

**ADOPTION BUREAUCRACIES: EXPERT KNOWLEDGE,
DOCUMENTS AND RACE IN THE MAKING OF ADOPTIVE
FAMILIES IN CENTRAL MEXICO**

by
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ABSTRACT

This dissertation examines the bureaucratic, legal and administrative practices of the neoliberal state through an ethnographic account of the Mexican government's recent attempts to regulate and create adoptive families. With the Mexican state's adherence to international adoption conventions and the recent shift towards the right in Mexican politics, federal and state-level governments have adjusted existing codes to facilitate the "plenary adoption" of poor children by state approved families beginning in the 1990s. The reforms, which define "plenary adoption" as the creation of a new family by extinguishing all the previous kinship ties of the adopted child, mark a move away from earlier "simple adoption" provisions, in which adoption was defined as a contract between two individuals that could be revoked. Paying special attention to the material production of knowledge—as well as the legal and moral discourses that it entails— the dissertation explores how adoption becomes a technology of government with particular racialized effects, and investigates the multiple possibilities of relatedness that are made available or foreclosed through plenary adoption policies and practices.

Drawing on twenty consecutive months of ethnographic and archival work (2009-2011) in an office of the "System for Integral Family Development" or DIF (the state institution in charge of adoptions and social assistance in Mexico), as well as interviews with adoptive parents and birth mothers, the dissertation makes three principal interventions: First, it questions the view of bureaucrats as agents who mediate between already constituted objects to ask how forms of kinship and state power are mutually constituted in the context of child adoption. Second, it provides new insights into the

mundane processes through which common sense knowledges colonize legal and bureaucratic practices, showing how domains of normalization are central to governmental work and the implementation of law. Finally, it illustrates how the state acquires legitimacy through documentary practices and regimens of expertise that unfold in a context of entrenched and growing inequalities; and how moral and racial idioms emerge and materialize across governmental and familial domains.

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INTRODUCTION

In Summer 2010, just a few weeks after the start of the rainy season, several new government billboards sponsored by the local DIF, or System for Integral Family Development,¹ were put up to advertise the success of legal adoptions in the Central Mexican city of Barrancas.² Next to an icon of two hands holding a three-member heterosexual family, these billboards contained the following legend: “For a Culture of Adoption: We have achieved the delivery of more than 75 minors to [state] families.”³ This number was particularly significant, since the governor’s wife—who by mandate is always the President of the DIF at the federal, state and municipal levels —had publicly set the goal of reaching 100⁴ adoptions at the end of the year to celebrate the 100th anniversary of the 1910 Mexican Revolution.⁵

Accompanied by radio and television spots, as well as adds in local newspapers and magazines, these billboards literally made visible the state’s novel involvement in the “circulation of children”⁶ and the formation of families in Mexico. Indeed, adoption was one of the local DIF programs that received more media attention since 2006, when the National Action Party (PAN) took power in the state for the second time.⁷ As I discuss in more detail later in this chapter (see p. 22), the PAN’s electoral success at the national

¹ In Spanish: *Sistema para el Desarrollo Integral de la Familia*. All translations from Spanish to English were made by the author.

² This is a fictional name.

³ In Spanish: “*Por Una Cultura de la Adopción. Hemos logrado entregar a más de 75 menores a familias [del Estado].*”

⁴ Yet this goal was reached until August 2012, at the end of the PAN administration.

⁵ Paradoxically, at the time that the DIF’s President announced the goal of reaching 100 adoptions, local newspapers denounced that Barrancas had reached 100 executions related to organized crime in only 170 days.

⁶ This term has been used by recent scholars to think of how children move in and out of households and institutions (see Abreu 2009; Blum 2007; Bowie 2004; Fonseca 2004; Leinaweaver 2008; Marre and Briggs 2009).

⁷ The state had been headed by the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) before 2000.

(and in this case, local) level in 2000 was accompanied by a broader shift towards the Christian right and religious conservatism in the public organization of the state. Headlines such as “The [local] DIF promotes family consolidation as the natural institution of society”⁸ or “The [local] DIF System strengthens the family reintegration of children from [the state]”⁹ promoted and advertised a “culture of adoption”¹⁰ as a way to give institutionalized children the chance of a new life in “solid” families.

At the same time, in the context of increased “public spectacles” (Goldstein 2004) of violence in the city related to the so-called “war on drugs” launched by then President Felipe Calderón in 2006, these billboards or *espectaculares*—as they are called in Spanish—highlighted the multiple and ongoing contradictions of the government’s involvement in both protecting and exposing life. The affectively charged image of adoption, as the reintegration of a vulnerable child into a new and morally correct family, became one vehicle to advertise the reproduction of the nation’s own future in the midst of increasing public violence. Placed on top of houses and businesses along major highways and avenues of the city, these signs stood alongside other governmental billboards announcing state ransoms for kidnappers, family tributes for dead children or local commemorations for the Mexican army.¹¹ As such, the insertion of adoption in the composite “visual economy” (Poole 1997) of Barrancas speaks interestingly of the relations between state and family in Mexico’s complex social and political landscape.

⁸ Official Government Webpage. May 25th, 2008.

⁹ Official Government Webpage. February 3rd, 2008.

¹⁰ Official government webpage. November 21th, 2008.

¹¹ Although Mexico has relied heavily on the armed forces to combat drug trafficking over the last three decades—deploying military troops for counter-drug operations and enlisting military personnel in civilian police agencies, for example—this arrangement has increased greatly since the administrations of Vicente Fox (2000-2006) and Felipe Calderón (2006-2012), which employed tens of thousands of troops in domestic public security initiatives throughout the country (Astorga and Shirk 2010). These governmental techniques have been related to dramatic increases in human right violations, as military personnel are known to “switch ranks” and participate in organized crime.

In this dissertation, I locate the state's promotion of adoption for poor institutionalized children whose birth relatives are deemed unfit to raise them, as part of a broader shift in governmental approaches to the family in Mexico. With the state's adherence to international adoption conventions¹² in the late 1980s and 1990s, and political shifts towards the right in the PAN governments of Vicente Fox (2000-2006) and Felipe Calderon (2006-2012), as well as the "new" Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) government since 2012, the adoption of children has gained unprecedented importance to both protect the rights of children and promote the importance of the nuclear family in the creation and welfare of citizens.

In the 1990s, Mexican federal and state-level governments began to adjust existing legal codes to facilitate the "plenary" adoption (*adopción plena*) of vulnerable children (Berna Sesma 2005; Zamora et al 2004). These newer reforms –which follow Euro-American understandings of adoption–, define it as the juridical institution that allows children or disabled persons to become part of a new family *as if* they were offspring born into the family. As such, legal adoption has become, for the first time in Mexico, configured as an irrevocable status that extinguishes all previous kinship ties of the adoptee with his or her birth relatives. This has opened up new governmental and bureaucratic spaces to regulate the formation and dissolution of families, in contrast to earlier "simple" adoption (*adopción simple*) provisions,¹³ which were abrogated from the federal Civil Code only in 2013. *Adopción simple*, legally described as "civil kinship" or

¹² In this period Mexico signed major Western international adoption and children laws, such as the Inter-American Convention on Conflicts of Laws Regarding Adoption of Minors (1988); the UN Convention on the Rights of Children (1990); and the Hague Convention on the Protection of Minors and Cooperation Regarding International Adoption (1994).

¹³ In 1998, after the reforms to the Civil Code following Mexico's adherence to international adoption treaties, the "simple adoption" regime was supplemented with plenary or "full adoption" provisions (Zamora et al 2004).

parentesco civil, was defined as a contractual relationship between the adopter and the adoptee that did not sever the child's bonds with his or her extended birth family, and could be dissolved by such things as the ungratefulness of the adoptee. As such, the new emphasis on legal adoption as a modality of biological family formation, marks a significant move by the Mexican state to regulate areas of private life that had once been left to "tradition", and that were regarded as "outside" the formal domain of the law.

Yet, as Fonseca (2009a) has shown in the Brazilian case, the absence of legal mechanisms for forming nuclear families through adoption did not mean that these practices did not take place. Extra-legal and illegal forms of adoption (such as the falsification of birth certificates) have historically been one of the most common forms of creating adoptive families in Latin America.¹⁴ What is new, however, is the state's involvement in the regulation of these practices of kinship formation. In Barrancas, the shift from "simple" to "plenary" adoption laws happened in the course of several reforms to the Civil and Family Codes since the 1990s, when "plenary" adoption was made available for children under 6-years old. Yet, it was not until 2005 that all adoptions, regardless of age, became "plenary" adoptions in the state. Before that, "simple" adoptions for children over 6-years old did not require juridical approval from a judge.¹⁵

¹⁴ Given the widespread occurrence of forms of *de facto* adoptions that have historically taken place without legal approval, the Civil Code has legitimized some of these practices under the law of *entendado* (Código Civil 2008, Art.378). This law gives recognition to the cultural practice through which poor parents or single mothers entrust their children to the care and custody of wealthier persons. Contrary to the new "full adoption" laws, this law does not grant "rights" to children but to the woman who has cared since infancy for a child that is not her own, and to whom she has given her name and publicly presented as her son or daughter (Zamora et al 2004). In addition, given the absence of full adoption provisions until the last decade, the formation of biological nuclear families through adoption often occurred through "secret adoptions", in which newborn children were directly registered with the adoptive father's surname without notifying the judicial system. As a result of this policy of benevolent neglect, legal adoptions remained low (see Fonseca 2006, 2009a, 2009b).

¹⁵ Yet until 2008, when the Family Code was again reformed, it still stated that adoptees could impugn their adoption, asking for its revocation after reaching full legal age, if their disability had disappeared, or if they

This dissertation attempts to bring into focus this recent governmental attention to family formation and regulation by following different aspects of the bureaucratic processes entailed in the making of adoptive families and their implications in kinship relationships. It does this by attending to different material manifestations of family and state formation in Barrancas. Situated at the level of everyday governmental and familial practices, *Adoption Bureaucracies* takes child adoption as an entry point to think of the mutually constitutive relations between governmental practices, racial imaginaries, documents, forms of kinship and inequality in Central Mexico. Paying special attention to the material production of knowledge—as well as the legal and moral discourses that it entails—the dissertation explores how adoption becomes a technology of government with particular racialized effects, and questions the possibilities of relatedness that are made available or foreclosed through plenary adoption policies and practices. My emphasis is thus in the production of knowledges and the proliferation of truths in the formation of adoptive families and within them. It is also in the materiality that these knowledges and truths acquire in bureaucratic and domestic settings.

By focusing on the bureaucratic practices through which families are created, my ethnography challenges essentialist understandings of kinship, thinking instead of how family relations are traversed by legal practices and pronouncements, as well as broader political, social and economic processes. As such, this dissertation is as much about kinship and adoption as it is about the workings of state bureaucracy in Mexico. Rather than assuming that the family and kinship are something given or isolated, it considers the ways in which these domains are constituted, and how forms of gender, race and class

had found out about their adoption. In other states, such as Yucatan, adoption remained an administrative procedure (with no intervention of a judge) until 1999 (see Berna Sesma 2005).

inequality allow or disrupt certain reproductive and familial trajectories. Looking at governmental processes that are “at once internal and external to the state” (Mitchell 2006:179), it focuses on the multiple and composite practices, techniques and pedagogies carried out by bureaucrats and governmental agents, through which concrete “objects” are created, including the state itself as a “structural effect” (Mitchell 2006:180). Therefore, this dissertation offers an extensive meditation on how forms of kinship and state power are mutually constituted in the context of child adoption.

In this task, my work draws from the growing literature on bureaucracy and documents (Feldman 2008, Ferguson 1990, Gupta 2012, Herzfeld 1992, Hull 2012b, Riles 2006, Verdery 1996), which has focused on the everyday workings of the state and the production of knowledge in its material formation (Hoag 2011:81). Contrary to Weber’s ideal image of bureaucracy as a machine-like entity that should be characterized by “precision, speed, unambiguity, knowledge of the files, continuity, discretion, unity, strict subordination” (1978:973), scholars have shown how government workers do not only follow rules blindly or carry out decisions in a mechanical fashion but also engage in practical forms of creativity to produce documents anticipating how they can generate desired legal results (Bernstein and Mertz 2011:7, Hoag 2011:81). In this dissertation I build on these insights to explore the tensions that emerge in government workers’ attempts to achieve normative and “efficient” rule-governed bureaucratic practices while also creating the conditions under which normative ideals about the family and reproduction can be realized.

