>Haiti</i>    | 0   | 0   | 0   | 0   | 3    | 1    | 17   | 36   | 57   |
|                 |     |     |     |     |      |      |      |      |      |
| Asia            | 214 | 295 | 443 | 686 | 1107 | 1586 | 1196 | 2577 | 8104 |
| <i>China</i>    | 105 | 196 | 261 | 475 | 941  | 1427 | 1043 | 2389 | 6637 |

Everything concerning adoption in Spain is decentralised; each Autonomous Community has its own regulations. Whereas adoption is ruled by general regulations constituted by Spanish general law (Ley Orgánica) or the international regulations to which Spain subscribes, direct responsibilities are decentralised. There are twenty-four government authorities regarding adoption in Spain: fifteen Autonomous Communities authorities,<sup>16</sup> two for the autonomous cities of Ceuta and Melilla (the Spanish cities in Moroccan territory), and six for the Basque Country and the Balearic Islands with three authorities each –regional councils and insular councils. The Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs of Spain acts as a communication authority.

In the case of the Autonomous Community of Catalonia, while it accounts for 16% of Spanish's inhabitants and 16% of the Spanish children born in a year, 28-30% of international adoptions in Spain as a whole take place here. With 0.23 children adopted per each thousand inhabitants<sup>17</sup>, Catalonia is the place with more international adoption in the world in this moment.

As we mentioned at the beginning, many parents and members of associations relate the beginning of international adoption in Spain with the broadcasting, at the end of 1995, and on two or three more occasions, of a series of programmes called “The Rooms of Death.”<sup>18</sup> While the programme was being broadcast, the telephones of the television

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16 Andalucía, Aragón, Asturias, Canarias, Cantabria, Cataluña, Castilla-León, Castilla-La Mancha, Extremadura, Galicia, La Rioja, Madrid, Murcia, Navarra, Valencia.

17 Generalitat de Catalunya, Departament de Benestar i Família, Oficina de Premsa, Barcelona 2005.

18 Many adoptive parents begin talking about their experience by saying: “Everything started in 1995 when we saw a report on Chinese orphanages on television. It gave us a feeling of wanting to help by adopting a little Chinese girl” (<http://epostigo.iespana.es/epostigo/proceso.htm>). “The reason why I chose China is that I had already decided it before starting the procedures. My decision was based on the 1995 report as well as on people I met who had already adopted in China and talked about their experience” ([Adopcionsiendosoltero], 11/05/2003.). Recalling the beginning of the bigger and most active association of adoptive parents in Spain nowadays, the association of adoptive families in China (AFAC), the co-coordinator said that the remote origin of the association could be situated at the time of the first

channels collapsed receiving hundreds of calls from families, couples, and single people interested in adopting one of the girls. The following days, many Autonomous Governments declared that they had had to use special offices to inform callers about how to apply for adoption in China. In some communities, those applications reached six hundred (Marre 1996) in a few days.<sup>19</sup> Catalonia, with 30% of all international adoptions in Spain, is the Autonomous Community where more adoptive parents associations and federations have been founded and where they have more members. Since international adoption is a new phenomenon in Spain, new communication, contact and work strategies are permanently being generated, many of which are virtual, globalised and not institutionalised.

### ***The adoption processes: adoptive parents vs. professionals***

As the material and web pages of the public administrations and associations of adoptive parents show, the first thing to do in order to adopt a child is to fill out an application form in the Autonomic Community's office. Who is suitable to adopt depends on each Community.

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broadcasting of the show, which caused the first couple from Catalonia to adopt a Chinese girl a sleepless night. Their frustration the day after in the face of the negative answer from the administration towards their desire to adopt a child from China encouraged them to start an association which, at present, has over 1400 associated families and carries on support activities for parents and future adoptive parents in China. It is considered a "social phenomenon" (Interview, Barcelona 6/05/2003).

<sup>19</sup> The growing interest in adopting in China, according to an English grandmother of a Chinese girl who lives in Majorca, "functions by word of mouth... and then the AFAC (Association of Adoptive Families in China) has also expanded a lot in Catalonia" (Interview by chat, 22/04/2003).

One way to conduct an international adoption's process in Spain is by ECAIs.<sup>20</sup> The services offered by an ECAI are the adoption procedure forms, their translation, verification by a notary, and the professional advice for legalisation, and for consulates and embassies. As many of these services are considered an unjustified lucrative "business" for adoptive parents and their associations, the decision to avoid the ECAI mediation is confirmed once and again by adoptive families. Many of them say: "We understand that international adoption is a "business." The 10,000 adoptions made in the past four years, at an average of around 20,000 euros each, show a 160 million Euro business. From a legal point of view, financial profit-making is prohibited, but there are ways to cover it up easily".<sup>21</sup> As an adoptive mother said, "there were countries in Africa where you had to be on your own, and that was more appealing to us than going through an agency [...] because they are so cold, I do not know, but we wanted to be in control of the process. In an agency, you cannot control anything and, well, agencies are also becoming big businesses. And, you know, that is rubbish. Well, it is not fair that people make money in this way (...), besides, they make money out of feelings. (...) I think it is unfair that some people are making money out of it, but well then..." (Interview, Barcelona 11/07/2002). At least three adoptive couples in Congo<sup>22</sup> and two in Haiti<sup>23</sup> pointed out the inexistence of accredited ECAIs for these countries as one of the advantages of adopting there.

