An anthropological approach to voluntarily single motherhood in Barcelona

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Abstract

This article is based on the research I did for my doctoral thesis about voluntarily single motherhood in Barcelona (Catalonia, Spain). It is an anthropological approach to the appearance and the development of voluntarily single motherhood, which is when a woman becomes a mother through adoption or conception previously planned without partner. Within a framework of study carried out from October 2001 to October 2007 in the Barcelona Metropolitan Area, my research is based on in-depth interviews with twelve women from April 2002 to April 2006. The aim of the paper is to understand why women in Barcelona choose to be voluntarily single mothers. The purpose is to point out that the voluntarily single motherhood is a new way of understanding between women and men, resulting from the progressive changes in their respective gender roles. This anthropological research is grounded in a full vital process: from the personal decision of the women to become single mothers to the daily interaction with their children.

Keywords
Motherhood, kinship, gender, conception, adoption

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1. Introduction

This article is based on the research I did for my doctoral thesis about voluntarily single motherhood in Barcelona[2] (Catalonia[3], Spain[4]) (Jordana-Pröpper 2007). It is an anthropological approach to the appearance and development of voluntarily single motherhood, which is when a woman becomes a mother through adoption or conception previously planned without partner. The geographic scope of this research is the Barcelona Metropolitan Area.

The aim of the paper is to understand why women in Barcelona choose to be voluntarily single mothers. The purpose is to point out that the voluntarily single motherhood is a new way of understanding between women and men, resulting from the progressive changes in their respective gender roles in the Western world, from the female role ruled by the male role to a more egalitarian interpersonal relationship.

It takes into account two chronologically successive processes: the process of deciding to be single mothers and the process of becoming a mother through adoption or fertilization (sexual or assisted). I have looked into the various ways of being a voluntarily single mother in Barcelona, taking into account their socio-economic, ethnic, philosophical, political and/or religious particularities and the places where they live and/or develop their social life. I researched how the decision to become a voluntarily single mother emerged in each case, the different ways in which each of them adapted to becoming a voluntarily single mother and the position they assume regarding love and sexuality. I studied the relationships that each of them has with their descendants, paying special attention at the mother-son and the mother-daughter interactions. I analyzed the different interactions maintained by each of them with their respective social environment, in order to know the different social implications of the existence of voluntarily single motherhood in Barcelona. Specifically, I checked the relationships that each of them maintains with their relatives, their neighbours, their friends, the state and the world of employment.

Within a study conducted from October 2001 to October 2007 in the Barcelona Metropolitan Area, my research is based on twelve women interviewed in depth between April 2002 and April 2006. Ten of them (Janet, Carmela, Sofía, Neus, Lola, Lisa, Maite, Judith, Clara and Laia)[5] are single mothers through adoption while the other two (Sara and Miriam) are single mothers by sexual fertilization (i.e. a proposal for fertilization through sexual relationships without commitment). With regard to adoptive mothers, the information provided by these 10 women interviewed is supplemented by a

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[2] Barcelona is the capital of the Autonomous Community of Catalonia.
[3] Catalonia (Catalan: Catalunya; Spanish: Cataluña) is an Autonomous Community of the Kingdom of Spain. Catalan and Spanish are the common official languages to all Catalonia. Inside Catalonia, Aranese is also the third official language in the Aran Valley.
[4] The Kingdom of Spain (Spanish: Reino de España) is organized into seventeen Autonomous Communities including Catalonia.
[5] In order to maintain the anonymity of the informants, all names have been changed.

sample of 10 women and four men seeking international adoption gathered during my practical experience as a technician in adoptions and fostering in the ICIF[6] INTRESS[7].

In the absence of interviews with single mothers through assisted fertilization techniques, I tried to fill this void with the information given from specifically designed questionnaires for women who decide to become mothers at a private clinic named CEFER[8].

2. Literature review and hypothesis development

2.1. Literature review about theoretical framework

The theoretical framework combines the <u>theory of subjective culture</u> by Edward Evan Evans-Pritchard (1951, 1964) with the <u>theory of the action</u> by Pierre Bourdieu (1979, 1980, 1994).

Specifically, my theoretical approach combines the theory of Evans-Pritchard that recognizes the interplay between the individual and his social environment and the part of Bourdieu's theory that recognizes the importance of the individual in society.

Although the theory of the action by Bourdieu takes into account both the individual and their social environment, tends to give greater relevance to social initiatives than to individual decisions.

On the other hand, the theory of subjective culture by Evans-Pritchard also takes into account both the individual and their social environment, but tends to pay more attention to personality than to sociability.

The position I have taken in this research is to consider both the individual (agency) and the society (structure) as two different but equally important factors, instead of giving more importance to one instead of the other.

Marshal Sahlins (2004) proposed as guidance the distinction between three types of reciprocity: the generalized, the balanced and the negative.

