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The building of parental bonds: adoption and assisted reproduction in Chile

Florencia HERRERA*

Abstract

This article aims to analyze the building of bonds between parents and children in Chile. In keeping with the same, the cultural elements upon which mothers and fathers who have adopted children or had children using assisted reproduction techniques base their parenthood relationships are identified. People who have required assistance for their reproductive process have had to make implicit multiples underlying parental relations explicit. The analysis of parents' narratives enables identification of the following cultural elements: 1) Blood, biology and genetics, 2) care, love and time, 3) destiny, God and the unexplainable and 4) sensory aspects or relationships between bodies. The article attempts to bring the analysis of parenthood relations closer to the real experiences of people by accounting for creativity deployed in their desire to establish their relationships.

Keywords: adoption; assisted reproduction; family; kinship; parenthood.

Introduction

This article aims to analyze the building of bonds between parents and children in Chile. The long process couples who are unable to conceive go through in order to become parents, the options they consider, the choices they make and the arguments they use in order to provide meaning for their relationships with their

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children are revealing in terms of the elements that come into play for the building of parenthood.

The overarching question for this article is: What cultural elements do fathers and mothers who have adopted or conceived their children by means of assisted reproduction use to build parental bonds¹? The article analyzes discourse by mothers and fathers who have adopted children or had children by means of new reproductive technologies in Santiago, Chile.

People facing infertility have been forced to ask themselves how they intend to have children. The options they choose and the narratives they use to provide meaning for the processes by which they become parents allow us to approach the meaning of parental bonds in a way that is not possible in the case of children who are conceived 'naturally'. People who have required assistance for their reproductive process have had to make implicit multiples underlying parental relations explicit. What makes a child my child? What lies behind the idea that my child should have my blood? Discourse used by mothers and fathers interviewed either to support or challenge these ideas includes frequently-used expressions such as 'I gave her the gift of life', 'there is only one mother', and 'blood is thicker than water'. Tefler (1999) indicates that adoption practices make the cultural processes, notions and forces that create kinship visible (in Marré & Bestard, 2009). I believe that the same may be stated regarding practices associated to assisted reproduction. Levine states that new reproductive technologies provide the opportunity to discern "what constitutes relatedness for their users, for unpacking the meanings of key kinship concepts and kin terms and for testing the adequacy of anthropological theories about kinship cross-culturally" (2008, p. 381).

According to Melhuus & Howell (2009), new reproductive technologies and adoption have seldom been jointly analyzed by social scientists, even though the two authors believe that these two social phenomena belong to the same order. They propose that these two phenomena should be studied as two kinds of assisted procreation and suggest that parallel examination of the same enriches the understanding of both.

Nature and social, given and made

Anthropologists have been those most interested in analyzing the meaning of kinship relations. Ever since Schneider, this debate has been set at the core of the dichotomy between nature and social. Schneider (1980) referred to these two

¹ When talking about assisted reproduction I refer to intrauterine insemination (IUI), in vitro fertilization (IVF), the donation of gametes and intracytoplasmic sperm injection (ICSI). The latter is an IVF procedure in which a single sperm is injected through the pellucid zone of an egg.

domains as the order of nature and the order of law, arguing that biology has substantial symbolic weight for the building of kinship relations in American culture. The development of new reproductive technologies has sparked substantial interest in his statement regarding the effect of eventual discoveries in the field of biogenetics:

“In American cultural conception, kinship is defined as biogenetic. This definition says that kinship is whatever the biogenetic relationship is. If science discovers new facts about biogenetic relationship, then that is what kinship is and was all along, although it may not have been known at the time” (1980, p. 23).

Strathern (1992) states that the facts of kinship are also facts of nature and facts of culture, kinship are where these two domains overlap. Kinship connects people through biology. Family genealogies are perceived to be a network of connections between individuals due to the biogenetic transmission from parents to children.

“Kinship, though, is where Westerners think about connections between bodies themselves. Indeed, if they use the body to think about the uniqueness of the individual, they also use it to talk about the way persons are connected to one another, not through what they share in a general way, as we might speak of all humankind as kin, but through what has been transmitted in particular ways. So they trace specific connections (genealogies) and the network tells them how closely they are related (degrees of relatedness). Modern knowledge of genetics endorses this way of thinking: genes make each individual unique and connects it to many immediate – as well as countless more distant – others” (2005, p. 26).