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20 Entity of Collaboration with International Adoption (ECAI) is the name assigned to the organisations in charge of minor adoption procedures. "They do not want to be private adoption agencies; hence they received a new name. In order to avoid the risk of ending up as private agencies, the different decrees regulating their credentials establish the absence, in any ECAI, of profit making goals, and also the control by the Administration of their composition, functioning, taxes, and financial situation", as stated when the credentials for ECAIs- in Spain were first issued Biniés, P. 1997. *Las ECAI empezando a caminar. Diez Comunidades Autónomas disponen ya de Entidades Colaboradoras de Adopción Internacional. Infancia y Adopción 1.* Their existence was legislated by Organic Law 1/1996, which pointed out that "in the past years there has been a significant increase of children from foreign countries being adopted by Spanish adoptive parents [...] The law makes a difference in the role directly played by public entities and the mediation role that can be delegated to the private agencies with their corresponding credentials. It also establishes the conditions and requirements for obtaining those credentials, among which we can stress the absence of any profit making goal on the part of the agencies". Article 25, 1, c of Organic Law 1/1996 specified their role of advice and mediation in the adoption procedures, and in their follow-up. Law 1/1996. BOE. nº 15, January 17th 1996.

21 SCIAS 23/09/2002.

22 There are many children from Congo adopted in Catalonia, most of them through a Catalan nun living in Congo for the last 20 years.

23 When we asked why to adopt in Haiti, an adoptive mother said the main reason was to be able to go "on your own," and the possibility of meeting your child's biological parents, a normal procedure, at least in one of the orphanages, unless one makes a request otherwise (Interview, Barcelona 04/07/2003).

The other way to conduct international adoptions is, then, to go through the adoption procedures “on one’s own”.<sup>24</sup> In general terms, this is equivalent to saying that they go through the process with the support of an association, which offers the same services as an ECAI but “less expensive, and as an added value, the satisfaction of taking care of your child personally, in a less cold, matter-of-fact way and with less mediation”, said a family (Interview, Barcelona 04/07/2003). As adoptive parents involved with associations remark, families or people who had already gone through the adoption procedures were the ones who got them started. They were repeatedly asked how to do it, so they decided to group together to inform and give advice. It is a collaboration/replacement of certain administration functions, as well as competence/replacement of the ECAIs. The president of the National Co-ordination of Associations of Adoptive Families’ (CORA) introduced herself to the SCIAS saying that she represented “the social movement of adoptive parents.”<sup>25</sup> We have 1,000

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24 The co-ordinator of one of the associations estimated that adoptions “on one’s own” are the way chosen in 70% of the adoptions in Catalonia (Interview, Barcelona 05/06/2003).

25 A basic chronology of the constitution of parents associations and federations confirms what the CORA president pointed out. Towards the end of 1991, the Spanish Society for the Development of Adoption (SEDA) was founded and its base was in Madrid. Soon after that, in 1992, the Association for the Defence of the Children’s Rights (ADDIA) was founded in Barcelona and would later be called ADDIF. A year later, (UME ALAIA) the Association for Adoption Help was founded and it base was in the Vasque Country. In 1996, the association called Amics del Nepal was founded in Barcelona. It was initially an NGO created for collaborating with fostering homes for defenseless children from Nepal. Then Pont para la Adopció de Nens i nenes de l’India (PANI) and Association of Adopting Families in China (AFAC), the most numerous and active one, were also founded in Barcelona. In early 1997, Adopció, Família i Mon (ADOFAM) was founded in Barcelona and also in Barcelona, Federació d’Associacions per a l’Adopció (FADA) was founded with the participation of Catalanian associations. That same year the ATLAS association in defense of the adoption was founded in Madrid. In 1999, the Associació Illes Balears d’Adopcions (AIBA) appeared and the Association for the Defense, Protection and Guarantees in the Adoption and Fosterage of Minors (DAGA) was also founded, with its base in Madrid. In 2000, several new entities emerged: the Associations for the Defense of the Adoption and Fosterage (CORA) in Madrid; the Association for the Help of the Adoptee (AAA) with base in Barcelona; the Association of Adopting Families of Aragon (AFADA), with its base in Zaragoza, the Regional Association of Adopting Families of Castilla and Leon (ARFA), the Association of families for helping adoption in the world, in Cantabria (AFAMUNDI) and Friends of Infancy of Morocco (IMA), with its base in Barcelona. In 2001, more associations emerged: the Association of adopting and fostering families of La Rioja (AFAAR); the Galician Association for international adoption (AGAI) and the Castilian-Manchegan association for adoption and pre adoption fosterage (AMADA). In 2002, more new associations appeared: the association of adopting families of Andalusia (AFAAN), one of the Associations of adopting families in Haiti (ANSANM), an association of adopting families in China of the Vasque Country (ANICHI) and the Association of Adopting Families in Russia (ASFARU). In 2003, the associations founded were: the Association of Adopting Families in the Canary Islands (AFAIC), the Association of Ethiopian Children’s Families (AFNE) and the Association of Adopting Families in Murcia (FAMUR). In 2004, the association of adopting families of Navarra (AFADENA) was founded. In 2005, the Association of Adopting Families of the Valencia’s Community was founded (FAMITAS). So far, a chronology whose results show a unique interrelation between the legislative and administrative landmarks regarding international adoption and the foundation of Associations, which consider that many legislative decisions were made since they were founded and thanks to the pressure they have applied (Interview, Barcelona 6/05/2003). This is a process of constitution of associations and federations that is still in progress.