1. Generalized reciprocity occurs among the closest people, especially between close relatives and close friends. A giver gives a good to the receiver which counter-obligation will take place in an indeterminate

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[6] Acronym for Institució Col•laboradora d'Integració Familiar, "Collaboration Institution for Family Integration" in Catalan. Any person who wishes to adopt legally in or from Catalonia should go to an ICIF to be trained first through workshops and then evaluated by a Psychosocial Report. The ICIF is a non-profit entity who, in exchange for a determined fee, is responsible for conducting the elaboration of the Psychosocial Report, after which the applicants of adoption will receive or not the Aptitude Certificate that allows them to adopt.

[7] Acronym for Institut de Treball Social i Serveis Socials, "Institute of Social Work and Social Services" in Catalan. This is an ICIF whose headquarters is located in Barcelona. Their website is www.intress.org.

[8] With three facilities located in Barcelona, the CEFER Reproduction Institute is an interdisciplinary private clinic dedicated to study and treat reproductive and sexual problems. Their website is www.institutocefer.com.

future, because "the counter is not stipulated by time, quantity, or quality: the expectation of reciprocity is indefinite" (Sahlins 2004:194).

2. Balanced reciprocity may occur between close people as well as between people unknown to each other. Reciprocity is here a precise balance because "the reciprocation is the customary equivalent of the thing received and without delay (…) Social relations hinge on the material flow" (Sahlins 2004:194-195).

3. Negative reciprocity occurs among not close people, either between strangers or between people who knows each other but in impersonal manner, like what may exist between a citizen and a representative of a public or private entity. Here one side tries to give the minimum and receive the maximum (haggling, scam…), or tries to receive something not offering anything in return (theft, misappropriation…), at the expense of the other side (Sahlins 2004:195-197).

In this research I observed the different relationships of reciprocity that existed before, during and after the process of voluntarily single motherhood, both on economical and emotional level.

2.2. Literature review about previous studies

From the 1960s up to present, single-parent families have increased in the Western world due to increase in separations and divorces, while it has declined in relative terms those single parent families headed by a widow or widower. In the USA, families headed by single parents were around 29% in 1992, while the European Union single parenthood was higher in the Nordic countries and in United Kingdom (around 20%) and was lower in southern countries, especially in Spain (EONFP 1996:16-17).

The term 'lone parent families' emerged during the 1960s in the English-speaking countries to claim social acceptance of other family forms other than the married couple with their children, considered until then as the reference and the embodiment of desirable normality. However, this concept was misunderstood by the scientific field, as it has been associated with the risk factor of poverty and social exclusion, especially with regard to children. This is a widespread view up to now, although this point of view has been criticized among social scientists (Fernández-Cordón; Tobío-Soler 1999:13).

Questioning this negative perception of single motherhood, Lawyer Valerie S. Mannis (1999) has realised in the USA an investigation based on in-depth qualitative interviews with ten women who chose to become single mothers. In order to isolate agency from a feminist perspective, her sample was focused on: "(a) women who began raising their child without a live-in partner or a plan or expectation she would have a co-parent; (b) women who continued to live without a sexual partner in the household; (c) women who began mothering at age 21 or older; (d) women who were financially independent at conception, never received public assistance, and remained financially

independent; and (e) women who made the choice to be a single mother within the last five years" (Mannis 1999:122-123).

Sociologist Jane D. Bock (2000) also offered a feminist deconstruction of legitimacy regarding the intentional decision by midlife independent single women to enter solo parenthood, based on involved interviews with 26 single mothers by choice (SMCs) and two years of participant observation in two Single Mothers by Choice support groups in the USA. She found "that SMCs feel entitled to enter solo motherhood because they possess four essential attributes: age, responsibility, emotional maturity, and fiscal capability. SMCs use economic, moral, and religious justifications to further legitimize their decisions. These justifications allow SMCs to present themselves as competent, ethical, and mainstream mothers" (Bock 2000:62).

Nearly half a million households in Spain are lone parent families in which the woman is the main figure. Within this model, which includes separated, divorced or widowed mothers, it is becoming more relevant an additional group, the single mothers. In 2011 a total of 131,800 Spanish families were headed by a single mother, a figure that quadrupled the total of 33,300 in 2002 (Instituto de la Mujer 2011)

In Spain, a team of Psychologists (González-Rodríguez et alia 2012) have realised an investigation based on in-depth qualitative interviews with 162 families, focused on women who are single mothers by choice. The lack of sharing of household chores and childcare with a partner explains why the experience of being a single mother in Spain has some additional disadvantages. The overload of responsibilities, financial problems and the difficulty of reconciliation between work, family and personal life are the main problems of single mothers (González-Rodríguez et alia 2012).

Targeted aid for single mothers is almost nonexistent in Spain, but there are some general deductions or benefits for families with dependent children. In addition, some autonomous communities like Andalucia, Asturias, Extremadura and Catalonia expressly provide deductions for single mothers. Catalonia also keeps in place the so-called 'title of single parent', which provides several benefits, tax benefits and bonuses to these women (Ministerio de Sanidad, Servicios Sociales e Igualdad 2013).