When analyzing kinship relationships, Edwards talks about “interplay between the given and the mutable; between genes and background; between nature and nurture” (2000, p. 215) and states that this opposition has no solution, one implies the other. Family connection requires sociability or shared elements such as blood or genes.

Carsten (2004) makes a distinction between ‘what is given’ by nature or biology and ‘what is made’ over time and in shared activities. “Kinship may be viewed as given by birth and unchangeable, or it may be seen as shaped by the ordinary, every day activities of family life” (2004, p. 6). However, biology in itself is not enough. Carsten (2000) states that in cases of adoption biological bonds lose the meaning it has in prevailing discourse and that care, efforts and time play a crucial role in the creation of kinship bonds.

Regarding the understanding of kinship relationships, discussion has currently focused on the role played by the development of new reproductive technologies, international adoption and same-sex relationships. There has been much debate as to whether assisted reproduction techniques really change the meaning of kinship relationships (Bestard, 2009; Carsten, 2004; Edwards, 2000; Strathern, 2005; Cojocaru, 2009), about the importance of genetics, culture and appearance in international adoption (Howell & Marré, 2006; Lebner, 2000; Melhuus & Howell, 2009) and about the role of biology and choice in families made up of members of the same sex (Cadoret, 2003; Weeks *et al.*, 2000; Weston, 1992). Arguments continue to revolve around the dichotomy of nature and social, assigning a central role to biology, blood and genetics when defining what it means to be a relative.

The question comes up as to whether this dichotomy between nature and social accounts for how people provide meaning to and build kinship relationships. Mason suggests that even though anthropologists have best understood the fascination engendered by kinship, we must move away of the framework imposed by biology:

“One consequence of this is that although anthropology’s willingness to confront biology is laudable, not enough recognition is given to other important dimensions of kinship. Although the current concerns with reproductive technologies, genes and gametes is undoubtedly highly fruitful for the analysis of kinship, there are other ways in which kinship may be ‘given’, which are not to do with biology, substance or biogenetics. Alongside those, there may be other ways of being creative with kinship” (2008, p. 32).

Mason (2008) proposes four dimensions around which people recognize experience and understand kinship relations in their daily lives: fixed affinities, negotiated and creative affinities, ethereal affinities and sensory affinities.

The first of these –fixed affinities– makes reference to what Carsten (2004) says ‘is given’, or to the ‘ready made context’ in which relationships are built with the family of origin (Finch & Mason, 1993). In this case, relationships do not feel chosen, but rather inevitable and therefore enduring over time; they cannot be broken. Bonds of consanguinity are the classic example of these relationships. However, Mason argues that fixed affinities are not only included in biological relationships, but also go beyond the same.

In second place come affinities that are negotiated or creative. This dimension makes reference to people’s power to decide the manner or path being followed by each of the relationships established. Support, care and commitment are negotiated between the parties involved (Finch & Mason, 1993). This dimension refers to what can be created, which Carsten (2004) identifies as ‘what is made’.

According to Mason, the last two dimensions have been studied the least. However, these are no less relevant when it comes to understanding kinship relationships. Ethereal affinities allude to what is mysterious, magic and meta-physical. These are elements that exist beyond any rational explanation. Sensorial affinities make reference to the physical, material and corporeal dimension of relationships.

Adoption and Assisted Reproduction in Chile

Having children is considered to be the ‘natural’ way of things for every person and couple in Chile. It is well-accepted and expected that a man and woman get married and eventually have one or more children. The absence of children is evidence of incomplete people, an incomplete family or couple. Being parents is perceived as something essential to personal fulfilment, especially for women (Valdés *et al.*, 2005).

The practices of adoption and reproduction take place within a context traditionally influenced by the Catholic Church², steady incorporation of women into the workforce, substantially lower birth rates³ and the privatization and deregulation of basic social security mechanisms⁴. The appreciation of children comes in turn with these processes. Children play an increasingly core role in the family, displacing the figure of the father. Children cease to be a force contributing to sustain the family in order to become the main source of economic and affective investment for their parents (Valdés *et al.*, 2005). In keeping with the same, infertility is experienced as a drama for which a solution must be found.