families who are members of our association [...], but we also represent the 10,000 families who have brought in internationally adopted minors over the last four years, and the 12,000 families we estimate that are at present in the process of an international adoption”.<sup>26</sup>

Whether going through an ECAI or “on your own” there is a first step in the adoption process that all families have to do: the Suitability Certificate (IC), the certification of being suitable to adopt. Obtaining the IC should take no more than eight months, according to administrations, and can involve different requirements subject to each Autonomic Community. The adoptive parents are examined psychologically and economically by means of a psychosocial report in which the administration issues –or not— the IC. At least two or three psychologists and one social worker, all of them members of a professional body, must elaborate the psychosocial report, which, in many cases, adoptive parents do not distinguish from the IC. The global process varies significantly from one Autonomous Community to another. In some, it is handled by the Social Services; in others by concerted entities; in others through the TIPAI (Turn of Professional Intervention for International Adoption); and finally in others it is in charge of professionals selected by the adoptive parents. To this variety of options, and as the associations for the defence of uniform and transparent criteria claim, the variety of forms of evaluations resulting from the criteria of each professional must be added. This is one of the main conflicting issues between administrations and associations of adoptive families. The “examination” or “first step in the Ordeal” for adoptive parents, “a state of personal scrutinising –emotional and relational- applicants” according to the co-ordinator of a parents’ association—<sup>27</sup> is the first step in the adoption process that produce very much anxiety among future adoptive families. It is a process criticised by adoptive families and their associations in its forms and contents despite the fact that the percentage of negative resolutions of the IC is very low (between 2 and 5%) and, even when negative, it can be appealed.

From the point of view of adoptive families, there are many differences in terms of what is entailed by adoption between those directly concerned –the parents– and the professionals in charge of evaluation or follow up process. These differences appear,

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26 SCIAS, 23/09/2002.

27 SCIAS 21/10/2002.

sometimes, in an atmosphere of certain tension, during the process in which parents are being evaluated so as to obtain the Suitability Certificate. The differences between these two parts in an adoption process are directly linked to with what is entailed by adoption. According to adoptive families' narratives on the evaluation processes, the experts express or show their greatest doubts before families with biological children or non confirmed involuntarily childless, or single families -mainly of men in the recent past before the homosexual marriage law-, or families allegedly engaged at the same time in ART and adoption processes, or families allegedly engaged in a solidarity adoption and not because of their paternity desire, or families whose extended family, and yet friends, refuse or do not accept the adoption, or adoptions understood as "quiet diverse": interracial, intercultural, with children older than seven or eight, siblings or handicapped. To sum up, the experts express their greatest doubts before those adoption processes in which nurture does not follow as perfect as possible the path of nature.<sup>28</sup>

However, these types of families are not isolated cases. In the Catalan case, 47% of the families engaged in an adoption process have biological children. For them, adoptive paternity is "another form" of paternity or another way to have a child. As Marre was told by more than one adoptive mother, "I do not need to have my children through my

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28 In the case of Catalan Adoption Law, the Introduction clearly states the central premise of the adoption law: "Adoption imitates nature." The principle of "biological truth" allows the adoptee, when an adult, to do research on his/her parents by nature. This search, described in the Adoption Act as an 'inquiring and finding out' ("endegar i esbrinar") of the truth, has no effect on descent; it has the effect of a practical knowledge in relation to health and of a more theoretical knowledge in relation to the inquiry of origin. The adoptee and also his/her adoptive parents, when the adoptee is a minor, can ask for the "bio-genetic data of his/her progenitors." In international adoptions, the Act institutes a governmental body devoted to "collect and keep information related to adoptees and their origins." The simple data required by the Act is related to the body and origins of the adoptee, but not to his/her kinship. It is data that has practical consequences in terms of health conditions or in terms of the knowledge of origin. The Act follows nature in terms of differences of generations, in terms of prohibited degrees of consanguinity and affinity to adopt, and in terms of giving the same rights to those who descend by nature and by adoption. At the same time, a new genealogical link is created between the adoptee and the genealogy of adoptive parents. The adoptee receives the surnames of the adoptive parents and has the same rights as those children had by birth. It is important to point out that the genealogy exceeds the limits of the nuclear family. It is not only a tie between adoptive parents and adoptees, but also a genealogical connection with the whole family. Adoption also breaks links with the previous nature of the adoptee. It breaks links with "the family by nature." In the chapter related to international law, the Act stresses "the breaking of any juridical tie with the family of origin." The law obliges all the personnel involved in the administrative process of adoption to "maintain the secret of the information obtained and of the descent relationships of the adoptees; and also to prevent the families of origin from knowing the adoptive family." Secrecy has pervaded adoption in Catalonia, but secrecy is a contested issue by parents engaged in international adoption. Secrecy blocks the knowledge of the "facts of nature" considered to be a central value of kinship: something to be known Marre, D. & J. Bestard. 2004. Sobre la adopció internacional y otras formas de constituir familias: a modo de introducción. In *La adopción y el acogimiento: presente y perspectivas* (eds) D. Marre & J. Bestard. Barcelona: Universidad de Barcelona..

body to feel them as mine.” Also in the Catalan case, single parents account for 16% of the adoption processes, the group with the highest increase in 2004. Although the development of simultaneous ART and adoption processes is not frequent, especially because the experts’ negative consideration, some families do them. They justify themselves by saying that because each process takes such a long time, it is better to carry out both processes simultaneously and not one after the other. Even though experts are explicitly against solidarity adoptions, many families mention solidarity and the help to poor and abandoned children as the main objective when adopting. From many adoptive families’ point of view, solidarity or the desire “to give a child a better future” is as valid as the paternity desire to become parents or good parents. The importance given by the experts to the acceptance of the adoption by the extended families is, from adoptive families’ point of view, blown out of proportion taking into account that the European tendency is to a nuclear and/or single family. Experts also express many reservations regarding interracial and/or intercultural or non-usual adoptions. They say that their reservations are in accordance with the child best interest taking into account the difficulties they can find during their lives.