By paying attention to state practices located at the intersection between bureaucracy and normalization, my dissertation aims to rethink how race is materialized

in both kinship relationships and mundane practices of bureaucratic inspection, selection, documentation and regulation. Race has been understood as a social category of classification and comparison through which individuals are assigned identity and social or moral worth (Poole 1997:15). In the case of Mexico, which I will describe in more detail later in this chapter (see p. 45), race has not figured as a formal political category, but rather forms part of a complex social and historical landscape in which notions of *mestizaje* or racial mixture support an image of the subject as composed of multiple –and often conflicting– cultural and genetic heritages. *Mestizaje* reasserts the empirical reality of “races” by conceiving the Mexican subject as the result of the intermixture of distinct “racial” groups that came together during the colonial encounter (Spaniards, Indians, and to a lesser extent Black Africans). However, post-revolutionary national discourses officially discredit the importance of genetic markers to describe forms of class and gender inequality within the population. Contrary to other national projects based on the legal maintenance of racial boundaries and purity among groups, the twentieth century project of *mestizaje* is embedded within particular understandings of race that give enlightened education, discipline and moral reform the power to change a person’s racial standing (De la Cadena 2007). Through cultural pedagogies and governmental intervention, indigenous and black bodies could be “whitened” (or freed from those social and racial markers considered inferior) and included in the national body as *mestizo* subjects.

As Poole (1997: 16) has pointed out, race is a “slippery and often empty category” that has the capacity to occupy different positions and meanings across historical, social and political contexts. Moreover, it exerts its material presence while being “both visual

and non-visual, scientific and ‘popular,’ fixed and ever changing” (Poole 1997:16).

Rather than fixing the meaning of race *a priori* and turning it into a self-evident category that can be easily compartmentalized, race acquires materiality in this ethnography of adoption as an idiom that is part of broader “discursive economies” (Poole 1997), governmental rationalities, bureaucratic practices, and moral languages of family and resemblance. I study race, thus, not merely as an ideational construct or national ideology, but as it inhabits technologies of regularization and normalization in family forms and kinship relations, and as it underscores the moral discourses of the normalizing state. As such, I think of it as a constitutive part of the modern state and its concern with the regulation and control of reproduction and population through disciplinary technologies of normalization (Foucault 1995). In the chapters that follow, I illuminate how race becomes a language through which affects and relations can be described, moralized, rendered technical and operable; and how different forms of intervention and inequality can be naturalized in governmental and familial domains.

Specifically, this ethnography asks: How are families created through adoption work? What are the effects of moral and racial discourses of adoption in the creation of specific forms of relatedness? How are both the state and the family created through interpretative grids of technical expertise, and what kinds of relationships and forms of kinship are rendered intelligible and meaningful? I approach these questions through a detailed focus on the way in which a state Adoption Department produces ideas about kinship and family improvement, and puts them to use in the context of child adoption. In the dissertation chapters I focus on specific instances in which knowledge about the

family is produced, and the kinds of effects that these practices have within the domains of the state and the family.

Adoption Bureaucracies does not intend to be a treatise on adoptive kinship or about the state but an exploration of different practices of truth-making, that tell us something about the limits in delineating family, relationships, responsibility and care. While it draws fruitful insights and inspiration from recent adoption studies that focus on issues of identity and parenting (Bartholet 1993; Carsten 2000; Howell 2003, 2006; Modell 1994; Yngvesson 1997, 2003, 2010) it aims to extend this literature to the study of how categories of knowledge that make adoptive families are created in some bureaucratic and familial settings. As such, my dissertation does not uncover any particular “truths” about adoptive kinship, but shows how some of these truths are created and the force they have to produce and terminate forms of relatedness and kinship. In this regard, my study does not aim to rectify or determine the “value” of adoption programs in Mexico. Rather I aim to look at its effects in the creation and maintenance of distinct forms of relatedness, and domains of kinship and state; and how this is connected to larger social processes of racialization and race-making. This is why I aim to foreground adoption as a technology of government, focusing not merely in the application of abstract laws but in the acts of a complex bureaucratic apparatus and its specific effects.

The Integral Family Development

As a decentralized public institution with its own patrimony and juridical personality, the DIF– or *Sistema para el Desarrollo Integral de la Familia*– has made the family the central unit through which “vulnerable” individuals can receive social welfare

in Mexico. Following the guidelines of the new Social Assistance Law passed in 2004, the DIF is now in charge of coordinating the National System of Public and Private Social Assistance¹⁶ institutions in the country. As its name in Spanish states, its main purpose is the promotion of the “integral development of the family and the community, in order to combat the causes and effects of vulnerability” (SNDIF 2010). Tracing its roots to feminine charitable institutions for poor children that emerged after the 1910 Mexican Revolution, the DIF is now the central authority regulating and supervising all domestic and international adoptions in Mexico. While in Barrancas, at the time of my fieldwork the DIF regulated the whole adoption process, in other Mexican states it works jointly with private and civil society institutions in the production of adoption files for their juridical approval.¹⁷

The DIF is an example of how the gendered and hierarchized organization of social assistance in the country has been historically associated with the “feminine” side of the state. As such, the imagination of the nation-state as a family with its own gendered division of labor is visible in the DIFs own history, political structure and organization. This is aligned with the patriarchal nature of the nation, in which women’s power is grounded in their claim to protect and represent children, and their place in politics as protectors of motherhood and children (Traina et al. 2008:49). As mentioned earlier (see p. 1), the wife of the President of the Republic always serves as ‘President’ of

¹⁶ In Spanish the *Sistema Nacional de Asistencia Publica y Privada*. In addition to the DIF, this System includes the Ministries of Health, Social Development and Public Education; the National Institutes for the Elderly, Youth, Women and Indigenous people; the National Council against Addictions; the National Council for the Promotion of Education, and the National Council for Education and Life; the Centers for Juvenile Integration; the National Lottery; Public Charities; Forecasts for Public Assistance; Private Welfare Boards and all other private institutions of social assistance.

¹⁷ Other states in which the DIF regulates the whole adoption process are, for example, Coahuila, Morelos, Puebla, Durango and Campeche. In some states, such as San Luis Potosi or Jalisco, the DIF works together with private and social institutions to make adoption petitions to a judge (see Berna Sesma 2005).

the National DIF, while governors' and mayors' wives serve as heads of state and municipal DIFs. The DIF's origin can be traced to the "*Programa Gota de Leche*" (Drop of Milk Program), which was created in 1929 by upper class Mexican women who provided food to underprivileged children living in the peripheries of Mexico City. From it emerged the National Association for the Protection of Childhood (*Asociación Nacional de la Protección a la Infancia*), which started to receive funds from the National Lottery and Public Charity (*Beneficencia Publica*).

In 1961, PRI President Adolfo López Mateos created the National Institute for the Protection of Childhood or INPI (*Instituto Nacional de Protección a la Infancia*). This institute provided food to school-age children in Mexico City, but encouraged women in the rest of the country to form their own committees to replicate these actions in other federal states. In 1968 the Mexican Institute for Childhood Assistance or IMAN (*Institución Mexicana de Asistencia a la Niñez*) was created, which served orphaned, abandoned, disabled and ill children. These institutions (IMPI and IMAN) were fused in 1977 to create the DIF. As the coordinator of the National System of Public and Private Social Assistance (*Sistema Nacional de Asistencia Social Pública y Privada*), the DIF is now in charge of elaborating the National Program of Social Assistance, and supervising the services provided by private and public social assistance institutions. As I mention later in this chapter, its creation took place around the same time as the privatization of social services under structural adjustment policies in the country (see p. 21).

Through this gendered imaginary of social assistance, the wives of governors and mayors have been crucial figures in advertising the importance of the family to strengthen the state and fight against vice and crime. At the same time, local state DIFs have been in

charge of promoting policies to promote normative ideas of the heterosexual nuclear family as the best site to protect life. During the seventy-one years of PRI (Institutional Revolutionary Party) rule (1929-2000), the state's interest in the family was also intimately related to the creation of clientelist networks that would assure the maintenance of the party's power. This strong nexus of politics and social assistance is still part of the current structure of adoptions, as it is always the President of the DIF—the feminine side of the political party in power—who formally delivers “state” children to new adoptive families, or publicly provides other kinds of relief for so-called vulnerable groups. Of course, the gendered structure of social assistance in Mexico also underscores the imagination of the nation through “genealogical metaphors” (Herzfeld 1992:41). Latin American nations have been envisioned as racialized families created by the union of indigenous and colonizer elements (Schever 2013:95-96) and, as we will see in the following chapters, these gendered and racialized domains of government to which the DIF belongs, also substantiate the invocation of religious and paternalist languages in the adoption process.

In its particular governmental efforts to regulate and normalize families through adoption, the DIF also brings together the production of legality through forms of knowledge embedded in normalizing and bio-political effects (Foucault 1990). As part of the continuum of governmental apparatuses with regulatory functions that incorporate norms and juridical domains into their ordinary work, the DIF's forms of intervention are differentiated according to normative understandings about the worth of life. Lee Edelman (2004:2) has shown how family values and discourses about the protection of children are central to the formation of the image of the state and its politics of presence.

Edelman argues that it is through the pervasive evocation of the child as the emblem of futurity and reproduction, that the state affirms and authenticates its social order. This “reproductive futurism” places the child as “the perpetual horizon of every acknowledged politics, the fantasmatic beneficiary of every political intervention” (2004:3). As such, the image of the child as life, future and the “fetishistic fixation of heteronormativity” (2004:21), works as a grounding force and a language through which the nation-state aims to continually ground its presence. In the case of adoption, it is the unquestioned figure of the child as an emblem of the future life of the nation,¹⁸ which supports the need of protecting its life even if it might come at the cost of birth families. Following the international Convention on the Rights of the Child,¹⁹ adoption in Mexico is now guided by the “best interest of the child” principle, which aims to protect children’s rights above all other competing interests. While the DIF states that the preferable place for a child to grow up is within his or her birth family, when this is not considered possible, adoption is seen as the second best option.

As Rose and Valverde (1998:541) have argued, legal mechanisms are intimately related with regulatory desires to turn the family into a normalizing mechanism for children. In this dissertation, I explore how this brings together discursive practices that emphasize the need to save children (and the nation) by shifting the burden of caring for vulnerable subjects to the family as the best site to create rightful subjects. Thus, I argue that the family becomes a direct field of intervention, bringing together forms of assistance and repression for “the care and custody of children without families and of

¹⁸ In chapter four, I examine more closely the rhetoric of descent that organizes the temporality of governmental projects such as adoption, showing how it organizes forms of intervention.

¹⁹ The Convention was approved by the United Nations General Assembly in 1989, as the first legally binding international convention for children’s rights. Mexico ratified the Convention in 1990.

rebels against the family” (Donzelot 1979:89). By promising a new life for children in families, adoption takes over from state institutions the demand to raise useful subjects. Those families who cannot ensure the return of children as valuable citizens (Foucault 2003:257) ought not to be entitled to parenthood.