Adoption is only allowed in Chile when the family of origin is unable to provide the care needed by their child. The law only allows the adoption of minors and its legal consequences are the same as for biological affiliation. There is a single adoption system and there are no figures for family care, simple adoption or open adoption. Bonds of affiliation with the family of origin are erased with adoption and the bonds created by the same are irrevocable (Gómez, 2007).

² The influence of the Catholic Church in Chile has highly concrete consequences. Chile had no divorce law until 2004 and the country’s current abortion legislation is one of the most restrictive in the world. Abortion is penalized under any circumstance and is not allowed even when the mother’s life is in danger or when the fetus has no possibilities of survival.

³ The global birth rate has gone from 5.4 in 1960 down to 1.8 in 2007 (National Statistics Institute).

⁴ Chile has seen resources provided by society for the family weakens over the last thirty years. The privatization and deregulation of basic social security - health, pensions, labor, education - mean that the family has been overburdened with responsibilities (UNDP 2002: 212).

Adoption is a national process in Chile. Neither the Law of Adoption (in force since 1999) nor the National Service for the Protection of Minors⁵ (SENAME) makes any mention of the possibility of adopting children abroad. Regulations are only provided for adoption of Chilean children by foreign couples. The number of adoptions by non-residents in Chile has decreased in recent years and the current law prefers married couples residing in Chile to married couples residing abroad. In addition, married couples are preferred to singles, widows or divorcees. The number of children available for adoption is usually less than the number of couples wishing to adopt children. Consequently, foreign couples only qualify for adopting older children or children with health problems, while singles have almost no possibility of adopting a child (Sename, 2006).

The first IVF child in Chile was born in 1984. Ever since, the country's assisted reproduction industry has grown substantially. However, there are no laws regulating new reproductive technologies. Application of the same is therefore only regulated by the ethics committees of each medical center. The strong influence of the Catholic Church and its ability to state pro-life arguments have led several private clinics to self-regulate issues such as the handling of embryos⁶.

There has not yet been any public debate in Chile regarding new reproductive technologies. This is probably due to the fact that this industry generates a lot of revenue and the interests involved would probably be endangered if the issue is discussed and parliament passes any acts regarding the same. Private parties are presently free to decide what treatments to employ and for whom. The only regulation currently existing is the Civil Code article establishing that people who voluntarily undergo assisted reproduction treatment are assumed to be parents and that this affiliation cannot be challenged. No age limit is prescribed for this treatment nor is there any legislation as to whether egg and sperm donation should be anonymous or if donors should be paid.

Assisted reproduction treatment is very expensive. Most infertile couples in Chile cannot afford it. The public healthcare system is currently running an assisted fertilization pilot program offering approximately 200 annual spaces for a free IVF or ICSI cycle for married couples or stable couples affiliated to the public healthcare system. Most of these cycles are carried out at public hospitals in Santiago.

⁵ Adoption process in Chile can only be conducted by the SENAME and three agencies accredited by the same.

⁶ Some clinics go no further than ovular follow-up, while some choose to freeze embryos and others set a limit of days between fertilization and implantation of the same.

Methodology

The arguments wielded in this article are based on the results of a qualitative research project I conducted in Santiago, Chile between 2008 and 2009. Throughout this period, I interviewed forty-nine women and men who have opted for adoption or assisted reproduction in order to become parents.

I asked each person I interviewed to tell me how he or she had experienced the parenthood process starting from the very first time she or he thought 'I want to be a parent'. Based on this request, each person put together a coherent story with a beginning, middle and end. Each person interviewed organized and provided meaning for his or her experiences by means of this free narrative (Weeks *et al.*, 2001; Wegar, 1992). The structure of these interviews was flexible and fluent, allowing points of view to come out and unexpected issues to be discussed by those interviewed (Mason, 2002).

Most of these interviews were held at these people's homes, while others were held at their offices and very few were held in public places. This encouraged a more intimate atmosphere. I use pseudonyms and do not provide details about the persons interviewed in order to protect their identity. All interviews were recorded and transcribed.