In her cross-national research through six European countries that represent different types of welfare regimes (Denmark, Finland, Germany, Poland, Spain and the UK), based on survey data into the motives of the majority of the women who are providing care for their own children, Sociologist Birgit Pfau-Effinger also observed the hardships of family childcare by women in Spain, reflecting a tension between women's employment orientation and gaps in public childcare provision (Pfau-Effinger 2011).

Among other questions about the family norms in Spain, the European Values Study (EVS) asked to anonymous respondents every 9 years the following question:

> If a woman wants to have a child as a single parent, but she doesn't want to have a stable relationship with a man, do you approve or disapprove?

The results point that one in every two Spanish respondents disapproves the question. Data shows that the people who disapprove the voluntarily single motherhood doubled the people who approve it without variation from 1981 up to now. That is to say,

the idea of voluntarily single motherhood has been and is still misunderstood by a sizeable part of Spanish society up to now (European Values Study 2010).

2.3. Hypothesis development

1) The decision to become a voluntarily single mother is based on a combination of the desire to be a mother and having neared the end of fertile age without a partner
This statement talks about situations of women who do not have a partner or do not have a stable partner at the time they decide to become a mother. It would be women who decide to become single mothers after having had romantic relationships in the past but without discarding the option of having new ones in the future.

2) The decision to become a voluntarily single mother is based on a desire to be a mother combined with the desire to never coexist with any man
This statement talks about the situation of women who do not have a partner at the time they wish to reach motherhood. It would be women who decide to become single mothers and never wish to coexist with any man because of bad experiences that she and/or other women she knows has had with men generally.

3) Women of a certain age mainly without partner choose adoption and, to a lesser extent, other means
A smaller perception of difficulties at the time of considering adoption would exist than considering sexual fertilization or assisted fertilization. Unlike adoption, assisted or sexual fertilization implies experimentation with one's own physical body, with increased physical risks in assisted fertilization as it is more difficult to become pregnant and increased legal risks in sexual fertilization because the genetic father always will be able to demand his legal right to paternity. In addition, the idea that children without parents exist who needs love would make them more inclined towards adoption.

3. Case study

3.1. Provisional definition of the object of study

I made the following provisional definition of 'voluntarily single mother': every woman who has decided to have children without cohabitating with any affective-sexual partner.
I have not used the term 'voluntarily unmarried mother', because 'unmarried' is a legal term that defines a woman who is not legally married. A concept like 'voluntarily unmarried mother' would define not only women who choose to be single mothers, but also cohabiting mothers and never married ex-cohabiting mothers like those studied by Susan McRae (1993).

The term 'single' refers to a certain stage in life that a woman decides to adopt or conceive and give birth, a vital stage without cohabitation with any affective-sexual partner. Although the mothers studied by Laura Cardia-Vonèche and Benoît Bastard (1988), José Antonio Nieto-Piñeroba (1993) and Richard Green et alia (1986) are defined as 'single', the vital phase in which these decided to conceive and give birth is located in a marital status prior to separation or divorce: the marital status of marriage. It is precisely the fact that they come from a couple breakdown that these authors describe such mothers as 'single' and not as 'unmarried' mothers.

Therefore, the term 'voluntarily' is indispensable in the provisional definition of 'voluntarily single mother', since, in case of being absent, we would find in the definition of 'single mother' the same problem as in the definition of 'voluntarily unmarried mother', as I mentioned earlier. In short, I have provisionally defined as 'voluntarily single mother' to the woman who has become a mother by choice without cohabitating with any affective-sexual partner.

I took an anthropological approach to the appearance and the development of voluntarily single motherhood in the Barcelona Metropolitan Area, based on my interaction with twelve women and their social and material environment from April 2002 to April 2006.

3.2. From the aspiration to the action of becoming a mother

After they received as girls their filiation and familiarization on the side of their families through parental-filial love, the twelve informants began a process of socialization with people of their extra-familiar social environment. Each of them has been interacting with some people they get on with through friendly love relationships. With the advent of adulthood, they feel as women that friendly love is not enough. They begin to search a conjugal love that leads them to a parental-filial love.

It appears the subject of love and selfishness between love partners in the stories that express the end of each relationship, when the man does not share the woman's desire to have a son or daughter. This refusal to have children on the man's side is interpreted as selfishness on the woman's side. Consequently, she would consider herself as selfish if she did not have the intention of being a mother.

For them, to not wish to have a son or daughter is interpreted as lack of love, lack that causes the couple to breakdown. To have a son or daughter is the proof of love while not to have it is the proof of selfishness. The family is the result of the couple's love while the lack of offspring is the result of selfishness, according of their point of view.

This conception of love on the woman's side transforms after her last break-up, since she changes her priority to the pursuit of conjugal love, a love canalized into a man, for her priority to the pursuit of maternal-filial love, a love canalized into a son or daughter. From the wish to have children as an expression of couple love to the wish to have children as an expression of maternal-filial love.