Research Overview

This dissertation is based on 22 consecutive months of fieldwork in 2009-2011, and two shorter periods of fieldwork in the summers of 2007 and 2008.²⁰ When the adoption billboards mentioned above were put up, I had been conducting fieldwork in the DIF’s Adoption Department for 6 months. Although DIF authorities knew of my intentions to write a dissertation on adoptions, I was absorbed into the DIF’s bureaucratic structure in a rank similar to a professional trainee, like other students carrying out the social service that is required by the Mexican educational system. Specifically, as a trainee in relation to other female social workers, secretaries, psychologists and lawyers, I was affiliated to the Adoption Department, which is formally part of the DIF’s legal arm—the PDMF or Office for the Defense of the Minor and the Family (*Procuraduría de la Defensa del Menor y la Familia*). Through this work I generated long-lasting friendships and close relationships with Victoria, the Department’s secretary; Barbara, the head of psychology; Iris, a lawyer; and Gloria and Laura, the Department’s social workers. The head of the Adoption Department, the only male in the office, was our immediate *jefe* or boss. We usually just called him *licenciado*, alluding to the fact that he had a *licenciatura*

²⁰ This research project received clearance from the Homewood Institutional Review Board (HIRB No. 2009051) in 2009. In accordance with HIRB stipulations, all the personal names used in this dissertation, as well as the location of the research site itself, have been changed to protect the anonymity of the participants. All participants were asked to participate based on informed consent.

degree as a lawyer and was our superior. The DIFs Attorney or *Procuradora*, a female lawyer appointed by the DIF's President and General Director, was his (and our) immediate superior.

The DIF's Adoption Department, which was previously located downtown next to the Superior Court, had been recently relocated in the southern outskirts of the city, next to the children's *Albergue*. This new location could only be reached via the highway and was far from other DIF and government agencies housed in the city. This highway was now called the "*basurero*" or dumpster, because corpses with notes for drug cartels or the state police were often dumped there. Whereas before Iris or the *licenciado* could walk to the courthouse on a daily basis to follow up on legal cases, they now had to endure a long commute whenever the need to visit other government offices arose. The shift did not take place in response to the needs of the office; rather, it was the result of the Governor's desire to inaugurate a new complex for vulnerable groups built with federal funds. Since the facility could not be empty for the official inauguration –and no new program had been set up yet– they transferred existing DIF offices, including the Adoption Department, to fill up the empty space.

While the new location made the office workers feel isolated –and it proved inconvenient for visitors in general– my friends in the office liked their new workplace more than the previous one. Prior to the move, the Adoption Department was comprised of one tiny room with a door, and a shared open space for receiving people. Since they only had one cabinet and two shelves, piles of files ended up on the floor or were placed on chairs and desks. Now the department had three rooms with AC (although one broke down right away) and a waiting area painted in bright colors. They still did not have

enough cabinets or shelves, but there were four new computers with flat screens and high-speed Internet access. They had placed the Department's archive in the psychologist's bathroom and left other documents in boxes on the floor. Iris had even brought a small bathroom shelf from home to store her files and hung her bag on the hook for the missing fire extinguisher, for which the other workers secretly taunted her. Since child adoption was getting a lot of media attention in Barrancas, the office had greater access to resources than ever before. Since 2009, a new International Organization for Standardization Certification process (ISO 9001:2008) was under way,²¹ creating and expanding the bureaucratic adoption apparatus as a quality service provider. But everyone knew this was most likely temporary, as things would shift again when a new administration took office in 2012.

Throughout my extended fieldwork I was able to take part in the everyday work of the office, observing how state workers in charge of adoptions carried out their tasks—such as orientations to couples that wished to adopt, the elaboration of reports and legal documents, meetings with birth mothers who came to relinquish their paternal rights, and follow-up visits with adoptive parents and their children. I closely followed the work of Laura and Gloria as they visited prospective adoptive parents and their families, and observed the networks of decision-making through which they decided which couples were able to adopt and which were not. I also learned how Barbara produced her psychological reports and accompanied Iris to her courthouse appointments or helped her draft legal documents. I was allowed to sit and tape-record the Technical Adoption Councils—where a group of DIF authorities match children with approved couples wishing to adopt—and was given permission to listen to the audios from these meetings

²¹ The ISO Certification process is explained in more detail in chapter two.

since 2008. I focus in more detail on these meetings in chapter one and two of the dissertation. I also participated in state rituals related to adoption, particularly in the DIF's official "*entregas*" or deliveries, in which the governor's wife²²—and sometimes the governor himself—hand over the children to their new adoptive parents in the presence of families, media, and other local political figures or state authorities. As such, through close work in the Adoption Department, I was able to learn both about the production of adoptive families and the organization of bureaucratic and institutional labor itself for an extended period of time.

In addition to my work in the Adoption Department, I visited the DIF's *Albergue*—which is the temporary shelter to which all children (newborns up to 12-years old²³) who are taken in by the state are first sent. My visits to the *Albergue* took place twice per week from February to May 2010, and later on a more irregular basis to attend specific meetings or events. For example, I was allowed to sit in some of the shelter's "*juntas interdisciplinarias*" (interdisciplinary meetings), in which authorities and experts (such as the director, and the shelter's lawyers, psychologists, doctor and social workers) discuss the progress and future of every child in the *Albergue*. As I will describe in more detail in chapter two, in these meetings DIF workers decide which children can be reintegrated to suitable family members, adopted or sent to other—usually private—permanent orphanages. At the *Albergue* I spent much of my time in the legal and social work areas, accompanying lawyers to the courthouse, the social worker to her fieldtrips, and learning about the practices and procedures involved in producing and circulating documents and knowledge about children and birth families within the DIF and to families.

²² I was able to personally attend four of these events, and take part in the official "delivery" of 32 children.

²³ The local DIF also has another separate shelter for children between 12 and 18 years old, which I did not visit.

I carried out archival research at both the DIF's Adoption Department and *Albergue*. At the Adoption Department, I examined recent files regarding both adoptions and terminations of parental rights, as well as internal administrative documents being circulated inside the DIF and across other governmental offices. At the *Albergue*, I reviewed a sample of 140 files of children who entered the shelter since the 1990s, which included files of children who were adopted, but also of those who were not considered "adoptable" and thus, were transferred to permanent orphanages or placed with birth family members. I complemented this archival research with additional work in both the local archive of the Superior Court and the Superior Court's general archive.²⁴ During this period, I also conducted informal and semi-structured interviews with local DIF authorities and workers in both the *Albergue* and Adoption Department. I learned about changes in the law at the federal and local level through interviews with private adoption groups, lawyers, local politicians and the state's juridical councilor who was promoting adoptions in conjunction with private organizations. In general, the work at the Adoption Office and orphanage was highly rewarding insofar as I created lasting friendships and it enabled me, on the basis of long-term fieldwork, to constitute through snowball sampling methods a pool of 10 adoptive families willing to share their experiences on adoption, parenthood and kinship. Although these families had younger adopted children (under 10 years old), I was also able to establish close contacts with another five families who had older adopted children. I explore one of these histories in chapter three. I met adoptive

²⁴ At the Superior Court I examined 65 adoption files since 1981—which was the oldest date I found— as well as 11 penal cases concerning abortions, corruption of minors, infanticide and kidnappings since 1939. At the Supreme Court I followed the claims of unconstitutionality surrounding the passing of a new law allowing same sex couples to adopt in Mexico City in 2010. I looked at some inheritance disputes, impugnation of simple adoptions and a case, which disputed previous adoption laws only allowing childless couples to adopt in the state.

parents on a regular basis at group meetings, and also visited them in their homes for more detailed interviews. Finally, I was able to locate and interview a group of six birth mothers, whose stories I present in the last chapter. By thinking of family formation within a governmental framework, my aim is therefore to focus on the effects of particular procedures and apparatuses of power that delineate what constitute the limits of the family and the state.

Simple and Plenary Adoption

Several scholars have focused on family, childhood, illegitimacy and kinship in Latin America (Esteinou 2004; Kuznesof 2001, 2005; Kuznesof and Oppenheimer 1985). Even though historians of the family, illegitimacy, gender and slavery have provided valuable insights into the lives of children in the region (González and Premo 2007; Premo 2008), it is only recently that scholars have focused explicitly on historical forms of child abandonment, circulation and adoption (Blum 1998; 2004; 2006; 2007; 2009; Hecht 2002; Guy 1994, 1998, 2002; Marcílio 1998; Milanich 2004, 2009; Salinas Meza 1991; Shelton 2007; Twinam 2007). This trend has also marked recent anthropological studies of child circulation and adoption in Peru (Leinaweaver 2005, 2007, 2008, 2009a; Seligmann 2009), Brazil (Abreu 2009; Cardarello 2009; Fonseca 1986, 2002, 2004; Matos Viegas 2003), Ecuador (Leifsen 2008, 2009, 2013; Walmsley 2008; Weismantel 1995), Colombia (Halbmayer 2004), Guatemala (Posocco 2011) and Mexico (Reyes Kipp in press).

In the case of Mexico, Blum (1998; 2004; 2007; 2010) has shown how historically, the adoption of children across class lines was related to domestic service.

From 1870 to 1884, liberal laws omitted any provisions for legal adoption, but granted the title of “guardians” to employers of underage servants, thus making the acquisition of working dependents a “charitable” form of informal adoption (Blum 1998). From this time on, orphans were often children of poor rural female-headed families, the majority of them domestic servants that migrated into the cities (Arrom 1985; Blum 1998). The Constitution of 1917, a direct result of the Mexican revolution, provided protection against child labor and established the eight-hour workday. These changes, together with the legalization of adoption under the 1917 Law of Domestic Relations and the 1928 Federal Civil Code, introduced measures against adopting children as servants by framing “simple adoption” as a relation that required juridical approval. However, as mentioned above, adoption was structured in the law in similar ways as domestic service –that is, as a relation based on the goodwill of a patron- and was legally configured as a type of contract that bonded only the adopter and the adoptee and could be dissolved through mutual agreement or the “ingratitude”²⁵ of the adoptee.

Strongly influenced by idioms of apprenticeship and fosterage that developed in the context of female domestic service, these “simple adoption” laws provided tenuous regulation of widespread practices of *de facto* adoption or *entenado*, in which wealthier families took in poor children either as domestic servants or because the mothers of those children had themselves worked as servants for the adopting mother (Blum 2004; Zamora et al 2004).

This shift to regulate adoptions in the late 1980s –when Mexico signed major Western international adoption and children’s rights statutes (see p. 3 and 4)– coincided

²⁵ Leinaweaver (2013b) has ethnographically studied how complex and ambivalent relations of gratitude and ingratitude continue to permeate unequal kinship practices of child circulation in Peru.

with at least two major political and economic shifts. First, it coincided with the process of market liberalization and privatization of state services carried out under structural adjustment policies mandated by the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund in Latin America. The privatization program in Mexico was one of the largest in the world, in terms of the number and size of companies privatized. Between 1982 and 2003, for example, the number of state owned enterprises dropped from 1,155 to 201 (Chong and López-de-Silanes 2004:9). In this period Mexico also reversed post-revolutionary land reforms, privatized national industries, terminated several social development programs, and implemented social security reforms to pensions and health care services (Chase 2002:1). These changes have contributed to the widening of income inequalities, so that in 2000 the richest 10 percent of households in Mexico received twice the income of the poorest 40 percent of households (Laurell 2000: 310). Between 1988 and 1992, the Mexican industrial labor force also lost 1,300,000 workers (Vilas 1997: 942), expanding the numbers of unemployed and underemployed people in the country (Laurell 2000: 310). Moreover, changes in the Mexican political landscape at the end of the 1990s, brought about by the end of more than 70 years of one-party rule in Mexico by the PRI (*Partido Revolucionario Institucional*), destabilized previous relationships between the state and transnational organized crime networks, and produced new forms of negotiation and public displays of violence (Astorga and Shirk 2010). In this context, the economic integration of Mexico with Canada and the United States through the NAFTA in 1994, saw the growth of both legal and illegal transnational economies.