I attempted to represent mothers' and fathers' wide variety of experiences by interviewing people with different profiles. Age of the persons interviewed ranged between 30 and 60 and their economic status varied substantially. Some had a lot of buying power and were able to pay for several IVF cycles per year and even consider travelling to the United States or Europe for treatment. Others had very limited income and had access to free assisted reproduction treatment offered by the State⁷. Likewise, interviewees included people with a post-graduate university education, a normal university education, technical training, and a complete or incomplete high school education. Most of the people interviewed said that they were practicing Catholics, non-practicing Catholics and agnostics, but I also interviewed two people who said they were Mormons and one evangelical Protestant. An important percentage of the mothers and fathers were married at the time of the interview, but I also contacted people who were separated, single and common-law spouses.

The following section identifies and analyzes the cultural elements the mothers and fathers I interviewed base their parental relationships on. Mason (2008) indicates that the value of the dimensions she proposes must be empirically corroborated and that it is important to study variation throughout several cultures. This article aims to contribute to discussion about the meaning of kinship by: 1)

⁷ Needy adoptive mothers and fathers were not interviewed because foundations do not accept adoption applications from couples whose family income is lower than US\$ 12,000 per year.

joint analysis of discourse associated to the practices of adoption and assisted reproduction, 2) conducting this analysis in a different culture than the 'Euro-American culture' where debate has focused up until now, 3) verifying validity of the conceptual framework proposed by Mason and 4) opening up the game board for the incorporation of all significant dimensions for people.

Building parenthood

Getting married or moving in together and then having children is the natural order of things for the parents interviewed. Before experiencing infertility, very few of the people interviewed considered the possibility of not having children. Becoming a parent is considered to be part of every individual's life. The desire to have children is not normally expressed as something rational, but rather as something that precedes any reasoning, like a person's essential instinct. Catalina states: "Ever since Mauricio and I got married, starting with the priest who told us to 'procreate', I was taught that I had to be a mother" (an adoptive mother). Alberto states that "from the beginning, being a father was something absolutely natural and logical in the sequence of life" (father of two children by means of IVF). The people interviewed felt that they were going against social expectations by not having children. Many mentioned that they felt a lot of pressure from their family members and acquaintances.

The following section analyzes the cultural elements parents who have adopted or undergone assisted reproduction base their parental bonds on.

Blood, biology and genetics: Connections between bodies

Blood, biology and genetics have a strong symbolic meaning for the building of parenthood bonds in the cases studied. Mothers and fathers interviewed use these as synonyms and frequently mention them in their narratives. These are the elements that parents facing infertility feel they are being denied, and these lay the foundation upon which they want to build their relationship with their future children. The 'own child' they long for is a biological child, whose blood is their own, a child whose genetic makeup is the same as their own.

Blood and biogenetics are considered to be assurance of a bond that will not be questioned and which cannot be broken, something that will last for their entire lives. These elements also provide the guarantee of continuity. Children have the same blood as their parents, grandparents and great-grandparents and all these relatives are reflected in them through family resemblance. This is what parents look for when they choose assisted reproduction and this is what explains why adoption is always considered to be a second alternative. As stated by Edwards, people make the difference between blood relatives and those who join the family

by means of adoption: “This is evident in the emphasis people place on ‘accepting’ step or adopted children ‘as if’ they were ‘their own’” (1999, p. 70).

Valentina, a mother of twins by means of artificial insemination, says that only would have considered adopting a child after several failed in vitro fertilization attempts:

“I believe that adoption can be good, that it can be nice, it can eventually be almost like having your own child, but if you have the possibility to have your own child, even if it’s only one, well, it’s hopefully better that your child have your blood and your husband’s blood. That’s it, it should be just your blood, 100% yours, even though you might feel the same when you adopt a child but it’s the curiosity to see a little person and say, that’s it, he has my eyes, my temper or he’s just like my husband or the person I love, that maternal and paternal feeling I think is unique for a person who is a part of you” (mother of twins by means of artificial insemination).

This quote from Valentina reflects ideas that come out of a lot of interviews: the importance of appearance, that blood engenders parental feelings and that children are part of their parents’ bodies. Parents feel that biological reproduction ensures the existence of intimate bonds, they are sure that love for their children will spring forth naturally since these children have their blood and are part of their bodies.