This transformation has an element of continuity and an element of change. The element of continuity is the desire to love a certain person, thread that remains before

and after this metamorphosis. There remains the idea of finding a person who wants to love and who wants to be loved. The element of change lies in the profile of the person whom she is looking to love, from loving a man to loving a son or daughter. This in turn involves a change in the nature of love that she is looking for: if the pursuit of a partner involves the desire of conjugal love, the pursuit of a son or daughter involves the desire of maternal-filial love.

I found the idea of motherhood as a life project both before and after the decision of becoming single mothers. Before deciding to become single mothers, the idea of having children was framed inside a maternity project which was at the same time a paternity project. Then each woman wanted to do this within the framework of couple life. But in absence of a man who wants to share this conjugal project, the woman turns her maternity project with her decision of becoming a single mother. After deciding to become single mothers, this project transforms by excluding the paternal figure in the foundation of the future family. Now this is a project of motherhood that is not at the same time a project of paternity.

Once this single motherhood is reached through fertilization or adoption, they will start a project of paternity without discarding the possibility of finding a partner in the future to share her offspring. Each woman will expect to find a man who loves her, couple love, as well as her offspring, paternal-filial love.

I have also seen two interrelated ideas: the idea of solidarity and the idea of reciprocity between the adoptive mother and her adopted offspring.

The idea of solidarity lies in the intention to adopt a child from a poor country, where the child would not have future, to give to him or to her a better life in the woman's country. Some have preferred to adopt girls instead of boys as an expression of gender solidarity, understanding that in poor countries there is greater gender discrimination against women.

The idea of reciprocity lies in thinking that the adoption helps to the adopter as well as the adoptee. It is the idea of joining two affective-emotional needs: the woman who needs to have a child and the child who needs to have a mother. Here the idea of mutual aid is understood and felt like sharing of affection, as expression of maternal-filial love. Among those that have chosen to adopt girls instead of boys, this mutual aid is also expressed by gender affinities between mothers and daughters.

The possibilities and impossibilities that these women have found at the time of adopting have depended on their unmarried condition, since they only have been able to opt for adoption in those countries that allow single parent adoption. Moreover, some countries demand more requisites from single people than from couples.

Their female condition has also been decisive at the time of choosing adoption, because among those countries where single parent adoption is allowed there are some that do not allow adoption by single men but only by single women.

3.3. Formative-professional trajectory and project of maternity

Each of the mothers of this research has higher education. Some already started their professional life during the realization of their higher education (Janet, Sofia, Judith and Laia) and some even began to work before reaching the age of majority (Miriam, Carmela, Lisa and Clara).

Most of the twelve women (Sara, Miriam, Carmela, Sofia, Neus, Lola, Lisa, Clara and Laia) have an average income level while only three (Janet, Maite and Judith) enjoy a higher income level. Among the mothers from the first group, there are not few difficulties they have found and still find since they began the process of having their first sons or daughters.

All women coincided to choose their motherhood at a time of familiar and economical stability. Unlike adoptive mothers, genetic mothers did not need an extra economic effort to reach motherhood. All adoptive mothers would have adopted more than one son or daughter if they had more income at their disposal.

The genetic mothers did not change their rental apartments after reaching motherhood. However, some adoptive mothers (Carmela, Clara and Laia) were forced to change residence, buying a larger apartment, in order to meet the requirements for adoption.

After completing four months of maternity leave, some have retained their previous job (Sara, Janet, Carmela, Lola, Lisa, Maite, Judith, Clara and Laia), others have changed jobs (Sofia and Neus) and one was forced to resign and to be unemployed because she could not achieve compatibility between work and family life (Miriam).

I have also highlighted the testimonial role of public institutions at the time of providing support for the rearing of sons or daughters, limiting the different administrations to grant monthly or annually small sums of money that are not enough for the recipients.

Almost all of them have been forced to educate their sons or daughters in private nurseries or schools because in the public ones the few available admissions are allocated according to a scale that leaves single parents at the end of the queue. In this regard, several of those women had already joined the Federació de Famílies Monoparentals de Catalunya[9], an organization that was trying to extend the full equalization of single parent families with large families throughout all Catalan territory.

While the Catalan autonomous administration recognizes single parent families as large families, many local administrations outside the region of Barcelonès give preference to two-parent large families to the detriment of single parent families at the time of awarding admissions. In addition, a single parent family is inferior in economic conditions with respect of a two-parent family because the first may have only one salary while the latter may have two salaries. This means that the former will have more

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[9] "Federation of Single Parent Families of Catalonia" in Catalan. This is a Catalan federation of single parent families. Their website is http://www.familiesmonoparentals.org/cat/index.asp.

economic difficulties than the latter at the time of paying for services of private nurseries.