Structural adjustment policies that placed employment and income in the realm of market forces in Mexico brought with them different conceptions of how to alleviate

social needs that implied new distributions of responsibilities between the state, market and families (Laurell 2000:310-314; Vilas 1997: 944). These conceptions have demanded a modality of state intervention that neither nullifies the neoliberal project nor destroys the legitimacy of the state (Laurell 2000). Interventions are often justified if they increase the human capital and productivity of the poor and are compatible with fiscal adjustment. This has involved the commodification of social services and benefits, together with the creation of selective low-cost public programs targeted to specific groups that could receive the state's reduced funds (Laurell 2000:313-314). As Vilas (1997: 934) has argued, poverty was not to be officially combated through a state-led redistribution of resources, but through focalized and restrictive measures of "social compensation" designed to ameliorate social hardships caused by structural adjustment and to prevent social and political conflict (Laurell 2000; Vilas 1997:935).²⁶

Second, this broader process of neoliberal reforms coincided in Mexico with important public displays of the relations between the Roman Catholic Church and the state. In 1991, president Salinas de Gortari amended the 1917 Constitution to recognize the church as a legal person and allow clergy to own property, to vote and to participate in politics and education. Although the Catholic Church has historically had strong cultural influences in Mexican life, these changes marked a significant shift in the public

²⁶ While poverty was reduced from 51% to 33% percent in the whole population of Latin America between 1960 and 1980, in the decade of the 1980s, 60 million of "new poor" emerged in Latin America, of which 80% lived in urban areas (Vilas 1997: 934-936). Yet, as Laurell (2000:315) has shown, "the scarcity of resources and the magnitude of unsatisfied needs combined with the discretionary power of federal program officers and local authorities have strengthened political patronage, particularly for electoral proposes." While private banks were rescued from insolvency in 1995-99 with the help of US\$93 billions in tax money, the budget for the famous poverty program "*Progres*a" was US\$187 million in 1997. During Salinas de Gortari's presidency (1988-1994), the total budget of Mexican poverty programs only represented about 0.9 percent of GDP, and in 2000 it had been reduced to 0.2 percent (Laurell 2000:315).

organization of the state, which had legally banned the church since the mid-19th century from participating in political life and owning property (Metz 1992).

These trends were reinforced with the political shift towards the Christian right in the PAN governments of Vicente Fox (2000-2006) and Felipe Calderon (2006-2012), as well as the new PRI. At the time I started my fieldwork in 2009, for example, now President Enrique Peña Nieto, presided the first International Adoption Congress in Mexico as the Governor of the State of Mexico. In this period, many PAN and PRI state agents have publicly defended the nuclear heterosexual family as the locus of love and spirituality and the importance of adoption in giving a new family to children in need (SNDIF 2007), while also endorsing the prohibition of all forms of abortion rights.

These national efforts contrast with the legal reforms carried out in Mexico City by the ruling Democratic Revolutionary Party (PRD or *Partido Revolucionario Democrático*). There, gay marriage and adoption became legal in 2010, and abortion was legalized in 2007.²⁷ The decriminalization of abortion in Mexico City brought new visibility to the growing number of prolife organizations offering pregnant women shelter, doctrine and the possibility of adoption. They offer women psychological counseling, courses, and workshops such as “Christian life” and “second virginity”, that aim to teach them values to avoid further “promiscuity in life.”²⁸ At the time, Mexico’s Archbishopric opened up the website: <http://nolomates.catholic.net> to put pregnant women in contact with 53 help centers and 1,555 couples wishing to adopt.²⁹ In this regard, adoption has emerged as a moral field in which political parties (and politicians) forward claims about

²⁷ An initiative to legalize surrogacy was also approved in Mexico City in 2010. Tabasco is the only state where surrogacy is stipulated in its Civil Code since 1997.

²⁸ Embarazos en un centro pro vida: La culpa que salva del aborto. *La Jornada*, February 5th, 2009.

²⁹ Intensifica Iglesia programa de adopción. *La Jornada*, September 4th, 2008.

family and children as part of broader ideological agendas.³⁰ In the dissertation chapters I focus in more detail on how these religious and moral practices to support a “culture of adoption” in Mexico are in tension with the gendered and class inequalities of neoliberalism that lead to the placement of children in state institutions in Mexico.

Morgan and Roberts (2012) have suggested the concept of “reproductive governance” to think of transformations in the political rationalities of reproduction and population within neoliberalism. As they argue, since the 1990s reproductive discourses in Latin America have been increasingly framed in the name of morality and rights, producing new subject positions and forms of intervention. Reproduction has become a central aspect to the “moral regimes” of governmental actors (2012:242), creating divisions between those who are worthy of rights and those whose rights can be withheld. This dissertation thus explores forms of reproductive governance in Mexico –that is, the way NGOs, politicians, state bureaucrats, professionals and private religious associations make claims about the rights to life of children and the surveillance of poor, mostly female, bodies–, while also remaining attentive to the fact that the effects of neoliberal reforms on family and reproduction are not so easily discernible and transferable across settings.

As the following chapters hope to show, Mexican state institutions such as the DIF do not fit neatly within fixed models of either the “welfare state” –as a government

³⁰ From 2008 to 2011, for example, in response to Mexico City’s abortion laws, sixteen states amended their constitutions to protect life since conception. The state of Chihuahua has long had these laws in place, having amended its constitution in 1994. In November 2007, a reform in the state’s penal code promoted by the PAN party was passed, which prohibits all forms of abortion, including in case of rape – a right that was granted to women in Barrancas in 2000. The reform became effective in October 2008 for the Metropolitan Zone and in 2009 for the rest of the state. Female senators of the party in power (PAN) have also requested that the President of Mexico declare an official “Adoption Month” and encourage adoption as a form of charitable patriotic commitment.

through society— or so called “neoliberal” or “advanced liberal” forms of rule—as governing through individuals and regulated choices. As Tania Murray Li (2007) has pointed out, neoliberalism can be understood as an “assemblage of knowledge and practice” whose elements inhabit fields of governmental intervention that do not have fixed margins or clear outside borders. In this dissertation, I argue that adoption policies and state practices can be understood as part of complex rationalities and “improvement programs” (Li 2007:270) that problematize domains and render them technical, knowable and manageable in specific ways. On the one hand, adoption policies and practices in Mexico follow modern discourses of development and what Li (2007:5) has called a governmental “will to improve”—that is, to optimize the lives of others as part of a governmental field of power closely aligned to disciplinary and normalizing regimes of social obligation.

On the other hand, new technologies of adoption also incorporate neoliberal ideologies of choice, freedom, social risk and standardization. For example, as I explore further in chapter two, Barrancas’ Family Code was amended in 2010 to allow the adoption of institutionalized children whose parents or relatives do not visit them in the *Albergue* for 30 consecutive days. The formal justification of this reform was that the earlier three month waiting period to start children’s adoption constituted an obstacle to protect their rights, given that it allowed the family to “use the *Albergue* at their convenience” and “abuse” the state system, by visiting the child only once every three months to interrupt the counting process, leaving the children indefinitely under the care of the state and in a “defenseless state.” Here, neoliberal rationalities that propose that human progress is best achieved by “liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms

and skills” (Harvey 2005) and that state intervention should focus merely on securing the minimal necessary conditions for the family to regulate its own future by itself, speak to the project of adoption in interesting ways. The neoliberal rhetoric of governance, which includes new moral imperatives that argue for “the lessening of risk, not the meeting of need” (Culpitt 1999:35), has important consequences for how government workers interpret what their relation is to poor mothers and their families. Here, new concepts of risk, which inflect governmental rationalities to protect vulnerable children from their natal families –particularly their mothers–, also work to generate the figure of the mother as the “dangerous individual” (Foucault 1978). At the same time, the concept of risk is invoked to “protect a culture of the individual” (Culpitt 1999:36), helping to create the figure of an adoptable child as an “autonomous subject,” who is free from genealogical ties and therefore capable of improvement (see chapter two). Thus, adoption bureaucracies both celebrate the family as fundamental unit of the state, and its role in promoting the development of self-reliant, flexible and independent individuals.

My focus on a state Adoption Department offers a poignant site to interrogate how discourses of individualism, freedom, self-regulation and risk inflect forms of governmental intervention in family formation. Government through family requires that the family be “rendered technical” (Li 2007:234), while making it responsible for the lives of its members. As Culpitt (1999: 62) has argued, one aspect of the remoralization of welfare within neoliberalism is the common project to ‘resurrect’ the family as self-regulating and fundamental unit in social policy initiatives. Here, “the *family* is also used rhetorically as exemplar –as a means to stigmatize those who have no family or whose *family* falls outside the norm of respect. Attempting to control de deviant family is part of

the implicit aims of normative welfare” (Culpitt 1999: 62, emphasis in original). As Yazici (2012:128) notes, and I show in chapter four, since the discursive emphasis on “strengthening the family” works alongside neoliberal objectives to free individuals and diminish state responsibilities towards vulnerable populations, these policies actually “serve to undercut the already vulnerable families, married/unmarried women with their children, who do not fit into an idealized discursive image of a family and who most importantly need the state’s help to survive.”

Donzelot (1979) has shown how the state and the family have historically formed “tactical collusions” and “temporary convergences” on such things as the management of the family’s undesirable members. In the late eighteenth century this model allowed families to exclude undesired members and the state to secure strategic corrective interventions of these individuals in hospitals, orphanages and asylums (1979:122). Yet, in the advanced liberal model, as described by Rose (1993), this “temporary convergence” has shifted to one in which the state aims to place undesirable individuals back in the family in exchange for freedom and choice. The normative family, thus, becomes a self-regulating unit, that needs to be freed from unnecessary governmental intervention. The role of the state is merely to manage those forms of kinship “failure” and deviation that do not allow the correct family to function as an independent unit. The promotion of adoption in Barrancas is motivated, in part, by such views, and is seen as a technique to reinsert individuals into normative families in which they can become independent and self-reliant individuals.

At the same time, adoption calls for particular forms of technological and expert intervention to minimize the “risks” that are seen as permeating forms of family

formation that are not based on the binding force of biological procreation. As Foucault (2003:255) noted, the process of the constitution of the “nuclear family” also opened it up for particular forms and techniques of power, centered on the requirement to care for the child’s body. This rationalization of parent-child relations and its restriction within the compact nuclear family, Foucault argued, “effectively opens it up to political and moral criteria; opens it up to a type of power and to a technique of power relayed by medicine and doctors together with families” (2003:256). Through plenary adoption the family is also made available for new techniques of power. While Foucault mentions how families are called upon to take responsibility for their children’s lives and survival, to later give them up to the state when they are grown up (2003:257), plenary adoption simultaneously implies that not all families can take responsibility for their children’s bodies and lives. While some “correct” families are capable of raising independent citizens and reproducing the nation, others need to “sacrifice” parenthood and give their children up to secure the future life of the nation-state.

Patricia Anaya, who coordinated the National DIF’s “Diagnosis of the Mexican Family” and worked in its *Subdirección de Atención a Población Vulnerable* (Sub-direction for the Attention of Vulnerable Populations), for example, noted that because the strength of the Mexican nation is dependent on the strength of each family, “any discomfort in the interior of the social body of the State is directly related to the health of each of the families, in the same way that social development and economic growth are related to the integral development of the family” (Anaya 2009:289). As such, public policies centered on the family “will result in the engrandizement and strength of the

nation, in which each family makes a difference” (Anaya 2009:303). Anaya further explains:

In [the DIF’s] new vision of social assistance, the family is not only regarded as part of that population in vulnerability or risk; the family, in this framework, is, also, the organization capable of promoting, from within itself, the development of its members. If we accept this argument we can understand why the family is or should be the objective towards which the actions of social assistance are directed, as it is in that space where these actions are enhanced and multiplied (Anaya 2009:288).

Patricia Anaya further explains: “In this government [under Felipe Calderón 2006-2012] we have wanted to boost persons so that they become infused with desire to move ahead by their own will. It is a duty to assist the root of the conflict, the part that joins or disjoins the family, there we find an efficient answer” (Anaya 2009:281). Social assistance target populations are now understood as “promoters of their own development”, in a vision that privileges “the empowerment of subjects to facilitate and accompany their transition from a situation of vulnerability to another of reincorporation into human development, by reducing the factors of vulnerability in such a way that the subject is capable, by himself, of reinserting himself in his familiar and social environment” (Anaya 2009:287). The main objective is now to “diminish the [state’s] assistance more and more and procure the prevention and strengthening of the family, who will become the axis of the actions” (Anaya 2009:287). As I show in chapter one and two, the image of adoption as an “individualized life-project” can be understood in different registers. First, the creation of an individualized adoption project is related to the prior production of a liberated child. That is a child that is capable of being reincorporated into a “good” family by being “freed” from previous kinship (and racial) attachments which hindered him or her from becoming a “promoter of its own

development” (Anaya 2009:187). Second, it also calls attention to racialized understandings of the family that present adoption as an “individual” racial project to reconstitute children to the “natural” and only family to which they are supposed to belong.