Strathern (2005) suggests that connections between people are usually thought of as external to their bodies but that kinship is where Westerners think of connections between bodies. People who have doubted whether they are able to be biological parents clearly express this idea of being connected to the bodies of their children. The following quote by Edgardo well reflects Strathern’s proposal:

“Look, I’m sure that if I decided to adopt a child I would love him or her just the same, but it’s the last resort. It’s different to have a child and know that he or she is part of you. Those are my cells growing there, so there’s something more than ...just socialization, something more than just my gestures, than the way the child talks, there’s really a part of me” (father by means of IVF).

The elements of blood, biology and genetics are also mentioned in the discourse of fathers and mothers who have adopted children, but the nature of the same is more complex. Most of these parents have chosen to adopt a child when the option of assisted reproduction has failed. They have had to work to provide a new meaning for their ‘own child’. Bonds with their children cannot be built and legitimated based on blood and biogenetics. Children are connected to their progenitors by means of these elements. These are perceived by parents as figures that threaten the relationship with their children. The strength and power of blood

and biogenetics to build parental relations becomes manifest through: 1) potential adoptive fathers and mothers fearing that they may not come to love their future children, 2) confusion for adoptive parents as to what to call biological parents⁸, 3) generalized rejection of open adoption systems where biological parents can remain in contact with the child, 4) anguish coming up when parents think that their child may want to meet his or her progenitors or the fear that these progenitors may be able to take their children away from them. Francisca prefers to avoid contact with the biological mother of her son:

“I wouldn’t like to, say, see his mother come and visit once a month ‘cause even though he will know that another woman gave birth to him, he is going to know her whole story. I think it’s too unstable for me” (adoptive mother).

Bárbara remembers how scared she was when news headlines reported the case of a biological mother who recovered her child who had been given in adoption:

“[The case] of the baby was a two-year-old child recovered by its biological mother; we were scared shitless. We also knew that she [their son’s biological mother] had to sign, so we were frightened to death. Ever since she signed it was such a relief [...]. You stay scared and you feel the anguish for a very long time” (adoptive mother).

According to Mason (2008), the elements of blood and biogenetics fall within the dimension of fixed affinities. This is to say that these are part of what people perceive as ‘given’ and provide an ‘essential fixity’ quality for relations that is highly appreciated by parents.

Care, love and time: Relationships between people

Care, love and time are a second order of elements used by parents in order to build parental bonds. The emphasis here lies in relationships between people and the building of bonds as things that are created and not given.

Arguments related to how daily care associated raising children and love shared over time make parenthood real are more prevalent among parents who have adopted children. Many of these parents explicitly claim that parenthood is carried out on a day-to-day basis and is not something biologically given. Interviews

⁸ Some people interviewed stated that psychologists from the foundation where the adoption process took place advised them not to call people who had given up their child in adoption ‘biological parents’ but rather progenitors. This makes a lot of sense to the people interviewed. To this regard, Camila (mother by means of IVF and adoption) says: “you don’t call them biological parents, you call them progenitors, you see, what the psychologists said ‘forget about the issue of father, mother, [mother] means you’ and of course, now you need to talk about progenitors, it makes sense” (Camila).

commonly feature sayings that reinforce the power of raising children and love when it comes to parental bonds: “he was born of the heart and not of the belly”, “I wanted to raise a child more than bear a child”, “I am a mother even though I feed him with a bottle and not with my breasts”. These sayings highlight elements related to love and child care – the heart, the baby bottle, child raising– where a relationship between people is being built above and beyond elements associated to biological reproduction –the belly, gestation, lactation–, where this relationship is given. The words of Gabriel are very clear regarding this point:

“Paternity is not established by biology, I am convinced of that, I believe that paternity and maternity are established in the relationship, I am very convinced that the number of times you have woken up at four in the morning and the number of times you went out with your children, biological or non-biological, is all the same. What I mean to say is that paternity is a kind of relationship” (Adoptive father).

The following quote by Manuel shows how a parent’s relationship with his or her children is something built by means of daily care, love shared and time spent together:

“I started falling in love with my children as I changed their diapers, bathed them, hugged them, when I woke up and they looked at me and smiled or made a gesture, that’s how I gradually fell in love with them” (adoptive father and biological father).

Children’s responses (smiles, gestures) are also necessary for building paternity. Recognition of these roles plays an important part in parental bonds. Since this is a relationship between people, both parties are building the same. For Catalina the moment she felt that her child recognized her as its mother was crucial when it came to taking on the role of mother.