### ***Choosing a country of origin, choosing a child?***

When filling out the application form, adoptive parents must indicate the country they wish to adopt from. The reason is that not all countries admit unmarried couples or single parents as adoptive parents, and only very few admit homosexual couples. On the other hand, the Suitability Certificate (IC) is issued for a specific country.<sup>29</sup>

It is a period that is filled with longing, desire, insecurity about the outcome, but never doubt about the desired outcome. These are moments in which adoptive parents recognize being most disoriented. When choosing the country where to adopt and

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29 The modification of this is one of the associations’ main priorities. The administrations argue that since their main priority is the minor’s well being, it is necessary to look for the best parents, taking into account the minor and his/her country of origin. The associations claim that since they are already sufficiently discriminated by having to obtain a certificate that biological parents do not need, suitability should be considered in general, not for a specific country. At present, Catalonia is one of the few communities, which allows people to start simultaneous procedures for more than one country.

beginning the process for the IC, the time of the psychosocial report,<sup>30</sup> is the time when many adoptive parents most frequently join the associations, listservs, and chats.

As an adoptive parent said, it is not easy to decide the country of adoption, because when they do it, they start to build some bond with that country, which is somehow emotionally difficult to break or change. A mother-to-be of a Chinese girl said that for her it would be a great shock to have to change the country because, when she decided where to adopt, she started imagining her daughter (Barcelona 01/22/2003). Another mother who, due to problems with her ECAI, was filing out her application in Brazil and finally had to adopt in Ukraine, recalled the change as the worst moment of the process, something that discouraged her from considering another adoption (Barcelona 05/23/2003). A biological mother who had decided to have another child, this time adopted, justified her choice of adopting in Morocco in terms of “geographical and cultural proximity” in a long speech: “We were looking through the files and, well, one has one’s preferences, likes and dislikes, and we decided we were not interested in anything concerning Russia, Ukraine, Romania or China. I do not know. We do not know those cultures, and then what? Latin America was another possibility, the other big area, but there were several drawbacks, such as the fact that in some countries you had to stay for two months, which we could not do, and also it was a very long trip, and with our child we were a little afraid of it [...] I guess people make those long trips without any problem, but we were uncomfortable, anyway. The advantage was the language, of course [...]. Well, we decided to pass on that. There was India, also, but there were other problems. In India there are many orphanages and you have to have been married in the Church to adopt from them because they are ruled by religious staff, and we thought our file would be held up there. Then, our first idea was Africa, not Morocco, but Africa, but there was Madagascar, which was also an ordeal, because when you were there filling out forms –I think it has now changed—, you had to travel to South Africa on several occasions because it somehow belongs to South Africa for

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30 Regarding to IC, I knew the case of a couple which were in their second attempt for getting the IC. They had given up during the first attempt because they were “extremely distressed with the questions they were asked and the problems posed to them.” They gave it up for a time during which they received individual therapy and attended meetings in an association whose members talked continuously about IC. As they knew the social worker was about to visit their home, in order to make the apartment look its best, the woman had joined a commission for building repair and was trying to make them approve a general cleaning of the whole building and “some fixings at the entrance to avoid giving any bad impression” (Interview, Barcelona 03/11/2003).

some matters. You had to travel from there and we said then, well, Morocco (Interview, Barcelona 11/7/2002)’’.

Parents attribute a great deal of importance to the selection of the country where they will adopt. In general, they feel that, after the decision of having a child, this is probably the most important decision they make. On the one hand, and as I have already mentioned, all the adoption paperwork is done for one country only, or exceptionally for two.<sup>31</sup> Since all the process takes up a long time, a “mistake” in the selection of the country would make the process last longer, when it is already perceived as lasting too long. On the other hand, it is a decision that will determine the most important characteristics of the adoption process, which depend upon the country of origin of the child to be adopted. Many families that adopt in China justify their decision by arguing that the process there is made “transparent and crystal clear” by the country’s authorities and this makes the waiting period a tranquil one. A single mother, who worked a couple of hours as a volunteer at an association of adopting families while waiting for the assignment of her girl adopted in China, pointed out: “Many people, once they solve the race problem, they choose to adopt in China because the process is legal, transparent and ‘clean,’ and because everything is very clear. If there's one thing a person who's adopting wants to have is information and, in this sense, adoption in China is very good because people are constantly informed about how the process is going and how things are going. Every thing is done on a rigorous first come, first serve basis. A person is given a number when they submit the application and that number is always respected. No one is afraid of someone skipping that number.”

In Spain, it is not possible either to “choose” the sex of the child although people are allowed to state a “preference,” which most families do and when they do so, in more than 85% of the cases, they choose girls.<sup>32</sup> Ten years after the first international adoption and the ratification of The Hague Convention in 1995, not in Spain neither in any of its Autonomous Communities is it currently known the proportion of boys and

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31 In Catalonia, adoptive parents are allowed to choose two countries taking into account the problems that can occur in one of them.