The paradox with the governing of the family is that even as it is assumed to be a natural and even divine institution, it also requires enlightened improvement (Li 2007:232). In chapter one, I explore how this paradox is worked out in the DIF’s Adoption Department, by focusing on how discourses of God are used to explain the need to restore nature through social means. As in the case of Indonesia described by Li (2007: 233), governmental intervention is merely seen as a “restoration” of the unity of improvement (community, the family, the nation), to its natural state. I pay close attention to how government workers bring God into the work of the state in Mexico. As Scott (2011:96) has noted, Christian secularism has privatized religion alongside with familial and sexual matters. The family thus has been coded as a private institution even if the law defined marriage, inheritance and appropriate sexual practices. At the same time, women were associated with religion and religious belief (Scott 2011:97). Yet the public/private kinship/state distinction, a hypothetical boundary, required constant regulation by state authorities. As I show in chapter four, the public and private distinction indeed allowed to sexualize the bodies of women so “that both domestic harmony and public disorder were figured in female form” (Scott 2011:97). That is, it legitimated the political and social inequality of men and women, by moralizing the female body and it responsible for the failures of kinship.

However, I also show how in the very work of the state government these boundaries are also internal to the domain of the state itself, and are constantly crossed

and contested. As mentioned earlier, the state itself appropriates this public/private division by positioning the DIF as the “female” branch of government. The wife of the governor—as the official face of the DIF—also brings religious languages into the work of the state and the formation of families. As Asad mentioned, even if religion is placed in the domain of private reason by the secular, “Private *reason* is not the same as private *space*; it is the entitlement to difference, the immunity from the force of public reason.” (2003: 8). As such, it can exist within the organization of the state itself. But let me spend the next pages explaining in more detail these ideas, and how they emerge in the dissertation.

Moral Technologies of Adoption

As mentioned above, *Adoption Bureaucracies* focuses on adoption as a governmental technology, composed of specific practices that are capable of producing and terminating relationships. Modern bureaucracies, Gupta (2013:463) has noted, are “technologies of governmentality”, in that they aim to operate on populations and not on individuals. Foucault made use of the term technology, in part, to refer to methods and procedures to govern –control, discipline and manage– populations and individuals (see Brehrent 2013:55). By thinking of governmental practices of adoption in terms of technology, one of my aims is to challenge the idea that both the state and bureaucratic practices are neutral and have no specific effects (Brehrent 2013:55). As a governmental technology, adoption is very similar to what Rose has called complex “machines for government”, which he describes as “an assemblage of diverse components, persons, forms of knowledge, technical procedures and modes of judgment and sanction” (Rose

1993:287). But, as Rose also noted following Foucault, adoption can be seen as a governmental “machine” precisely because, even if it is assembled through bureaucracies formed of “parts that come from elsewhere, strange couplings, chance relations, cogs and levers that don't work”, they produce effects that have lives of their own (Rose 1993: 287). At the same time, through adoption, the family can be “instrumentalized as a *social machine*” (Rose 1993:294, emphasis in original). That is, it can be constituted as a separate domain that is “both *made* social and utilized to *create* sociality” (Rose 1993:293-294, emphasis in original) by placing relations under the tutelage of experts that can manage them under a system of sanctions and rewards. Here, specific relations arise between forms of expertise, relations of authority and claims to truth that have the power to both de-politicize governmental practices (Rose 1993:294) and moralize subjects and relationships. That is, the promise of new adoption programs to give families to children in need through technical calculations, simultaneously depoliticizes the work of the government and its role in the formation of moral worlds.

As such, I argue that adoption policies and practices can also be understood as “*moral technologies*” that elucidate both the production of knowledge and the relations of power that emerge in the constitution of family and state. That is, I look at how both technology and morality are constituted through the everyday practices of bureaucrats in charge of adoptions and children. As Latour and Venn (2002: 255) have argued: “Morality is no more human than technology, in the sense that it would originate from an already constituted human who would be master of itself as well as of the universe.” Locating adoption as a governmental technology helps me to think of how, despite technology’s claims to neutrality and impersonality in the production of knowledge, it

nonetheless produces moral subjects and “introduce[s] a history of enfoldings, detours, drifts, openings and translations that abolish the idea of function as much as that of neutrality” (Latour and Venn 2002: 255) into the workings of the state.

As mentioned above, Tania Murray Li (2007) has noted how states make use of logics of “improvement” to govern populations, which are made actionable through the detection of “deficiencies that need to be rectified” (Li 2007:7)— as technical matters in a process that she described as “rendering technical.” As James Ferguson (1990) has also poignantly shown in his study of development projects in Lesotho, the *problematization* of a domain of life is closely aligned to the kinds of technical interventions that are made possible. In the case of new policies of plenary adoption in Mexico, it is precisely the recent governmental *problematization* of child circulation and correct family formation, which has been crucial in opening up a new domain of governmental intervention. At the same time, as Leshkovich (2012:298) has argued, “rendering technical succeeds by convincingly rendering its target moral.” Looking at how different experts define and propose solutions to the problem of infant abandonment, she elucidates the intimate relationship between rendering technical and rendering moral: for example—as I also show in chapter four—, she explores how the kind of maternal personhood that is deemed to be morally correct, is also the kind of personhood that is seen as absent in some women, making them and their children targets for technical intervention.

As Behrent has argued: “‘Technology’ is thus both a form of power that ‘produces’ individuals in ways that integrate them into political and economic structures by supervising, subjecting, and normalizing them, and a term that dispels the illusion of the ‘the individual as abstract subject, defined by individual rights’” (2013: 82). That is,

although technology cannot merely be explained in terms of individual intention (Behrent 2013:65), the very generation of individuals is also the generation of moral worlds. As Latour and Venn (2002:253) have argued, morality is material; it has a mass, and “is also in our apparatuses.” That is, “a substantial part of our everyday morality rested upon technological apparatuses” (Latour and Venn 2002:253). Arguing against an understanding of technology as belonging to the “realm of means and morality to the realm of ends”, Latour and Venn (2002: 247) show how technology folds places, times and agents, and as such is not a form of “mediation” between already constituted objects. This view of “technical mediation” reduces technologies to the “role of instruments that ‘merely’ give a more durable shape to schemes, forms, and relations which are already present in another form and in other materials” (Latour and Venn 2002:250). As they argue, morality “*traverses the world* and, like technology, it engenders in its wake forms of humanity, choices of subjectivity, modes of objectification, various types of attachment” (Latour and Venn 2002:254; emphasis in original). In this regard, when thinking of adoption as a governmental technology, my aim is not to think of bureaucrats as mere “intermediaries” that fulfill a function between already constituted objects or domains—such as the law, the family, kinship or morality—but to explore what is at stake in the making of such claims in daily bureaucratic practices (see chapter one). As Li insists, “rendering contentious issues technical [...] should be seen as a project, not as a secure accomplishment” (2007:10). It is in the production of knowledges as part of this unfinished project and its effects, that I am interested in this dissertation. I dedicate the chapters of the dissertation to explore the production of such “moral” figures as the freestanding child (chapter two), the bad mother (chapter four), the child as relative

(chapter three) and the correct or incorrect family (chapter one and three). I examine how domains such as “the family”, “motherhood” and “childhood” are made intelligible, practicable and amenable to interventions (see Rose 1993: 289).

Expert Knowledges

Adoption Bureaucracies examines different aspects of governmental expertise, in order to elucidate the technical qualities of authority and the production of manageable categories of people. Adoption becomes an activity of government as it interlaces theories about childhood, parenthood and life, with the expertise of social workers, psychologists, lawyers and doctors who deploy specific techniques (such as evaluations, inspections and forms of writing) to produce materials (legal texts, individual files) that aim to terminate and constitute individuals and domains of social life. As Rose (1993:291) has argued, knowledge “is an apparatus for the production, circulation, accumulation, authorization and realization of truth. And truth is a technical matter - it is the 'know how' that promises to make government possible. The practice of rendering a governmental problem technical, thus confirms expertise and constitutes the boundary between those who are positioned as trustees of knowledge—having the capacity to diagnose deficiencies in others—, and those who are subject to expert direction (Li 2007:10). As such, these technical expert practices have the power of creating boundaries and domains to be governed.

Authors have shown how expert knowledge works by recasting its political affiliations within a technical matrix of science (Ferguson 1990; Mitchell 2003; Rose 1993). Through this operation, expertise can be established as neutral and self-

referencing (Li 2007:10). As Li has noted, expert discourses are "closed" insofar as they "are devoid of reference to questions they cannot address, or that might cast doubt upon the completeness of their diagnoses or the feasibility of their solutions" (2007:11). What is excluded, in this regard, are questions about the ways in which the law and governmental forms of intervention support and reproduce the very inequalities that produce the problems that are being addressed. As Li shows, these questions are ordinarily "screened out in the constitution of improvement as a technical domain" (2007:11). Following Ferguson (1990), Li shows how problems that are "rendered technical" are also "rendered nonpolitical." That is, technical expertise requires particular pedagogies that allow the exclusion of broader political and economic power relations from the practical field of technical diagnosis and intervention. As such, experts are trained to "focus more on the capacities of the poor than on the practices through which one social group impoverished another" (2007:7). As I show in the following chapters, governmental decisions to sever kinship ties and create new ones require leaving out the socio-economic conditions of poverty that created the figure of the "child in need" in the first place. At the same time, since "deficient subjects" (such as bad mothers, or institutionalized children in need of adoption) can only be identified and developed from the outside, boundaries are established that divide populations and individuals into those that can be improved or perfected and those that are hopeless cases (Li 2007:15). In this case poor children and their parents, there are also various divisions enacted in the domain of those who are in need of development. While for children improvement is seen as their placement in a (socially, racially and morally) better family; for their parents –

especially their mothers— the aim is more often trying to stop their ability to reproduce and parent more children.

It has been long noted that the truth-claims of bureaucratic expertise are highly significant for modern and advanced liberal forms of government and legal action (Rose 1993). Yet, these forms of expertise, authority and administration are not coherently organized by the state as opposed to non-political domains. As Rose (1993:286) has argued, we are confronted by a “force field” that “is made up of a multiplicity of interlocking apparatuses for the programming of this or that dimension of life, apparatuses that cannot be understood according to a polarization of public and private or state and civil society” (1993:286). The forms of expertise that mark this field of intervention are able to work by incorporating within their daily operations other fields of knowledge that are positioned as outside of their expert domain. Similar to what Carsten (2013:112) has called a process of “domestication” within blood banks and pathology labs, which make the boundaries between the lab and the outside world “a bit fuzzy” (2013:112), in the following chapters I show how governmental and bureaucratic practices are made possible by the incorporation of everyday sociality into expert knowledge. These connections are crucial to the “technical” work of bureaucracies in charge of making families, even if they are sometimes formally denied.

As I show in chapter one and two, governmental knowledge is infused with forms of common sense, personal stories and “non-expert knowledges” that become central to decision-making processes. In this regard, a focus on the DIF’s adoption work and its effects within and beyond the state highlights the contradictions that ordinarily coexist in governmental apparatuses of rule, as well as the unfinished character of bureaucratic

regimes. Building from Mariana Valverde's (2003) work, I pay attention to the constitution and circulation of truths that sustain law in bureaucratic settings. Particularly, I look at the formation and contestation of knowledge in the work of state adoption bureaucracies, by examining how moralized non-expert knowledges "of right and wrong, order and disorder, and virtue and vice" (Valverde 2003:2) enter into the creation of the law. As Mitchell (2006) has noted, the exact division between the legal system—a central piece of the modern state— and the "society" it structures is very difficult to locate. Even though the distinction is simplified by thinking of law as an abstract code and society as the space of its practical application, this image leaves out the complex forms in which code and practice are parts of each other (2006: 176).