By proposing the unification of a common criterion for all Catalan regions at the same level, the Federació de Famílies Monoparentals de Catalunya try to achieve the full equalization of single parent families with large families in the scale for pre-registration of their children at public schools. The organization also aims to obtain diverse financial and social benefits according by the per capita income of each single parent family, allotted for those who only have one payroll or financial contribution to support their sons or daughters.

3.4. From filiation to familiarization

All twelve women reside in the Barcelona Metropolitan Area, an area of Catalonia particularly characterized by past and present immigration. This is reflected in the origins of the mothers as well as in the origins of those sons or daughters both genetic and adoptive. If all mothers have born from two parents of Catalan, Andalusian, Murcian, Castilian, or Jewish descent (either wholly or partially), their children have born from fathers of Catalan, Andalusian, Canarian, Jewish, Amerindian, Gypsy, Russian, Chinese or Afro-Caribbean descent (either wholly or partially).

When a genetic or adopted child enters on the scene, he or she becomes a son or daughter at the same time that a woman becomes a mother, the parents of that mother become grandparents and so on. All this produces an impact on the family and the social environment of the new mother and new son or daughter.

I have seen how every one of the mothers has already founded a family with a single son or daughter and start to consider having or not having more sons or daughters.

Among those who have already taken the decision to adopt a second son or daughter (Carmela, Maite and Clara) or are thinking about it (Laia), all coincided in a desire for a phenotypic and ethnic similarity between siblings as far as possible.

With regard to similarities or dissimilarities between the siblings in terms of gender, some mothers tend to want a second child of the same female gender (Carmela, Clara and Laia) while another mother prefers that her second child be of different sex from the first (Maite). In the latter case, she has chosen the same female gender that had originally been planned for the first child, because that child finally turned out to be male by unwanted circumstances.

3.5. From familiarization to socialization

I observed how the child has already been integrated into their new family with an adequate maternal-filial attachment as basis. But he or she still must transcend the family environment by socializing with people belonging to different families and sometimes even belonging to different cultures. This socialization process is parallel to the extra-domestic learning process, both formal (at school) and informal (interacting with friends

and acquaintances). It is through this process that the child is developing his or her own identity as well as he or she is being aware of the meaning of the absent paternity.

All the mothers coincide to recognize that it is not easy to bring up their children without a father, that it is hard having "to be father and mother at the same time".

Each of the respective mothers have different ways of facing for their sons or daughters the absence of the paternal figure, introducing male figures in their social and family life. They are friends, brothers, fathers or other male relatives of the mother who can provide a male figure for the son or daughter.

All of them make a distinction between "male figure", which can be performed by any male relative and male friend of the mother as well as any male relative and male friend of the son or daughter, and "paternal figure", which can only be exercised by a future male partner. Despite feeling the lack of paternal figure for the son or daughter, they do not regret having decided to become single mothers. Each of them maintains the hope that some day she will find a partner for her as well as a father for the son or daughter.

4. Methodology and data

I carried out this research with my own resources[10], as a native of the geographic area of study with a double meaning: I am native because I was born in Barcelona and I am native because I am Catalan by paternal descent. I am also German by maternal descent, therefore I possess dual citizenship: Spanish and German. As Catalan and Spanish are the co-official languages and the most widely spoken in the Autonomous Community of Catalonia, one or the other language have been employed in the interviews according to the preferences expressed by informants themselves.

In order to maintain the anonymity of informants, their names have been changed and I have always omitted the mention of any surname. I could have chosen not to change the real names of these women to observe their respective identities, since no mention of their surnames would ensure their privacy. But that would have created confusion because there are two pairs of informants with identical real names. For this reason I have renamed each of them with a different fictitious name.

I tried to make contact with voluntarily single mothers, associated or not, asking about the existence of some of them in local institutions at neighbourhood or municipal levels, in clinics where the assisted fertilization is treated, in women's organizations, and in public institutions related with maternity and women. I found two informants in different groups of single parent families: an informant (Miriam) through the Federació de Famílies Monoparentals de Catalunya and other six informants (Janet, Carmela, Sofia, Neus, Lisa and Laia) through Adopción Siendo Soltero[11]. In turn, these last women

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[10] All my applications for funding to various public institutions were rejected for lack of resources to meet all applications for grants, reflecting the insufficient municipal, district, regional and state budgets assigned to research during the development of this anthropological approach.

[11] "Adoption Being Single" in Spanish. This is the electronic list of single adopters of Spain. Their website is http://www.adopcionsoltero.galeon.com/.

introduced me to other three women (Lola, Maite and Clara): is the process well known as 'Snowball'.

In addition, I did not discard the possibility of making contact with individuals or groups of voluntarily single mothers by more informal procedures, through casual and occasional friends and acquaintances who in turn know people or groups related with voluntarily single motherhood. In this way I made contact with two (Sara and Judith) of my twelve informants.

During the process of making contacts, I introduced myself not just like someone who is looking for very specific information, but like a person who wants to meet another person as a whole. That is to say, not only to know the person like a voluntarily single mother, but like a total woman as a whole, in a dialogical way instead of a hierarchical way.