32 The preference for girls does not seem to be exclusive of adoptive families. On Monday December 6th 2004, under the title of “Pocos hijos y, si es posible, chicas” (Few children and, if it’s possible, girls”) an article based on a work carried out by Margarita Delgado and Laura Barrios appeared in the newspaper. Their study was on population and fecundity in Spain and showed that, among other things, there was a clear preference for girls, which was even more significant in the case of mothers with university training (*El País*, Sociedad, 6/12/2004, 29).

girls that have been adopted, even though it is known the total number, their country of origin and age. The selection of the country of origin also has, from the perspective of the families, an influence in the possible sex of their future child. Thus, many families, and they admit so choose China because of the high probability of getting a girl due to the fact that most, if not all, of the numerous minors given up for adoption in China are girls. Along the same line, some families wish to have a son and therefore they choose Morocco because most minors given up for adoption there are boys.

Regarding age, parents can choose the age range they prefer. However, in this case, the professionals in charge of evaluating them as prospective future parents should recommend the age range that they consider to be most convenient for that family, taking into consideration its characteristics or the age of its members. In general, families point out that it is something they manage to agree with the professionals and that most times everything goes according to what they had expected.

The legal impediment to choose color or physical features in the children is solved or at least avoided, some way and only partially from the parents' perspective, through the selection of the country where they will adopt from. This way most families know or figure what their adopted girls will look like if they adopt in China, or Ethiopia, Haiti or Congo, or Russia or Eastern Europe. Latin America, where some Spanish families have initially adopted but where they do it less and less, is probably the "origin" that poses more questions in that sense to the future parents although most people said that their child would probably be "very ethnic." However, it is possible that the relationship between country of origin and child's features is not always and exactly like that. There was the case of an adopting family in Russia who, when they did the first trip to meet and accept the girl they had been assigned and saw she was not Caucasian, they rejected the baby assignment on racial grounds. They said that they really needed a physical resemblance with the baby so as to identify themselves as parents.

### ***Going to the "difference", going to "the country of origin" or to "cultural origins"***

"Pregnancy" starts when the applicants receive the approval from the public authorities, the IC, and an application is sent to the country itself. At this point, the applicants know

that they will become parents, but they do not know how long the process will take. This is a period that the applicants themselves describe as their pregnancy or bureaucratic pregnancy. Just like people expecting a biological child, adoptive parents now prepare their surroundings for the forthcoming event. Their parents are involved in preparing themselves for grandparenthood, siblings to become uncles and aunts, etc. However, they are preparing themselves for a new family member who will be born in an unknown country by unknown biological parents, and who will look quite different from themselves. To many, it is the last fact that takes on some significance (Howell and Marre forthcoming).

They are warned that although they will love their child just like biological parents, the rest of the world may not accept this in the same way and the child may experience being ostracized and the object of racism (Howell and Marre forthcoming). Due to the fact that they do not have –and it does not look like- a nine month biological pregnancy, during which people in their surroundings prepare them for the forthcoming event; adoptive couples or individuals have to explicitly explain their pregnancy to make it visible. In addition, many times, especially when parents are engaged in an interracial or “intercultural” adoption, they feel they need to justify it also before their parents, siblings, extended families and friends.

It is a time in which the bond with the country of origin of the child or with their “culture” is reinforced. Families adopting in Eastern Europe are probably the exception. They seem to be less interested in a “culture” that, on the other hand, they feel very close or similar. It is also a waiting time that many adoptive families spend within an association of adoptive families that, on the other hand, are usually organized by children's countries of origin:<sup>33</sup> “It’s for your child, so that he doesn’t feel like he’s the only one and for him to know that there are others like him” (Interview, Barcelona 22/05/2003) said one father who was a founder of one of Barcelona’s oldest associations.

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33 I am referring to large, in international adoptions terms, Autonomous Communities like Catalan or Madrid Communities. There are some Autonomous Communities with just one International Adoptive Families’ Association.

It is also a time during which the associations encourage families to buy books and other “cultural” material about the country of origin of children, and even encourage them to learn the basics of the language. The associations and their events, activities, services and meetings -specially the annual or biannual full day macro parties-, tend to create a community whose children are (and look) similar. The decision of keeping some previous and post adoption type of bond with their child's country of origin is something that adoptive parents never question. This may be as a result of changing trends within the adoption world generally that emphasize questions of roots, and more explicit about the need to encourage a child in an acceptance of his or her “two cultures”. Adoptive parents have been informed during the preparation courses that they attend during the pregnancy period about the importance of taking their child on a visit to his or her country of birth. Today, most expecting or new adoptive parents will say that they plan to undertake such a journey once their child reaches adolescence. Their arguments for doing so are rather similar and appear not to be thought through. Having been told by the “experts” that it is an important aspect of the children’s sense of identity to be familiar with their “original culture”, they, being good parents, make this part of their future planning. In Spain, parents are adamant about their adopted child not losing touch with their culture of origin. There is literally no home I have visited for an interview with an adoptive family without some sign of the child’s country of origin: pictures, images, and objects, with the exception perhaps of adoptive parents who adopt from Eastern Europe, this is, “into the same culture.” If it is true that international adoptions always cross lines of nation and ethnicity but when differences visibly mark a difference between children and parents, this is, cross lines of race, the community created around them, the associations of international adoptive families, try to become more and more “visible and vocal”, using Volkman (2003: 30) terms. It is the case in Spain, like in United States, of families adopting in China and, in the Spanish case of families adopting in Ethiopia and Haiti, to mention some of them. The opposite case is the association of adoptive families in Eastern Europe and Russia, the latest one to be created and the least active one, despite the fact that they are the second destination, after China, in Catalonia but the first in the rest of the state.