In the following chapters, I examine how state workers are able to "know" what a good family, or a bad mother are, and how they make use of this knowledge in the production of legal documents. As Valverde (2003:5) has noted, law not only "uses" facts, accumulating and operationalizing knowledge in the form of evidence; it also produces the very knowledge from which it draws "facts" and conclusions. In the case of adoption, the law makes use of extra-legally produced texts such as psychological studies, social work reports, photographs, or letters from children and adoption petitioners, to support and finalize an adoption. In this sense, then, I follow Rose and Valverde (1998) in suggesting that it is more suitable "and more materialist" to think of legal adoption "complexes" rather than adoption "Law" (Valverde 2003:10). These legal complexes can be understood as uncoordinated and dispersed assemblages of institutions, documents, rituals, and relations of power-knowledge that go beyond the formal confines of the Law, and include claims of sciences such as medicine, criminology, or psychology (Valverde

2003:10). As my dissertation hopes to make clear, forms of disciplinary normalization are woven into the juridical system through everyday bureaucratic work. I focus not only on how nonscientific knowledges circulate in strict legal contexts, but how they inhabit technical and bureaucratic domains. Bureaucracy, and what Valverde calls “administrative knowledge” (2003:20), cannot be subsumed under either science or everyday lay knowledge, but is an “in-between, hybrid epistemological category.” It inhabits a peculiar, and therefore extremely interesting space in relation to the law and legal knowledge.

Kinship and State

Das and Poole (2004) have shown how the margins of the state are redrawn, contested and expanded through practices that can take place at the very center of the central state. That is, the line that divides the state from what it is not, never marks a real exterior. It is a line that is continuously being redrawn internally, through institutional technologies and practices that maintain the socio-political order (Mitchell 2006:175). As scholars have argued after Foucault (Mitchell 2006), it is necessary to unsettle the state-phenomenon as a bonded and discrete entity, separate from other domains such as society, family or economy, and look at techniques and governmental practices that extend well beyond the formal confines of the state. As Lambek (2013) has argued, even if the state and its law attempt to establish its superior authority by encapsulating domains of religion or kinship as outside of itself, these very domains become constituted in the process and are thus deeply implicated and entangled in one another (2013:242). Because of this, “many acts of kinship are simultaneously acts of the state” (Lambek 2013:251).

Focusing on the governmental production of adoptive families, this dissertation examines the processes through which the distinction between state, family and kinship is produced. I ask what methods of organization and representation operate within state practices, creating the effect of an “enduring structure apparently external to those practices” (Mitchell 2006:170). How is a domain of the family and kinship separate from state practices, produced? And how is this division naturalized? In this effort, my dissertation joins a growing literature that challenges views of the family as an autonomous and separate institution that creates civil society (Collier et al. 1982; Collier 1995; Donzelot 1979; McKinnon 2013; Mulla 2011; Reynolds 2000; Rose 1987; Thorne and Yalom 1992; Weintraub and Kumar 1997; Yanagisako and Collier 1987), placing it instead at the center of the very governmental practices from which the state itself “draws life” (Das 2006: 102). By looking at the intersections of reproduction and bureaucracy, I locate my study at the points where the public and the private draw and give life from/to each other.

Several scholars (McKinnon 2013; McKinnon and Cannell 2013) have challenged the assumption that kinship is not an organizational force within modern states. This assumption is intimately related to the presupposition that kinship is both temporally prior to the state and structurally separate from political or economic functions within modern state societies (McKinnon 2013:40; McKinnon and Cannell 2013:4). Using the example of the stigmatization of kin marriages in the nineteenth and twentieth century United States, McKinnon (2013), for example, shows how this division between kinship and politics has made invisible the force of kinship in political and economic processes (2013:41). McKinnon (2013:51) argues that in the

US the stigmatization and prohibition of historical institutions and forms of kinship – such as kin marriage, slavery, polygamy, and nepotism– in the late nineteenth century was part of a purifying move, and boundary-making technology, that brings modernity into being (2013: 51).

Authors have critiqued that the universal truth of kinship has a biological base, and have questioned the forms of power that locate kinship in the domestic and feminine domains (Schneider 1984; Yanagisako 2013; Yanagisako and Collier 1987; Yanagisako and Delaney 1995). Yanagisako (2013:65), for example, has shown how transnational projects of collaboration between Italian family firms and Chinese entrepreneurs “are motivated and shaped by kinship sentiments and commitments to family and unity and intergenerational succession, as well as by critiques of and struggles over them.” Family ownership and control persist in transnational firms, as well as the tensions over the incorporation of non-family members in managerial positions. Building on Yanagisako’s insights, Shever (2013) has also pointed out the importance of understanding affect not merely as a force of reproduction locked in the domestic domain but as a force of production that shapes industrial and commercial processes in the Argentinian oil industry. By looking at how kinship sentiments organize and are organized by the state and its bureaucratic practices, my work also questions the relegation of kinship to the domestic domain (Das and Addlakha 2001; Procupez 2008), and the narratives of modernity that see kinship as irrelevant to modern political and economic domains (McKinnon and Cannell 2013:13; Yanagisako and Collier 1987; Yanagisako and Delaney 1995). As McKinnon and Cannell (2013:13) have argued “the nature of kinship–and forms of

relatedness [...] more broadly—should not be presupposed but rather should be the focus of historical and ethnographic inquiry.”

The family needs to be seen “not as a point of departure, as a manifest reality, but as a moving resultant, an uncertain form whose intelligibility can only come from studying the system of relations it maintains with the sociopolitical level” (Donzelot 1979:xxv). In my dissertation, I part from this understanding to think of how both family and kinship are produced in coordination with bureaucratic practices. Moreover, I take Mitchell’s (2006) point about the need of interrogating the creation of a “state effect” further, by also unsettling the very idea of kinship and family as fundamental, natural and coherent entities. While the family has sometimes been cast as an “artificial” institution heavily regulated by the state (Borneman 2001), kinship is still sometimes presented as a more “authentic” and all-encompassing domain of human relations. My dissertation focuses on both the multiple arrangements and practices that aim to create the effect of the state as a separate and coherent actor (Mitchell 2006:176); and the techniques that aim to produce kinship as an autonomous and natural domain upon which the state merely acts and intervenes. In this regard, I think of the production of kinship and family as separate domains that emerge as effects of multiple and complex forms of institutional practices through a kind of “*kinship effect*.”

That is, I think of kinship not as domain of relations that are given in nature or prior to state practices, but which have certain effects as they come into contact with forms of governmental practice. As such, I challenge the idea that kinship is an intelligible domain that is only acted upon by political, legal or economic domains. Instead, I think of kinship as emerging of different practices that also involve state

processes. Particularly, through an investigation of adoption bureaucracies, I show how both kinship and the state emerge as effects of specific governmental practices. This does not merely involve the penetration of predefined forms of kinship into political or economic relations in the public domain (McKinnon and Cannell 2013:10), but the very constitution of kinship as a domain of practice. Throughout the dissertation, I explore the production of kinship within specific governmental practices that naturalize and sacralize specific forms or relations (Yanagisako and Delaney 1995). As such, I am interested in the “vitality of kinship” in state institutions (McKinnon and Cannell 2013:15), also in how it emerges as a coherent and actionable domain of power in itself. As I argue in the following chapters, kinship and bureaucracy mutually draw life from, and constitute each other, in the production of adoptive families. The purification of these domains as separate and coherent entities can only be maintained abstractly, and in retrospect, as a certain effect of power.

By drawing attention to kinship as an *effect*, however, I do not mean to convey that kinship appears merely as the consequence—something that inevitably follows an antecedent or cause—of governmental practices, which would fall back on the assumption that kinship is a domain that is only acted upon by the law or the state. Lambek, for example, has warned: “Although kinship occurs in a particular nexus of biopolitics, it cannot be reduced to an *effect of biopolitics*” (2013:256, emphasis added). For him, kinship is embedded and emerges from biopolitical practices, as “a site and product of a specific nexus of power/knowledge” (Lambek 2013:245). Kinship is not a separate and subordinated domain in relation to the state, because it is embedded in its actions (such as signing birth or death certificates; registering property) and constitutes what the state is

and means (Lambek 2013:257). However, he cautions, biopolitics “is not a replacement of kinship per se but relocation and supplementation of certain significant acts, as well as the authority for carrying out these acts and the commitment to standing by the consequences” (Lambek 2013:250). As such, for Lambek (2013:255), “kinship always manages to be something more”, despite its “encapsulation” within the state’s biopolitical order. That is, kinship is both immoderate and immodern. It is immodern because it exceeds modernity; and immoderate—from a bureaucratic point of view—, because of its superfluity, excess and inexhaustible demands of care (Lambek 2013:255-6). Bureaucracy, he argues, “ostensibly abhors superfluity and ambiguity and attempts to tame kinship, but kinship is an aspect of life that cannot be rationalized, in any sense of that word” (Lambek 2013:256).

While I take these insights seriously, my purpose here is neither to claim that kinship is a mere effect of the state —where biopolitics is the cause—, nor that it is a domain that is more fundamental and primitive, and as such always exceeds the state. More modestly, my aim here is merely to think of how kinship becomes an intelligible domain through specific practices that go beyond the narrow limits of biological reproduction. Kinship effect can also convey the connections and enchainings of different elements or domains with each other.³¹ As such, when proposing to think of a kinship effect, I do not mean that kinship is neither more or less “real” than other domains, but that it acquires particular configurations as it inhabits state, legal and other public arenas.

³¹ According to the dictionary, the word *effect* can also be understood as a claim or intent to be something; to produce a distinctive or desired impression or appearance; as well as the accomplishment or achievement of a certain state, with the power to bring about results or exert influence; an object or good, or a quality or state of being operative; that is, kinship can also be an unfinished “affective goal”, or a striving that guides specific actions. See: Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary. 2014. www.merriam-webster.com. Accessed 05/14/2014.

As Herzfeld (2007:320) has noted, kinship is uncertain precisely because it is deeply embedded in life.

Adoption, *Mestizaje* and Race-Making Technologies

Following Yngvesson and Coutin (2006), I suggest that instead of understanding adoption as a mere imitation of the “natural” family, it is more productive to look at how it anchors or unsettles nature. I ask: what are the effects of development and racial discourses of adoption in the creation of specific forms of relatedness? One theme that unifies this dissertation is the relationship between governmental practices of family formation and race. I see race as an idiom and a goal that is intimately related to normative ideas of the family, and as such, always available to express certain aspects of relationships or governmental rationalities. As Yngvesson and Coutin (2006:170) have shown, racialization can be both found at particular moments, and be always already there, “waiting to be rendered salient” (see chapter three). In the following chapters, I am especially interested in thinking of forms of racialization as crucial to the production of the figure of the “natural family” and the creation of narratives of responsibility, accountability and moral worth. I look at how race and resemblance work to both structure and organize governmental understandings of correct families (chapter one); to understand one’s relations to others (chapter three) and to fix subjects as either morally corrupt or capable of change (chapter two and four).