Eschewing the classical hierarchy between observer and observed, and the not less classical hierarchy between man and woman, I have highlighted the fact that, in the symmetrical dialogues that I have proposed, the observer is at the same time the observed and vice versa, so that there is reciprocity, a fluid human interaction and not a mere interrogation legitimized in the name of science.

In this respect, the terms 'investigator', 'informant' and 'open interview' do not have an unilateral and unidirectional meaning here, but the roles of 'investigator' and 'informant' could be interchangeable according to the way in which each human interaction is developed; and therefore, the 'open interview' could be carried out by both parties of the interaction.

Once the person accepted to becoming 'informant', I set a time and place for a first introductory conversation. Starting from the ideas developed in this introductory conversation, once in a while I asked her how life was going as a voluntarily single mother. From time to time, each 'informer' would remind in front of the 'researcher' the vital process that she took to become a voluntarily single mother. In this respect, the information provided by each of the twelve voluntarily single mothers comes from interviews of variable number and duration.

The type of field work carried out is the continued contact that the 'investigator' did with each 'informant' in her respective space of social or private life, during the sessions of 'open interviews' that were carried out. When the opportunity arose, in case of being able to be present at meetings of voluntarily single mothers or in family gatherings of each voluntarily single mother with their children and other relatives and friends, I did not discard the possibility of making semi-structured interviews with groups (Hammersley, and Atkinson 1995:157-174).

However, it was not possible to participate in meetings of voluntarily single mothers, but at family gatherings of some voluntarily single mothers with their sons or daughters and even with other relatives and friends.

In every time and place, I recorded or not in certain material support[12] my interaction with each 'informant', depending on whether it was considered relevant or

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[12] 90 minute cassette tapes, notebooks and e-mails.

not by consensus of all the interlocutors. When such registration has not been possible, I have given testimony of my experience in writing after the event.

I designed and used two types of in-depth interviews, which correspond to two different stages of the process towards the voluntarily single motherhood:

1. *Script to interview those women who wants to become single mothers,* when the decision of becoming single mother is taken, but has not yet been applied by means of any concrete action.
2. *Script to interview those women who have been able to become single mothers,* when the action of becoming a single mother has been carried out successfully.

In order to design both types of in-depth interviews, I have based on the models proposed and practiced by Elizabeth Bott (2003), Martyn Hammersley, Paul Atkinson (1995) and Paul Thompson (2000).

I did not get the opportunity to contact women who are or want to become single mothers through assisted fertilization, but doctors Simón Marina-Avendaño and David Marina-Roncero have provided me the possibility to deliver questionnaires to those patients at the clinic CEFER who want to fill out. It should be noted that the *Questionnaire for the woman who wants to become a single mother* offers some free-response questions, which provides certain space to express in manuscript form. The result has been to obtain a *Sample of six women who want to become single mothers through assisted fertilization,* which offers a brief but valuable overview of the situation of these women just in the beginning of their respective processes to motherhood.

I also made a *Sample of ten female and four male applicants for single parent adoption* while I was working in 2004 as technician in adoptions and fostering at the ICIF INTRESS, reviewing the application and monitoring files of single parent adoptions. It is an anthropological rereading of a material previously developed by psychologists and social workers. Therefore, it is not a first-hand material but contains some information on key issues of interest in this investigation, especially the time passed between the last romantic relationship and the decision of single parenthood.

5. Results

5.1. Results to the first hypothesis - The decision to become a voluntarily single mother is based on a combination of the desire to be a mother and having neared the end of fertile age without a partner

The results corroborate the first hypothesis although with shades: the decision to become a voluntarily single mother is based on a combination of the desire to be a mother and the fact of not to have found any partner, although not necessarily at the moment of having neared the end of her fertile age but at anytime of her life.

Among all twelve women of the study, the decision to become a voluntarily single mother is based on a combination of the desire to be a mother and the fact of not to have found any partner. As Miriam explains:

> Some men did not want to have children, other men wanted to have children later… I wanted to have a child already.… And I decided to become a mother alone!

On the other hand, the decision to become a voluntarily single mother is not always based on a combination of the desire to be a mother and having neared the end of fertile age. According to my research results, age at onset of motherhood began earlier than the end of fertile age in four of the twelve women:

Table 1. Age at the onset of motherhood

Age at onset of motherhood	
Aged 30 to 40 years	**Aged 40 to 55 years**
Sara (30)	**Maite (41)**
Miriam (31)	**Judith (41)**
Neus (32)	**Carmela (42)**
Lisa (36)	**Clara (42)**
	Laia (42)
	Sofía (44)
	Janet (46)
	Lola (53)

5.2. Results to the second hypothesis - The decision to become a voluntarily single mother is based on a desire to be a mother combined with the desire to never coexist with any man

With regard to the second hypothesis, it has been drastically refuted because it has not been any case of woman who decides to be single mother along with the intention of never coexisting with any man. As Janet said:

> I do not rule out the possibility of finding a mate, because I have hopes that maybe one day I will find him… If he arrives, he would be very welcome!