But, what do families associate origins with in their narratives?

The most shocking thing for me was to confirm, as I was doing fieldwork, that everybody seemed to know for sure what they were referring to when they talked about origins, that is to say: cultural origins or culture of origin.

Some associate origins or culture of origin with a language, even if the girl has been adopted as a baby, as is the case with the Chinese girls. Language classes is one of the things the Association of adoptive families in China offers parents and girls. Families also talk about food and regional products, and thus they incorporate new products to their diets and pass around recipes of the country or region. They buy music, objects, children's books and they go see movies coming from the country of origin.

As the mother-to-be who was waiting for the girl from China while doing voluntary work pointed out, the future adopting parents know that the “country of origin,” or simply “the origin,” influences what they normally call the “culture of origin” of their child, even when they are referring to a new born or a few month old child. In many of these and other cases, the terms “origin” or “culture of origin” are used to refer to phenotypical features. Likewise, in many other cases, they are used to talk about a culture that, from the moment the decision is made; they start to get interested in through its literature, music, language, food and all sort of products. One mother who did not know if she could bear children but had decided that, in any case, she preferred to adopt, said more or less the same thing that the single mother waiting for her child adopted in China: “many people, once they solve the race problem, choose to adopt in China”. Thus, even though from the very beginning she had thought about adopting in the black Africa, she carried out her first adoption in China and two years later another one in Africa. She considered her daughters to be “different” but said she felt prepared for the experience. However, she recognized that when she had decided to adopt for the second time, and do it in Africa, some families with whom she had shared her first adopting experience in China, told her that they did not feel prepared to adopt in Africa and the furthest they could go in that sense, in terms of the “differences,” was China. Also her husband did not have any problem to adopt in Africa but only if the child was a girl. He justified him saying that he did not see himself capable to say no, for instance, to an adolescent boy coming from Africa taking into account that for sure the child will be taller and bigger than him. A young Catalonian woman born in India declared, “going to my country in search of my origins had meant for me being able to understand

certain attitudes that had come up and were related to my genetic inheritance”. For her as for the mother of a Chinese girl adopted when she was three months old, that emphatically maintained that she wanted her child not to lose her culture of origin and that she would see to it, “culture of origins” or “origin” seem to refer to a biological or genetic inheritance.

The issue of “origins” or “cultural origins” of the child, or the fact that children will have a need and will probably raise the issue of origins when they reach adolescence is something that all adoptive parents mention. This is not something new. It’s something that, among others, Howell (Howell 2003; Howell 2004) and Yngvesson (Yngvesson 2003; Yngvesson & Mahoney 2000) have spoken about, for Norway and Sweden respectively. And they both more or less agree that the *Operation Return*,<sup>34</sup> as it is called here, is more related to the parents’ than to the children’s needs and desires. Howell (2004) has even suggested that the relatively lack of interest on the part of most young adoptees in their origins may be, for their adoptive parents, a confirmation and reaffirmation of the kinning bond they have been able to build.<sup>35</sup>

It seems as if the origins refer to a place, a town, or a city where the child is supposed to have been born or the place where he or she was institutionalized. To establish a contact with the place has another objective, which is reducing as much as possible the sense of the unknown and “ghostly”, of that “backpack” that they all recognize that their children carry on their backs, no matter how old they are. Inasmuch the adoptive families are convinced that there is a past, that is, the certainty that they do not start from zero, they want to know that past as much as possible. “It is not only important where your child comes from, but also to know his or her reality”, an adoptive parent said to justify the requirement from some countries that adoptive families stay in the country of origin of their children for several weeks. In general, families try to “know” or have the biggest possible amount of data with regard to their children. Thus, if they are able to visit the institution the child has lived in, they can get to know who took care of him/her, what

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34 Paco Rúa [adoptive father and coordinator of one of the most active associations in Madrid] prepares the so-called Operation: Return, and says: “sooner or later, your children will ask you to take them to their country of origin so as to get to know their own origins. Adolescence implies a construction of the identity and Judith, who’s ten years old, is at its doors. I prefer to anticipate it instead of coming too late. Therefore, we’ve already decided where to go for the 2005 vacations: Zipaquirá”.

35 For a single-sex couple of mothers it was very important the fact that it had been so difficult to return to Nicaragua to adopt their second daughter with their eldest one, also adopted in Nicaragua: an adolescent who refused to go back to the country and who didn’t enjoy the trip at all.

the child ate, how he/she was dressed and therefore collect stories that they can tell their child later. They visit, if they have that information, the site where they are told the child was found abandoned, they take pictures or film the site, the street, the atmosphere, the people. They try to talk to people from there. That is, they build a story about the child's origin that they can tell him/her later.<sup>36</sup> They try to minimize the holes, the information holes about their child's first times.

Open adoption is in the same line. Many of the families adopting in Haiti do so to be able to choose one orphanage in particular that allows the possibility of having an interview with the child's biological parents. The objective is, in many cases, to obtain the maximum possible information about their children, to clear as many doubts as possible, to fill in as much as possible the information gaps, to find an explanation for the evidences of the present or the future. A mother would say that it had been a good experience to know the biological parents of her two daughters, because she rapidly found an explanation to why they were so tiny in spite of their age. They were like that because their biological parents were also very small, and not because of malnutrition or any disease (Marre & Bestard 2003).