Through ethnographic material in Mexico and Alaska, Bodenhorn (2013:131), for example, has focused on how states “see” kinship as a racial category when they

regulate the movement of people and how people recognize state processes when making kinship decisions. As she shows, specific state practices to manage Iñupiaq children's placements include policies "explicitly designed to 'breed out' indigeneity, showing the 'malleability of race' which is perceived as capable of change through adoption and marriage". For her, this calls for a "more complex view of the race-kinship nexus that can account for the ways in which race emerges as a category influenced by shifting and contradictory classificatory moves" (Bodenhorn 2013:134). For example, in transnational adoption "the assumption is that it is the adopted child who crosses boundaries; the parents are a unit(y), bringing in a child that is somehow Other" (Bodenhorn 2013:144). In chapter one, I explore in more detail some of these insights, by showing how the adoptable child is imagined as capable of crossing racial and class lines, when becoming part of a new family. I examine how the "social nakedness" (Howell 2006:6) produce by plenary adoption laws, which demand the termination of all previous kinship relations of the child to his or her birth relatives, also delineate the racial and social mobility of the child.³²

As I will show in more detail in chapter one, the governmental project of plenary adoption in Mexico also draws life from earlier racialized nation-making development projects. Particularly, it realigns itself in interesting ways with modern racial projects of *mestizaje*—or racial mixture— that were central to governmental practices in twentieth century Mexico. This project, which Poole (2009:218) has called an "affective goal", has worked as a strong "ideal, a never-to-be accomplished

³² Leinaweaver (2011), for example, has shown how the legal category of plenary adoption places internationally adopted Peruvians in a different migratory category than other migrants. Thus, allowing particular forms of integration and exclusion.

possibility”, that operated independently of actual race mixture in the country, while supporting several, often contradictory, forms of intervention. Particularly, the project of racial *mestizaje* was central to promote the incorporation of indigenous and poor groups within the nation through enlightened pedagogical techniques, which had the potential to both physically and socially “whiten” the population.

During both the independence period (early 19th century) and the revolutionary period (early 20th century), the *mestizo* –understood as the improved breed of a colonizer man and a native woman–, served as a symbol of the unique character of Latin America and, in Mexico in particular, was taken as symbol of both resistance to the Spanish colonial order and the racial discourses of ‘purity’ dominant in the United States (Alonso 2007; Miller 2004; see also Vasconcelos 1979). In the context of the Mexican Revolution of 1910, *mestizaje* acquired a particularly salient place in the debates about the country’s national character and its shared history with other Latin American nations. The Mexican anthropologists Manuel Gamio –who studied under Boas–, for example, argued that Mexico’s fractured and dispersed “*patrias chicas*” (small motherlands) and indigenous communities, needed to be “merged” into the nation, “to make coherent and homogeneous the national race, unifying the language and converging the culture”³³ (1916:14, my translation).

In his book *The Cosmic Race* (1979[1925]), the Mexican politician and philosopher José Vasconcelos, also presented *mestizaje* as a project of racial, national and pan-Latin American perfectionism. That essay, which would become a central

³³ “El problema no está pues, en evitar una ilusoria agresividad conjunta de tales agrupaciones indígenas, sino encauzar sus poderosas energías hoy dispersas, atrayendo a sus individuos hacia el otro grupo social que siempre han considerado como enemigo, incorporándolos, fundiéndolos con él, tendiendo, en fin, a hacer coherente y homogénea la raza nacional, unificando el idioma y convergente la cultura”. Pp. 14.

landmark for the understanding of mestizaje in Latin America³⁴, predicted the emergence of a new Spiritual or Aesthetic Era in which the mestizo –as a “cosmic race”– would rule. Silencing the violences of colonization, it credited the whitened European element with the power to give reason and future to the Latin American nations; while the indigenous/black³⁵ component was seen as passive, feminine and passionate. The discourse of mestizaje was thus articulated around a logic of “dialectical perfectionism” in which the Indian represented the moment of negativity that needed to be surpassed in order to achieve the final synthesis (i.e. Friedlander 1975; Miller 2004; Knight 1990).

As such, mestizaje has been articulated within particular understandings of race in which morality and culture are as important as biology and nature³⁶ (De la Cadena 2007). Race, thus, cannot be determined in purely biological terms, since the process of mixture made other ‘inner’ qualities of the soul, such as decency, as important as the ‘outer’ qualities of the body. This link of nature and culture creates what de la Cadena calls a “bio-politics” in which ‘culture’ was the entering point from which to change ‘nature’ (2007:98). In this regard, national education was a crucial instrument to transform the Indian (and Black) into a Mestizo. As Miller (2004) has pointed out, early twentieth century Latin American thinkers such as

³⁴ Other influential authors of that time are Rodo, E. 2000 [1900]. *Ariel*. Madrid: Cátedra. Freyre, G. 1946. *The Masters and the Slaves. A Study in the Development of Brazilian Civilization* New York: Knopf. Gamio, M. 1960. *Forjando Patria*. Mexico City: Porrúa. Sierra, J. 1969 [1941]. *The Political Evolution of the Mexican People*. Austin: University of Texas Press.

³⁵ Although in Mexico African slavery was usually excluded from mestizaje, in places like Brazil intellectuals of mestizaje acknowledged blackness as part of the ‘mixture’. See: Graham, R., ed. 1990. *The Idea of race in Latin America, 1870-1940*. Austin: University of Texas Press. Stepan, N.L. 1991. *The Hour of Eugenics: Race, Gender and Nation in Latin America*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press. Wade, P. 1997. *Race and ethnicity in Latin America*. London: Pluto Press.

³⁶ Of course, this is true not only for mestizaje but for all racial projects in general. The issue rests in locating the particular configurations of what counts as nature and culture in the case of mestizaje.

Manuel Gamio or José Vasconcelos in Mexico, Cesar Augusto Sandino in Nicaragua or Gilberto Freyre in Brazil, argued in favor of education as a tool of racial, cultural and moral progression, in which the positive aspects of the Indian culture could be preserved and the negative ones rejected (Stepan 1991). In this sense, the project of mestizaje is not only limited to biological ‘mixture.’ It is also a moral and cultural project that has worked through the belief that a guided education could integrate, whiten and discipline the Indigenous -or African- ‘Other’ into the mixed nation.

Child adoption, I argue, can be understood as a continuation of these racial projects as well as the logic of *blanqueamiento* –or whitening– that has been central to development programs in the post-revolutionary Mexican state. As I explore in more detail in chapter one, race inhabits adoption projects in old and new ways to produce unintended outcomes that are intelligible precisely because they are part of broader structures of power/knowledge that configure what counts as kinship in the first place. In chapter three, I explore more closely how plenary adoption offers specific languages to understand relatedness and one’s relations to others.

‘Relatedness’, Carsten reminds us, refers to the ways in which people “create similarity or difference between themselves and others” (2004:82), and since kinship is not an isolated “thing” in itself, this process of creating similarity and difference, or proximity and distance, is intimately linked to forms of understanding racial and class difference. Adoption programs, I argue, reinstate notions about kinship as grounded in biological reproduction, that open up racial languages to express closeness and disappointments in relationships. I focus particularly on how the framing of adoptive relations “as if” they were founded on biological reproduction within new plenary

adoption practices and policies in Mexico and internationally (Modell 1994), articulates racial and social relations within adoptive families. At the same time, I question the limits of this kind of “clean-break model” in erasing all the traces of the past with which adoptees enter into new families and relationships (Yngvesson 2000). I examine the temporal impasses that emerge between the state’s understanding of “success” in family formation, and the lives of relationships within adoptive families. As such, my dissertation explores how specific ideas about race and kinship are generated in practice, and how they become actionable. Because of this, I take seriously the thoughts and practices of adoption bureaucrats and of families themselves, to think of new adoption policies as structured practices with specific effects that traverse the boundaries of what is considered to be the law, state, and kinship itself.

Brief Chapter Overview

The first chapter delineates in more detail the administrative process of screening and selection of adoptive couples and their matching with adoptable children. I focus on how the image of the bureaucrat as a “mediator” of God is produced in the Adoption Department, and the questions about agency, authorship and responsibility that emerge. By looking at how state workers use resemblance as the best tool to match children with new parents, I focus on how adoptions become social and racial technologies. Particularly, I argue that state experts participate in the consolidation of race as a marker of the natural and divine family. I show how, by presenting their work as mere “mediators”, adoption bureaucrats also free the state

from its responsibility in the termination of life forms and the making of relations. I focus on how the figure of the morally correct couple is created through the work of psychologists and social workers.

In chapter two I explore in more detail the production of documents that create the figure of the freestanding adoptable child. I focus in particular on standardizing procedures that allow the creation of files that can move through the bureaucratic system and into the Superior Court for legal approval. I focus on the tensions between new efforts to achieve governmental transparency and accountability, and the personal relations to files and cases that exist in the Adoption Department. I pay attention to how forms of common sense that support stratified reproduction continue to give support to the production of documents that become legal evidence.

The next chapter continues my exploration of issues of race, kinship and belonging in relation to adoption in Mexico. It focuses on the limits of the state's family-formation model through plenary adoption, by questioning the image of a child's "full-inclusion" into the family and what is left unsaid about the child's past. Particularly, it focuses on the racialized languages that are implicit in ideas about the family as unified through reproduction. It questions the temporality of success that is used by state workers to form adoptive families, and focuses on how families struggle to maintain relationships that are haunted by the lack of blood connections. That is, I show how racial imaginaries of inclusion, which guide domestic child adoption in Mexico, can also work to avoid acknowledging one's implication in the lives of family members.

The last chapter turns to the children's birth mothers and the production of the figure of the bad mother. I analyze documents written by social workers and psychologists to show how moral views about women are produced through technical and expert knowledges. I focus on the different practices and regimes of care and discipline available for birth mothers in contrast to their children. I argue that the moralization of motherhood and the sexualization of birth mothers' relationships works to justify differential distributions of care and punishment.

CHAPTER ONE

Following God's Will: Adoption, Resemblance and the Natural Family

It was early in the morning in June 2010. The DIF's Technical Adoption Council had recently assigned six institutionalized children new parents, and this day was to be their formal "Presentation." The first couple was already waiting, anxiously, under the shade of the *Albergue's* trees. One by one, the selected couples were going to meet "their" children for the first time, after receiving general information about the minors' psychological, medical and legal situations by professionals from the *Albergue* and Adoption Department.

Gloria, the older social worker from the DIF's Adoption Department, and I talked to the first couple while waiting for the rest of the staff to arrive. The couple was very nervous and also very excited; they could not sleep last night at all, they told us. It had only been a day since they received a phone call from the DIF, telling them about their approval as the adoptive parents of two sisters—one and three years old, respectively. Following the DIF's stipulations—which only allow couples to select the children's sex and age in their petition letters—the couple had originally asked to adopt a boy of up to 5 years old, so the news took them even more by surprise; but they were thrilled to finally become parents regardless of the children's sex.

The couple, who I call Antonia and Ramón, had waited many years for this moment. Three years ago the DIF's Technical Adoption Council—headed by the past governmental administration—had rejected them as adoption applicants because they did not own a house. The previous year, with the dream of becoming parents, they had

borrowed money and used all their savings to build a cement house on top of their *dulcería* (a small store where they sell candy in bulk)—which is their main source of income. At the time of their second application they were still in the process of expanding and improving their house.³⁷ Earlier in 2010, after making adjustments to their living arrangements, the DIF finally found them “viable” as adoptive parents, and their dossier was placed in the official *Lista de Espera* or Waiting List.

Antonia, who used to teach children the Bible, told us that she had been praying to God for a child the night before they received the DIF’s phone call. For her, as for many Mexicans, God was responsible for the miracle of parenthood and she felt this event could only be the work of God. “And the reward was double” —Gloria, the social worker, added, knowing that they were Christians like herself—“You will receive not one but two children at once! There is no doubt that God heard your pleas: You knew how to ask in your prayers, and He responded.” Nodding excitedly, Antonia responded: “Yes, this is God’s work, but it’s also your work [in the DIF’s Adoption Department], because you act with God.” Ramón agreed and thanked Gloria and the DIF for giving them the opportunity to be parents. “We are only vessels” —Gloria responded in a modest voice— “as the Bible says, we are only the *mediators* that He uses.”

Gloria’s words that day were not completely new to me. In fact, I had heard several other adoptive parents describe the arrival of their children as the work of God and portray DIF workers as mediators of God’s Will. As an adoptive parent once told me,

³⁷ As Leinaweaver (2011:384) has pointed out, the house is particularly important in Latin American and international figurations of kinship: “The home is where kinship takes place, and, at least in the case of adoptive kinship, where it is actively produced; it must be adequate to that challenge.” In Mexico, the home—and its constant improvement—is also a central part of understandings of kinship. As such, in the process of screening couples wishing to adopt, special attention was paid to their “will to improve” (Li 2007) their houses as a testament to couple’s kinship commitments.