“I felt that he really connected with me. That’s when I felt the connection, OK, I’m your mother and you are my child, I was rocking him to sleep in my arms and he leaned back, maybe it’s just my imagination, but he took my arms like this and looked into my eyes, smiled and embraced me. I had never seen it so clearly the other times” (adoptive mother).

Care upbringing, love and recognition are less prevalent in the discourse of parents who have had biological children by means of assisted reproduction. This obviously doesn’t mean that they don’t love or care for their children, but they don’t consider these arguments necessary for validating bonds with their children, the relationship is already validated by biological bonds. When the child is not a biological child the relationship must be built over time since the child is initially

seen as a ‘stranger’ to the family and to its parents⁹. Camila explained how her daughter Fernanda has become part of the family as time went by and states that she ‘is increasingly a part of us’:

“I think that life is to be lived on a day-to-day basis, and Fernandita is more and more... a part of us, you understand, the bond gets stronger and stronger all the time. Antonio and Fernandita are clearly my children” (mother by IVF and by adoption).

People feel they play an active role in building these bonds. This is not given, people shape relationships over time. Care, love and time elements can be considered part of what Carsten calls ‘what is made’ (2004) and Mason’s dimension of negotiated and creative affinities (2008). Carsten (2000) analyzes the narratives of adopted children who have met their biological parents and concludes that biological bonds in themselves are unable to activate kinship commitments. The parental relationship is built over time by means of care and effort.

Destiny, God and the unexplainable: Relationships with transcendental aspects

Arguments appeal to fate, God’s will and what cannot be rationally explained are commonplace among interviewees who have become parents through adoption. These parents need a foundation to build their parenthood on: a base as strong as blood bonds, making these bonds unquestionable and unbreakable, beyond human will.

Adoptive parents – especially adoptive mothers – describe the first time they saw their child as a magical event, where the sensations coming over them have no rational explanation or went beyond their control. They instantly recognized the child as their own after seeing it for the first time: “When I saw him there was no question in my mind that he was ours” (Violeta), “I didn’t have the slightest doubt that she was our daughter” (Maria Paz), “When I saw her I said that baby was mine” (Barbara).

Starting from the time of adoption, all past history took on a new meaning as the path to be followed in order to meet their child. The child was destined to be adopted by the couple from the time it was conceived. In the eyes of adopted parents their child could not have been any other. Nelson states that God chose a son for them:

⁹ In cases of adoption the child does not have the genetic load of their parents and his or her ancestors are unknown. This means that the child is seen as someone ‘to be known’. When the child bears his or her parents’ genetic load, he or she is seen as someone ‘known’, who belonged to the family even before birth.

“He was the child destined for us, there was no other option, he was always our son. I think ever since he was conceived that that God said, he is not for her, this is just a coincidence, but he was destined to be a Pérez Soto (mentioning his last name and his wife’s last name)” (adoptive father).

Nelson says that he and his son both have a mole on their arm, in exactly the same place, to reinforce the idea that his son was destined for him and that they are inevitably united. Camila provides a deep and binding meaning to the fact that the girl they adopted had the same name that she and her husband had originally chosen years before for their future daughter: Fernanda. After having their first child her eggs aged prematurely and Camila says that the doctor couldn’t explain why. She is certain that this happened because she was not supposed to get pregnant and God had planned for her to be Fernanda’s mother. So Fernanda was born to be her daughter and God guided Camila to find her:

“And I always involve God in this because in that sense I am sure it was Him, He guided me and said perfect, keep going, but your path is a different one and the truth is that when Fernanda came, then I realized, I completely closed the chapter, like why I didn’t get pregnant, the idea of having a natural daughter, my genes, everything came full circle when I met Fernanda and that’s when I understood. I told Mario ‘she is the Fernanda that we have always dreamed of and prayed for’. For me the man upstairs had everything worked out” (mother by means of IVF and adoption).

It is interesting to see that, despite cultural differences, narratives about destiny are also commonplace for adoptive parents in other countries. In their article about international adoption in Norway and Spain, Howell and Marré (2006) state that parents in both countries build an immediate bond with the child chosen for them and use a discourse of destiny.

“Parents in both Norway and Spain again and again express the idea that their child was meant for them in some mysterious way. No other child would have done as well” (Howell and Marré, 2006, p. 301).

