Conclusions: Contexts of Globalization and Family Transnationalization

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As a social phenomenon affecting different kinds of families, heteroparental, homoparental, or single-parental families, late-forming families constitute an emerging social group in Spain. Delayed family formation has been a growing social phenomenon in postindustrialized countries in the last decades. The development of assisted reproductive technologies, higher levels of formal education, women’s incorporation into the productive labor market (out of home), and the financial costs bringing up children are some of the factors that scholars have highlighted to explain the postponement of parenthood beyond this age. Among these factors, there are transnational factors that interact when future parents decide to have children abroad limiting other alternatives for becoming parents, such as legal restrictions regarding surrogacy or low birth rates that makes domestic adoptions more difficult.

When Spanish older parents decide to adopt their children abroad, they not only have to take into account the legislation established by Spanish Civil Law (Código Civil) regarding age in both parents and children, but also those specific rules established by sending countries regarding parents’ and children’s age, gender, and parents’ sexual identity. While most single mothers in our research decided to have their first child through assisted reproduction and intercountry adoption, same-sex female couples did so through assisted reproduction and same sex male couples through domestic fostering, planning to adopt children later, and through surrogacy in other countries because Spanish legislation specifically prohibited surrogacy. In this case, they usually argue that they have chosen these options because most sending countries’ legislations explicitly prohibited same sex couples from adopting.

Drawing from social values regarding the child’s best interest, open adoption, and multiculturalism, we can observe how, in local/global contexts birthparents, adoptive parents, and other family members and friends re-imagine kinship beyond traditional family patterns and nation-state borders. Once their children have been incorporated into Spanish society, most of our informants continue to develop social and cultural relationships with their children’s birth countries through different kinds of symbolic acts and activities. While late-forming family parents by surrogacy in other countries may try to keep their children’s citizenship from their birth countries and develop relationships with their children’s gestational mothers, parents adopting abroad also try to develop relationships with their children’s birth societies, birthparents, and siblings.