5.3. Results to the third hypothesis - Women of a certain age mainly without partner choose adoption and, to a lesser extent, other means

With regard to the third hypothesis, it would be possible to affirm that adoption is a more accessible way towards the single motherhood than the sexual fertilization.

It is infrequent that a single woman finds a man who responds affirmatively to her proposal to fertilize her but without committing themselves to a lasting relation, with her or with the son they conceive. And if she were with a man who accepted such proposal, it would always fit the possibility that finally he would break the pact by vindicating his

right of legal paternity. Only two of the twelve women found this way to reach motherhood. As Miriam explains:

> I wanted to have a child in a special way. I did not like the idea of artificial insemination. I wanted to choose the natural way, which is nicer, is it not? I had a summer love… I proposed him, and he agreed… The first time in my life that I try, and I was pregnant!

On the other hand, the assisted fertilization would omit these legal risks, but would display more physical risks in the medical attempts to reach the conception and later to maintain the long period of pregnancy until reaching motherhood through to a happy conclusion. As Laia said:

> I pondered other options… Neither by artificial insemination nor by the other way… As per my age, there is also more risk… Having a single pregnancy… I was very scared! Not my style! Thus, I have chosen to adopt!

Adoption is also the most preferred option among the women who would only accept to generate genetic children inside an optimal couple relationship. As Clara points:

> I do not want to have a child of a father who is not engaged! I do not want that option because I think there are too many ties! Apparently not, but then come out the ties… I am pretty sure of that!

5.4. Survey results

With regard to the *Sample of six women who want to become single mothers* through assisted fertilization and the *Sample of ten female and four male applicants for single parent adoption*, both samples have not altered the results contributed by my twelve informants, but rather appear to have corroborated. It should be noted the limitations that these samples show in front of the in-depth interviews. If the other samples were in-depth interviews as I had hoped at first, perhaps the results would have been different.

6. Conclusion

I pointed out that these twelve women have opted for motherhood alone in the absence of finding a suitable partner with whom to share a family project. Two have chosen sexual fertilization and ten have opted for adoption to achieve the same goal: to become mothers at a time that the will and the power have been able to shake hands.

7. Discussion

7.1. Limitations of the study and perspectives for further research

The small sample analyzed by this study limits generalization of the results beyond these twelve voluntarily single mothers. It could also extend this sample of twelve informants to a greater number, especially in the case of informants who are voluntarily single mothers through sexual fertilization. If possible, it could also add new informants who were voluntarily single mothers through assisted fertilization.

Lack of adequate financing has been other limitation of this study. With adequate financing within the setting of an established research team, it would be productive to carry on the line of this research to monitor the same twelve informants to see their evolution with their sons or daughters. Among those who had managed to find a partner during the last interviews, it could establish with time if the relationship strengthens or otherwise will not have continuity. It could see with time also if the other mothers will find their desired respective partners also or not. It would observe particularly the evolution of the boys or girls as children themselves as well as for their peculiarity of being sons or daughters of single parents. If among the genetic sons or daughters it could see how they perceive the absence of their genetic father, in case of the adoptive sons or daughters it could see how they perceive the absence of their genetic parents and at the same time how they perceive the absence of an adoptive father.

Among the genetic mothers, it could see their evolution in the limited or non-existent relationship they manage with the male progenitors of their sons or daughters. And among the adoptive mothers, it could observe their relationship with these genetic parents if this happens. When the genetic sons or daughters and the adoptive sons or daughters come in contact directly or indirectly with their genetic parents, it could establish how these relationships are.

If the children of immigrants tend to retain more or less their cultural specificity and at the same time will retain their specific phenotypic traits till reaching adulthood, the children adopted at an early age will only have the same culture of their mothers and at the same time will retain their specific phenotypic traits on reaching the age of majority. It would be also interesting to compare what happens in both situations through their respective processes from filiation to socialization, from childhood to adulthood. It should also be taken into account the case of the children adopted at an older age, as they may also retain some of the cultural specificity that they acquired in their place of origin at the time of adoption.

7.2. Advice for policy makers

If all mothers with a more modest socioeconomic status (Sara, Miriam, Carmela, Sofia, Neus, Lola, Lisa, Clara and Laia) had some economic stability before reaching motherhood, is just after adopting or giving birth when they began to experience economic problems associated with single parenthood. In order to overcome this

situation, some mothers from a more modest socioeconomic position (Miriam, Laia, Lisa, Neus and Carmela) have been joined or linked to the Federació de Famílies Monoparentals de Catalunya to help each other and claim together their rights in front of the different public administrations.