The difference between Chilean adoptive parents and those in Norway and Spain is that Chilean discourse of destiny is more closely related to religious discourse. Howell and Marré state that adoptive parents are more prone to magical thinking. In Chile, adoptive parents are more likely to find a religious explanation. God is generally a part of their arguments. Parents who have conceived by means of new reproductive technologies also use arguments related to the unexplainable, mystical and religious, but using different nuances. Anita, the mother of triplets by means of IVF, believes that her desire to have two girls and a boy was so strong

that God sent her two girls and a boy. Carmen, the mother of twins by means of IVF, believes that it was so hard for her to get pregnant because her children were supposed to be born just after her father's death in order to console her and her mother. Many of the people interviewed state that the success or failure of these treatments are 'in the hands of God'. Therefore, even though these pregnancies are the result of medical intervention and these parents' active search for a solution, the result –which is to say the child–, is a product of divine will¹⁰.

Religious discourse is very much a part of interviewees' narratives. Parents find it hard to see the existence of their child as something haphazard, the result of a social worker's decision or the right dose of hormones. Parenthood needs to be legitimated by something transcendental.

Sensorial aspects, what is seen, smelt, touched and heard: Relationships between bodies

Allusion is being made to relationships between bodies once again, but this time at a different level. Now it is not just a body that is constituted by another body, but rather two bodies that relate and perceive one another. This perception takes place through the senses: sight, touch, smell and hearing. As indicated by Mason (2008), relationships between concrete bodies are an important part of people's everyday experience (2008).

This dimension is especially relevant in parental relationships. Parents have a very corporeal relationship with their children: affection is shown by means of hugs and kisses care when children are small – changing their diapers, bathing, dressing, feeding– implies physical contact with children. While listening carefully to the words of interviewees, one can tell that references to physical relationships between bodies are commonplace for both parents who have conceived by means of assisted reproduction and parents who have adopted a child.

Women perceive pregnancy as an essential experience for the building of maternity and describe it as an eminently sensorial experience. Magdalena is very explicit in this respect: "I always wanted *to feel* what it was like to be a mother, or rather to feel my belly, the heartbeats, the kicks, to see myself fat" (mother by means of IVF). Olivia opted for conception by means of egg donation in order to

¹⁰ Roberts (2006) analyzes the influence of religious thought on assisted reproduction treatment in Ecuador. She makes a distinction between Baroque Catholicism and Enlightened Catholicism: "Baroque Catholicism, for the purposes of my analysis here, signifies outwardly focused devotion entered on personalistic exchanges with God and saints, with relatively little attention paid to Church doctrine. Enlightened Catholicism denotes a cultivation of the individual self as inwardly focused, temperate, and rule-oriented" (2006, p. 513). Discourse of parents interviewed in Chile more closely approaches Baroque Catholicism, where God has a concrete influence without intermediaries in everyday life and little attachment to rules established by the church.

experience pregnancy: “the chance to experience pregnancy is something unique, it’s like marvellous [...] the fact that there is a baby in your belly and feeling it move”.

The senses play an important role in the initial recognition of a child in cases of adoption. Camila repeatedly mentions the role of smell in her first meeting with her daughter Fernanda: “We felt her, don’t ask me what, her scent. Ah, I don’t know, it’s her” and “her scent, feeling that it’s Fernanda, that it’s her” (adoptive mother). Catalina explains that she made sure she was wearing the same perfume every time she weREALITATEA PE MASA DE DISECTIENT to see her son before taking him home: “so that he could start to recognize me” (adoptive mother). Renato says that it was easier for him to feel like a father when he saw that his daughter looked like his wife: “as soon as we saw her we knew who she was, and as soon as she turned her face we saw her and said ‘she looks just like Rebeca’” (adoptive father). For Violeta and Lucía, touching and being touched by their children during their first meeting was essential: “He took my hand, he took my face in his hands and I kissed him all over” (Violeta, adoptive mother). “Fede caressed my hair, he caressed my face, he purred, he talked to me, it was so incredible” (Lucía, adoptive mother).

