

# INTERNACIONAL ADOPTION: SOLIDARITY WITH INFANCY OR ASSISTED REPRODUCTION?

Ana Berástegui

Instituto Universitario de la Familia

Universidad Pontificia Comillas de Madrid

[a.berastegui@iuf.upcomillas.es](mailto:a.berastegui@iuf.upcomillas.es)

## Introduction

In 2000, a well known brand of Swedish furniture presented a publicity campaign with the slogan "Adopt a child: redecorate your life" with the view, according to the advertising agency, to promoting solidarity, progressive values and open families. Despite the fact that the advert was withdrawn after pressure from Parent Associations, the message remained. Meanwhile, this very summer, the gossip magazines throughout Spain have informed us in great detail about the adoption of some twins whose genetic material, medical care during the pregnancy and birth had been carefully selected and prepared to give the mother two infants to care for. And the new message has remained printed on the retinas of the average Spaniard.

These two images help me to illustrate the two extremes in which the image of adoption has been created in Spain over the past ten years. On the one hand, adoption as a gesture of solidarity. On the other, a method of assisted reproduction as a means to having a child when biology and new fecundation techniques have failed. On the one hand an absolutely different experience of paternity which honours and fills someone with solidarity values, on the other an absolutely equal experience that must shorten the distance between having a biological or adopted child. The tension between both poles is summarized in one demand: **Why, if there are still children suffering injustice in the world they do not get quickly and cheaply a healthy child without traumas for me?**

This social vision on adoption is not the one shared by the majority of adopting families and, however, it is present in people's talk, the people who coexist with the families and with the children, at certain times of the adopters' lives; many who approach adoption and then take a step back and unfortunately many of those who also, but not in a pure state, in motivations and expectations of some of the families who end up adopting. Not in vain the general culture on paternity and adoption influences the attitudes and the ways of confrontation by the adopting families, and finally, the adaptation of the children that are adopted.

This so confused adoption culture, that mingles adoption as a solidarity gesture with the adoption as a reproductive technique is in part a consequence, but also a cause, of the most spectacular and irreflexive way in which the international adoption has evolved in Spain.

As we know, in less than ten years Spain has gone from considering international adoption as an option for "adventurous families" to considering the family-with-adopted-child as a model family in advertising (valid for advertising cars, sanitary towels, children's snacks or electrical appliances) a family that is desired and normal, by this meaning becoming the principal adopting power on the planet. However, this revolution that is known as the boom of international adoption has happened without sufficient knowledge

on the phenomena, its objectives its specifics and its risks and accompanied by this tense and hardly realistic adoption culture.

In Spain, as noted by Julio Iglesias de Ussel, it can be observed that all social changes (in family matters, incorporation of women in the labour market, civil society in general) have happened in a very short period of time with the additional disfunctions and generational changes that this entails.

However, in the European countries with more experience in the field of adoption, there are different processes and generations of parents that have passed before reaching the present conception of adoption. René Hoksbergen <sup>1</sup> has studied these social changes defining these categories: the closed traditional generation (1950-1970), the optimist-idealist generation (1971-1981), the materialist-realist generation (1982-1992) and finally the optimist-demanding generation (since 1993) which would be the actual generation of adopting European parents.

### **The consumer generation**

In Spain we could define the present generation of adopting parents as the consumer generation. In this we can observe many of the characteristics of the optimist-demanding generation, shared with the rest of Europeans, but at the same time continuing with some of the characteristics of the previous generations. This consumer generation in adoption would be defined by five basic influences that also configure their risks:

- 1.- The cultural definition on paternity and maternity and the social consideration of the children as commodities with the family life plan.
- 2.- The problems of infertility at a social level that have converted infertility into a customary problem and the adoption as another way to parenthood.
- 3.- Solidarity as a personal impulse within anybody's reach more than a structural commitment.
- 4.- The adopter as a consumer with rights and claims and the role of the network of adopters in the configuration of adoption services.
- 5.- The influence of the Media with their presentation of adoption as something desirable and a possible solution to the situation of a impoverished infancy.

### **Solidarity with infancy or assisted reproduction?**

The tension between the solidarity with infancy and assisted reproduction should be resolved by separating both tendencies from their consumer tendencies and taking the positive part of both. From solidarity with infancy we should accept the commitment with the child that already exists and the empathy for its situation and respect for its rights; from assisted reproduction we should understand the importance of the wish to be parents as a principal motive for adoption and the only way of offering children who have been deprived of their families, what they really need: parents. In this way the adoption culture would be configured as a real resource for the protection of children.

<sup>1</sup> Hoksbergen, R. y Laak, J. (2005). Changing attitudes of adoptive parents in Northern European countries. En: D.M. Brodzinsky y J. Palacios (Eds.). *Psychological Issues in adoption: research and practice* (pp. 27-46). New York: Praeger.