In general, in the parents' retelling of the time when they went for their children, they never talk about 'that' place as an interesting, nice and pleasant place; they rather mention its lack of resources, its problems, its poverty, its corruption and its stifling hot or freezing cold weather. Moreover, they experience and then systematically retell the moment of taking the plane back home as a relief.<sup>37</sup>

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36 In the case of China, where information about female children is more difficult to obtain, many adoptive families resort to the services of an adoptive parent of Chinese girl from the United States who does search of "finding ads," or ads about the finding of the little girls. It is a facsimile reproduction of the ad the Chinese authorities are obliged to publish since 1996 in a local journal when a little girl has been found abandoned. "Those ads have often more information than the one we have," a mother said. They are ads with a picture of the baby girl and, thus, parents consider it to be the first picture they can have of her. As a mother who was about to receive her baby girl told us: "When I get the finding ad from C., I will let you know. It will be in Chinese, of course, but I will have it translated when I pluck up the courage to do so. Sometimes one does not know whether one wants to know more or not." The very same father from the United States is in charge, on demand, of filming the place where the baby girl was abandoned, and obtaining information the orphanage has about the girls.

37 This is a general feeling that has been very well transmitted by two films related international adoption: John Sayles' *La casa de los babies* (2003) and Benard Tavernier's *Holy Lola* (2005).

### *Knowing or building the “difference”: managing the “difference”?*

Most of the internationally adopted children do not, in the vast majority of cases, look like their parents. In these cases, resemblances do not seem to assist the kinning process (Marre & Bestard forthcoming; Modell 2001), to cement and confirm the reality of relatedness as occur in biological kinship. To the outside eye they represent an enigma; a challenge to the normal order of things. Their very existence in their familial setting demands an explanation. Parents do not require legitimation or an explanation of the relationship. As far as they are concerned they are a family as real as any other. Fate played a hand in giving them the particular child just it does with biological children. But the kinning process for them seem to require an extra dimension, namely the drawing of the individual child into their own personal domain of resemblances (Howell & Marre forthcoming). As Marre was told by an adoptive and biological mother “biological maternity is easier, for the adoptive one has to work harder. Biological maternity makes you grow emotionally, perhaps, but adoptive maternity makes you grow humanly”.

Most of adopters say they are aware that their children are “different”. Origins, cultural origins or country of origin refer to the difference. Children’s differences are linked, in general terms, to their “cultural origins” or “country of origin” with no mention of “racial difference.”

But, they also know that when they are talking about difference also refer to certain forms of discrimination and, thus, they want to “anticipate.” The word “anticipate” is often mentioned by adopting parents. But, what does “anticipate” really mean? It means to state explicitly, and one may add emphasize, something that is self-evident and that stigmatizes. As an example, I can comment a recently passed law according to which adoptive families have the possibility, as they themselves point out, of “cause their children to reborn” in Spain through obtaining a birth certificate with the place of birth being that of the place of residence of the adoptive parents. From the perspective of the adoptive families’ narratives, it is a possibility that, on the one hand, only “favors” those families adopting in Eastern Europe and children who are similar to their parents and, on the other hand, “encourages” the hiding, invisibilisation and secrecy of the

adoption itself. As it was commented on in associations and listservs of adoptive families, this law could constitute a step back in the process of visibilisation and opening up of the adoption and it could contribute to the minor's loss of his/her "cultural roots" or his/her link to his/her "cultural origins."

Likewise, as some families would comment in the meetings, virtual and in person, they feel they have to prepare themselves on a daily basis to explain "where" their child is from. "When someone asks me if my husband's black, I answer he is not, but I say that Clarisa was born in Haiti," told me a mother who had found an ironic way of answering the repeated question about her daughter.

The adoption of minors phenotypically different means for the adoptive families, according to my ethnographic data, a deeper process of reflection during the pre adoptive as well as the post adoptive stage and, from their perspective; it requires the need to acquire "skills," "tools" and "know-how" typical of the "cultures of origin" of their children, more adequate for treating their bodies and "customs." It is told in this way even among adopting families in China who, because of their attitudes, are perceived by the other families and associations as the elite. The parents of girls from China usually spoke of the thousand-year old culture of their daughters and the "natural" meekness and intelligence they say their girls have. Adoptive parents through any way always improve the "natural" qualities of the children.

Some parents prefer to reinforce these "natural" qualities of their daughters through their names. An adoptive mother to a Chinese girl and a Congolese girl told me she had called the former one Honey and the latter Forest in reference to their "nature."

The reference to how fast children improve and especially to their bodies is something constant in adoptive families. However, it's not only a question related to the children's general health, although it has to do with that, but also with their appearance.