Mason (2008) says that voice, touch and smell are commonplace elements in discourse of children about kinship and he wonders if maybe they are more in tune with these aspects of life or more able to talk about them. In contrast with adults, children are not afraid to seem immature or superficial. Parents interviewed do not evidence these elements in a reflexive or processed manner. Many of them have not stopped to think about the role of physical contact or sensorial relationships in their parental relationships¹¹. However, it could be stated that based on their words, that perceiving their child – smelling, hearing, seeing and touching – is a crucial part of day-to-day parenting. Likewise, as in the elements of care, love and time exist in an active relationship that can be transformed and that depends on the people building the same.

Creating and fixing: the exercise of parenthood

I have identified four orders of elements explicitly or implicitly present in parenthood discourse: biology, care, transcendental aspects and sensorial aspects. These elements are directly related to the daily experience of paternity and their interaction accounts for the specificity of parental bonds.

¹¹ Parents who have adopted, especially mothers, usually use more elaborate discourse regarding the importance of physical contact with their children. This is certainly due to adoption preparation workshops provided by these foundations, which highlight the importance of attachment for children’s development.

These four orders are combined, empowered and sometimes contradicted in parents' discourse about parenthood. This is not a case of biological parents using elements related to biology and blood while adoptive parents make use of elements related to care and love. All of the elements identified may be present in the narrative used by the same person. For example, Camila reveals how important blood is for her in the way she was afraid of 'not falling in love' if her future child was not her own biological child, stating that love made her adoptive daughter really her daughter, that God led her to find her daughter and appeals to scent when stating that she recognized her daughter instantly when she saw her for the first time.

A very common practice in kinship relationships and one of the main strategies used by parents in order to validate their relationships with their children is the search for resemblance. This search evidences how important elements identified in the building of parental bonds really are. Resemblance is seen as evidence of a biological relationship but also reflects the growing closeness between an adopted child and his or her parent. These are perceived using sight and are therefore sensorial in this sense. These may also be considered to be proof of a transcendental connection, beyond anything rational, between a child and his or her parent (such as the mole Nelson shares with his adopted son). According to Bestard & Marré (2009) resemblance is an expression of 'what is given' in kinship relations:

"Family resemblance shows continuity among individuals and constitutes a good opportunity for reflecting on the construction of a person through kinship and for making explicit the way in which there is always something given, something non-intentional, in the definition of a person as a relative" (2009, p. 64).

However, resemblance is also actively sought after and even created by people. This brings us to the relationship between the two dimensions proposed by Carsten (2004) ('what is given' and 'what is made') in the construction of parental bonds. Resemblance may also be 'invented' but is always considered to be something beyond human control, either as a reflection of nature, divine aspects or love. It is precisely the attribution of this 'non-intentional' quality that gives parents courage in order to legitimate the parental relationship. Using the term proposed by Mason (2008), I believe that what parents are trying to do by looking for resemblance with their children is to 'fix' the parental bond: to provide an unquestionable and unbreakable nature for the same, placing parenthood in predetermined ground beyond their control.

The framework proposed by Mason is valid when it comes to accounting for the meaning of parenthood in Chile. There is an important connection between the dimensions of affinity proposed by the same and elements identified in Chilean

parents' discourse. I agree with this in the relevance of fixity in kinship relations but I also believe that it is useful for analysis to place the same at a different level than elements upon which parental bonds are based. Biology, care, transcendental aspects and sensorial aspects are permeated by the dimensions of 'fixity' and 'creativity' or 'what is given' and 'what is made'. The dimension of what is given must not be limited to by biological aspects and must be expanded (as suggested by Mason) in order to make room for everything perceived to be fixed, which is beyond any individual's decisions and control. In keeping with the above elements, parents build arguments where these two dimensions come into play.

Throughout this article I have attempted, in keeping with Mason, to open the dichotomy of biological and social aspects in order to bring the analysis of kinship relationships closer to people's real experiences. Consideration of adoption as a second alternative, insistence on painful and expensive treatment, and vulnerability felt by adoptive parents regarding their children's progenitors account for the substantial symbolic power of blood, biology and genetics when it comes to establishing parental relations in Chile. The important role of care and love in the building of a relationship with an adopted child show how new relationships can be created and established. Likewise, the strong influence of religion in Chile means that transcendental aspects are considered to be a firm foundation for the creation of parental bonds. This is reflected in arguments used by several parents, stating that God has sent them their children and it is He who decides whether treatment will be successful or not. Finally, sensorial relationships are irreflexively present in a culture where affection and closeness are expressed bodily.

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