On 6th March 2007, the Catalan autonomous government approved that families with children under three years may apply an annual grant of 625 euros (25 euros more than in 2006) per child, while the big families and the lone parent families will receive 730 euros (30 euros more than in 2006) for each child under 6 years. But this increase was considered grossly inadequate by family entities because the amount of aid only covers a fraction of the expense of a child. As an example, they exhibit that Spain only invests 0.5% of its GDP on family benefits, ranking it among the last of the fifteen old EU members (Bracero, and Lopez 2007:27).

This negligence by the government has serious consequences in everyday life of lone parent families, situation that is worsening progressively since the beginning of the financial crises in 2008 to this day. The cuts in the Spanish welfare state affect more women than men, since women traditionally take many more responsibilities. Many women are forced to leave their jobs to care for children and other dependents, and single mothers are especially vulnerable. With these cuts, many women are forced to leave employment in order to assume those services formerly guaranteed by the state, so they are expelled from the public space to return back to the private space, preventing women to participate in citizenship on equal terms with men (Sainz-Ezquerra 2013:1).

The pay gap has been exacerbated by the crisis, labour reforms and austerity policies. In Europe as a whole, pay gap is the 16.2% while in Spain is the 19%. Women bear greater job insecurity than men and the most feminized labour sectors are the lowest paid. In addition, women have more obstacles to gain access to better paid higher positions, so the pay gap increases. Women work more in part-time and temporary jobs than men. In 2011, 31.6% of female jobs were part-time, while in the case of men this percentage fell to 8.1% (Sainz-Ezquerra 2013).

Since the financial crisis began in 2008, in Spain the rate of unemployment has been increasing from 8% in 2007 to exceeding 26% in 2013 (European Central Bank 2013).

On February 2013, there were more women registered as unemployed (2,536,596) than men (2,503,626). Before the crisis, the highest female unemployment was something structural in the Spanish labour market, but the austerity policies and cuts to basic public services such as health, education, child care or dependent people, are preventing women from accessing the labour market on equal terms, as some of these services are no longer provided by the state (Sainz-Ezquerra 2013).

Those cuts affects also the research budget in Spain, where spending on science and research has been cut dramatically as part of the Spanish government's broader austerity programme (Buck 2013).

Therefore, my main advice for policy makers is to understand the real needs of the people through more investment on employment, welfare and research. In this way, all Spanish citizenship would work in fair jobs, the Spanish welfare state would cover all

society's needs and the Spanish research budget would support all investigations from all sciences, including the anthropological research presented in this article.

With regard to the investigation of adoptive mothers with their sons or daughters, it would be convenient to integrate their post-adoptive monitoring within the usual practice of the Servei d'Atenció Postadoptiva ("Post-Adoptive Attention Service" in Catalan) of the ICAA[13], since that is also the assignment of that institution[14]. For this purpose, the Servei d'Atenció Postadoptiva could include anthropologists on their staff of technicians in adoptions and fostering. In this way, the anthropological research would be recognized and benefited by the support of a public institution at the same time that the Servei d'Atenció Postadoptiva would be benefited by the professional contribution of anthropologists. It might also include anthropologists on the staffs of the ICIF and the ECAI[15] for the same assignment, participating in multidisciplinary team work alongside psychologists, psychiatrists, doctors, lawyers and social workers.

Different social actors draw attention of parents to the dual specificity, the natal and the adoptive, of their adoptive sons or daughters. It would also be necessary to incorporate anthropologists in these adoption agencies for the training of prospective adoptive parents, particularly in the pedagogy to show that there are various forms of adoption and fostering in different human societies, in order to liberate them from their previous prejudices about adoption as a last and problematic resource.

This would be in line that John Terrell and Judith Modell (1994:160) proposed to the community of anthropologists: to spread their knowledge about adoption in different cultures to the general public, in order to generate confidence in the adoption process by removing prejudices about it.

Last but not least, I hope this article has contributed to shed more light on understanding voluntarily single motherhood in Barcelona.

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[13] Acronym for Institut Català de l'Acolliment i l'Adopció, "Catalan Institute for Fostering and Adoption" in Catalan. This institute of the Generalitat de Catalunya ("Government of Catalonia" in Catalan) is responsible for foster care and adoption both at autonomous and international level.

[14] The Servei d'Atenció Postadoptiva provides advice and psychological counselling and education for all adoptive families or adopted children who need help and guidance to face the needs posed by the rearing and education of children, as well as the relationship between them and their parents throughout their evolutionary process. This service puts a special focus on crises that may occur within the context of adoption by providing tools, guidelines and guidance to promote the growth and welfare of these families. The service also offers psychological, social and legal counselling in the processes in search of the origins of all those people who want it. The Servei d'Atenció Postadoptiva consists of a multidisciplinary team of psychologists, pedagogues and social workers with experience in the field of adoption, responsible for attend consultations.

[15] Acronym for Entitat Col·laboradora per l'Adopció Internacional, "Collaborating Entity for International Adoption" in Catalan. Non-profit entity that, in exchange for a determined fee, makes all necessary arrangements throughout the adoption process until the child is formally adopted.

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