The first thing parents mention in their accounts is the state in which they found the children, what the clothes in which the child was handed over looked like, the condition of his or her hair and skin which is something they hasten to examine in detail in search of signs. Skin and hair care is a recurrent subject among parents of girls of African or Haitian origin. For most of them, their daughters' skin is very delicate and need unique

care. They consider it an extremely delicate skin, a skin that requires extra care because if not it becomes "white." However, also the hair receives an important attention and energy on the part of the white mothers to black girls. Not only is it present in their accounts, but it is also a recurrent topic in the listservs in which one can find products, recommendations on how often afro hair should be washed (compared to non afro hair), what types of shampoos, conditioners, combs, brushes and rubber bands should be used, and so on. The considerations about hair and white mothers' incapacity to deal with it are identical to those described by K. Tyler in her work on mixed families in Leicester (Tyler 2003; Tyler 2004a; Tyler 2004b). Thus, most mothers point out that the best thing to do is to take the girls to a hair salon "for black people," a mother said, because they "naturally" know how to deal with it. "You have to go to one of these hair salons that there are now, run by immigrants, because not only do they know how to deal with the hair, but they also have the adequate products. One can look at how they do it, but we will never be able to do it as they do it because for them it's natural." "Natural" is also the adjective used to describe the inner rhythm that they perceive in their daughters, as K Tyler also mentioned in her work. At the same time, parents describe the "natural" ability of their daughters from Africa to eat delicately with the hands forming some sort of bowl with them.

The emphasis on the difference is not, however, something exclusive of the girls of African or Haitian origin. Some mothers recommend doing a tight ponytail to their daughters' hair to stress their almond-shaped eyes to which, because of these characteristics, they treat with special eye drops because, they claim, those types of eyes produce less amount of natural tears.

From the parents' point of view, seem to be better for something that is self-evident and that stigmatizes to state explicitly and one may add emphasize. Adoptive parents spend a lot of effort in emphasizing the differences between themselves and their adopted children. But, at the same time, they can say "imagine how much 'ours' we feel her, that we don't even see her black anymore. I'm not kidding. You don't see the color, it's just love," says a professor, mother to an adopted child of Ethiopian origin and two biologic sons. The journalist who interviewed Ethiopians girls' adoptive mother understood last paragraph as a positive attitude before "cultural", racial actually, "differences." Evidently, this is a possibility and, in fact, it is supposed that this adoptive mother, like the other previously quoted, "once [she] solve the race problem" she can go to adopt in

Ethiopia. Nevertheless, she needs to emphasize her love for her child saying that they “don’t see the color.” Because, what would happen if they see her color, her black color? Could not they love her in the same way?

### *Some last comments*

Can we speak of intercultural relations in the context of international adoption in Spain? On the one hand, it seems that adoptive parents think that they are engaged in an intercultural relation when they adopt everywhere, probably with the exception of Eastern Europe and Soviet Union. Nevertheless, taking into account this exception and the fact that most of the adoptive children are adopted when babies, it is not possible to think in an intercultural relation, at least between parents and children. It seems that when adoptive parents speak of intercultural relations in fact they are speaking of interracial relations. As an adoptive father, founder of one of the oldest associations in Catalonia, said “their race doesn’t matter because they’ll end up being Catalanian.” The integration of adoptees into their adoptive families caught the political imagination of Catalan politicians in their endeavor to cope with the question of immigration. In the 2003 international conference on adoption in Catalonia mentioned before, the former president of the Catalan government placed international adoption in the context of new migration to Catalonia. He observed that international adoption in Catalonia doubles the rest of Spain and he underlined the open mentality of Catalan identity compared to other cultures and civilizations. Referring to a village where a local racist political group had appeared, he said that he had met a Catalan mother with a Chinese child there, both speaking Catalan –the main symbol of Catalan integration. At a different scale, integration is easier in adoptive families, than in adoptive countries. Both, adoptive families and adoptive countries use the same language of genealogy, origins and identity. In a multicultural world with politics of identity, adoption into a new country (or a new family) does not necessarily mean to hide previous origins and nature.

On the other hand, it is evident that international adoption has stimulated and produced certain forms of contacts with countries and/or cultural origins of adopted children. Adoptive families isolated or as part of an association build and maintain some type of bond with the country and culture of origin of their children. They go to the countries,

sometimes twice, and they became consumers of some cultural products of children's country of origin like music, films, food and so on. Most of them begin to go to restaurants and different types of specialized shops, called "ethnic restaurants". In this sense, it is evident that they are building some type of bridges with those countries<sup>38</sup> and cultures. Nevertheless, as we saw, the relation is an unequal relation. From the parents' point of view, the country and/or culture of origins is always worse than the adoptive one, this is the owner, included those who adopt in China and they think of their girls as belonging to a million-year culture. Even in the case of girls adopted in China, their living conditions improve significantly once incorporated into the adoptive family. The underestimation of a place or culture which, on the other hand, they keep saying they want to keep alive for their children is the way for a kinning process that, in an interracial adoption, probably presents itself as more difficult (Howell 2004).

Finally, "immigrants" do not constitute one category (Howell & Melhuus 2002). Rather, those immigrants who get incorporated into a native family, kinned in a native family, are viewed by the authorities (and the rest of the native population) as quite a different category from those who arrive in order to find work, escape from a restrictive political system in their home country, or just look for a better future (Howell & Marre forthcoming). When in a TV show I took part in, a father of two adopted girls in China was asked if he had ever thought that one of his girls could fall in love with the son of a couple of Chinese immigrants, those who own restaurants in Barcelona, he said he had never thought about that and he thought it was unlikely to happen.

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38 It is interesting to point out that when in 2003 the Catalanian government organized a Congress on international adoption called "New Horizons" and to which it invited officials in charge of international adoption in several countries of Asia, Africa and Eastern Europe in order to initiate contact with them so as to cater to the demand of adoptive families, some coordinators of different workshops belonged to the Foreign Chamber of Commerce of Catalonia. It was something that, on the other hand, was not commented on, in any way, by any type of media, association of adoptive families or parents.



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