“God takes many different material forms to carry out his mandate, and the DIF is one of them.” Such pronouncements were often made publicly, in official state events and speeches, by both parents and government workers—including the DIF’s President herself. This was the case in the first 2010 *Entrega Oficial* that I attended, where the Governor’s wife—in her role as DIF President—, formally “hands over” or “delivers” previously institutionalized children to their new adoptive parents. “God bless the DIF” —a new adoptive father proclaimed with teary eyes that day— “because for us it’s the *medium* that God used to reunite us with our children!” To this, the DIF’s President responded as part of her speech: “Today you are adoptive parents, parents of the heart and of vocation, because God chose you to be parents of these children; and God chose me to be the Governor’s wife and receive a marvelous DIF with extraordinary goals, to give life to children.”

This association of divine and reproductive domains has been noted not only in Mexico but also in other regions in Latin America. Jenkins (2002:174), for example, has shown how in the hinterlands of Costa Rica the intersection of local moral worlds with stories of birth, childlessness and parenting result in the figuration of adoption as a “miracle of God.” Similar to what I observed during my fieldwork, in Costa Rica a Christian worldview helped people make sense of the tribulations of pregnancy and birth, turning adoption into a testimony of the “will of God in their lives” (Jenkins 2002:173). DIF workers and adopting families tended to share the belief that adoption could restore God’s divine plan, placing children in good families. These Christian languages were also embedded in complex notions of the gift in the context of adoption. As Leinaweaver (2011, 2013a, 2013b) has shown, “competing senses of gratitude” exist in international

adoptions, by which adoptees are seen as owing something to their parents or society, and their adoptive parents “are grateful to those involved in the miraculous gift of a child, a sentiment that can in some cases be directed at a birth family but is almost always directed at the child’s nation of origin, the adoption office staff, and God” (2013b: 573).

These discourses about God and kinship in Barrancas, I think, shared similarities with other more ‘secular’ “discourses of destiny” and fate (Howell and Marre 2006) that have been described as part of the “kinning devices” (Howell 2003) of international adoptive families. In Norway and Spain, for example, parents continuously state that: “their child was meant for them in some mysterious way” (Howell and Marre 2006:301). Yngvesson and Coutin (2006:179-180) have also noted how both immigration and international adoption become configured as “home” journeys that bring people to the places where they are supposed to really belong. Plenary adoption laws support this notion of new –and improved– beginnings, by cancelling the previous persona as a “false beginning”, and inserting a “clean break” between adoptees’ previous and new families. According to these narratives, “individuals are put up for adoption because they cannot get the right “start” (develop) in their country (or family) of origin” (Yngvesson and Coutin 2006: 179). Thus, the role of adoption bureaucracies is to “correct” this lack of fit by placing children in “families in which they can flourish” (Yngvesson and Coutin 2006: 179). In Barrancas, these discourses were explicitly joined with Christian understandings of religious faith and reproduction that traversed broad social, familial, bureaucratic and governmental settings. For DIF workers, adoption allowed God to repair illegitimate forms of reproduction, restore moral family “values,” and bring blessings to those devout couples in response to their faith.

Scholars who have written on new reproductive technologies in Latin America (Braff 2010, Roberts 2012) have also noted how both medical practitioners and patients see reproduction as an *assisted process*, where technology supplements God's design. As some authors have noted (Marre and Bestard 2009; Melhuus and Howell 2009; Wade 2012), adoption and other new reproductive technologies are mutually implicated forms of "assisted procreation" (Melhuus and Howell 2009:146) and should be studied together. In her work on assisted reproduction in Ecuador, Elizabeth Roberts (2012), for example, describes how clinicians ordinarily invoked God's help in moments of "heightened lack of control" (2012:11), such as the processes of fertilization and embryo transfer, "when the clinicians, after preparing as best they could, ceded control of the gametes to the unknown" (2012:10). In this regard, Roberts notes that practitioners did not see themselves as "playing God but rather were God's helpers" (2012:55). That is, IVF practitioners' invocations of God in the laboratory were "a way of declaring his sovereignty over matters of reproduction, above the Catholic Church and state that protect unborn human life" (2012: 54-55). Similar to IVF practitioners, DIF state workers saw God as *responsible* for the final outcomes of matching of children with new parents. However, this was perhaps not so much because of their sense of a clear division between moments of rational control and "lack of control" in assisting reproduction—as Roberts has described. As I will argue in this chapter, the invocation of God speaks of the ways in which technology works to channel God's design, and not only supplement it.

Adoption itself works as a *moral technology*, permeating the whole technical and bureaucratic process of creating adoptive families. That is, the selection of viable couples for adoption and the classification of unviable parents—which include discursive and

disciplinary techniques by which relations are racialized—, also work through the deployment of particular moral languages inflected with theological understandings of what correct families ought to *look like*. As such, the invocation of God in the Adoption Department blurred the boundaries between the natural and the social in reproduction, instead of only supporting biology. That is, by supporting the notion that biology might function to place children in “wrong” families, the DIF also normalized the presence of moral languages of the family —strongly guided by local forms of cultural Catholicism and Christianity— in the workings of the state bureaucracy. As I will explore in this chapter, this figure of the moral and natural family comes to be part of the DIF’s work in the selection of couples and matching of children with new parents.

For state workers, God could intervene in biological processes through governmental technologies, correcting forms of biological reproduction tainted by an immoral use of sexuality. In this process, Catholic understandings of the family and procreation have situated adoption as a “natural” option to restore the “natural” family. As Melhuus and Howell (2009:159) have noted, adoption does not challenge the natural order of traditional procreation, and from a Catholic point of view it restores the sacrament of marriage, and the notion of the family. This was in alignment with the governmental requirement of “rendering” the family “technical” (Li 2007), as a site to be investigated, classified, and interpreted. While authors such as Franklin (2006:171) have shown how scientists involved in stem cell research, for example, aim to produce lab-made-biologicals that are as “good as nature” through rigorous forms of quality control, government workers in charge of adoptions saw their job as a divine call, making God –

and not the state or science—responsible for separating biological relatives and forming new “natural” families.

This particular understanding of “nature”, thus, is rooted in Catholic notions of the patriarchal family in Mexico and does not neatly overlap with biological reproduction. As stated above, the assumption was that biology could function against divine nature, placing children in wrong families. In particular, it followed government workers’ understanding that even though God gave humans the gift of reproduction, He did not approve of sex outside marriage. State workers were in charge of fixing, on God’s behalf, the misuse of His gift of reproduction by immoral women who had fallen to carnal “sins.” As such, God’s natural family was made not only through biological reproduction, but also through social intervention. The family, thus, could be “restored” to its naturally divine state, through technical, legal and bureaucratic processes.

In the DIF’s Adoption Department, the patriarchal family was invoked as the goal of social technologies of normalization and discipline, thus orienting workers to produce morally sound technical and legal judgments or rational decisions. As I will show in this chapter, professional expertise was embedded within local cultural-religious worldviews that located the “traditional” patriarchal and heterosexual family as the most “natural” expression of the family. While Gloria was the most openly devout Christian in the Adoption Department, all workers agreed that only marriage between a man and a woman provided the necessary loving environment for procreation, and gave children the best chance to develop as moral beings.³⁸ As Jenkins noted (2002:181), the shifting

³⁸ Some authors (Traina et al. 2008) have looked at the intersection between religion, technology and reproduction around the world, focusing on the practices of “religious people.” While it could be claimed that workers in the DIF’s Adoption Department are “religious people” since they “suffuse significant dimensions of human activity with religious meaning” and see “divine power and intention at work in their

expressions of family structures that deviate from the nuclear heterosexual model supported by the Catholic Church continue to be subject of intense social and political debates in Latin America. Unmarried, divorced or homosexual couples, as well as adolescent and single mothers, are still considered by many to signal the overall disintegration of the values of the patriarchal family. Pathologies of kinship –such as family violence, sexual abuse or neglect– that caused the institutionalization of adoptable children in the first place–, were all seen as symptoms emanating from the distortion of this model of the “natural family.” Even though some single mothers or fathers managed to raise their children with strong moral values—it was said in the DIF’s Adoption Department–, this was not the ideal scenario for any child, but particularly not for adopted children who had already experienced the harms of pathological kinship. A solvent family that could ensure the parents’ devotion to their children was the best situation for a child’s “full development.” DIF workers saw it as their duty to ensure that adopted children had this “ideal” family scenario, which could heal the wounds of their initial abandonment.

Supported by traditional Christian discourses of the family that are widely accepted in Mexico, religious concepts such as God complemented other technical knowledges as “interpretative grids” (Ferguson 1990) through which everyday relations could be rendered intelligible and meaningful. How do these frameworks for argumentation work in practice and what are their effects in the formation of families? In the reminder of the chapter I focus on how governmental workers in charge of adoptions

daily activities, successes and trials” (Traina et al. 2008:18), I prefer to think of state bureaucrats as cultural actors that are part of larger social and political assemblages in which religious ideas mark accepted forms of social life. While members of the adoption office were not all Roman Catholic—Gloria, for example was Protestant–, they shared culturally accepted notions of the family founded in Christianity.

understand and put into practice the “plenary” adoption model in the context of Christian understandings of the nuclear family, and how the figure of the patriarchal “natural” family is solidified and comes to infuse the work of the governmental organization. Looking at the selection of viable and non-viable adoptive couples and the matching of approved couples with institutionalized children, I explore how these Christian-inspired ideals of family become part of expert knowledges with particular effects. I describe how the picture of the state as a moral/paternal tool that God uses to correct sexually tainted forms of reproduction, inscribes racial and economic inequalities in the creation of families. I argue that the image of bureaucratic adoption work as the amendment of immoral reproduction and reunification of God’s sanctioned families, also allows leaving out the forms of responsibility and authorship by which the state terminates forms of kinship and participates in the maintenance of inequalities.

Finally, I pay attention to the racialized ideas implicit in the creation of nuclear heterosexual families through plenary adoption. I describe the nexus between modern discourses of mestizaje in Mexico and governmental visions of kinship as founded in physical resemblance within the family. As I will show, government workers see race as something changeable that is crucial for relatedness to flourish, allowing a child to move from a birth family to an adoptive one. Here, resemblance is not necessarily only achieved through biological ties, but also by state intervention, becoming proof of God’s validation of the new families.

Catholic Secularism and the Patriarchal Family

In 2010 Mexico City passed a bill to allow same-sex couples to legally marry and adopt children. Local human rights and activist groups backed this bill and celebrated it as an unprecedented expansion of LGBT rights in the country. However, it also provoked strong reactions against it in wide sectors of civil society.³⁹ The Catholic Church, Christian groups and the National Action Party publicly condemned it. The Mexican Archdiocese, for example, stated that it was an “atrocities more damaging than *narco* [drug war] violence” and that it was “destroying the family and children’s rights.”⁴⁰ While mainly right-wing groups opposed same-sex unions, gay adoption was a topic that generated controversy among wider sections of society, including people that sympathized with the left. The arguments were based on the idea that heterosexual homes were the most “healthy” sites to socialize children as moral citizens, and that adopted children—who came from “disintegrated homes”—needed to be protected from even more damaging kinship relations than the ones they were born in. Several groups publicly opposed gay adoption on the grounds that it was against the “superior interest of the child.”⁴¹ Josefina Vázquez Mota, then Coordinator of the PAN Parliamentary group, also stated that while these laws aimed to protect the rights of couples, they minimized the

³⁹ A poll conducted by *Parametría* in 2013 showed that 52% of Mexicans now approve gay marriage. However, the same poll shows that only 24% of Mexicans agree with the extension of adoption rights to same-sex couples. These numbers contrast with a previous poll by the same company in 2010, in which 62% of the respondents were against gay adoption, and only 32% were in favor of legalizing homosexual marriage (see: <http://www.parametria.com.mx>)

⁴⁰ Más dañinas que el narco, leyes del gobierno de Ebrard: Arquidiócesis. *La Jornada* August 16th, 2010.

⁴¹ SCJN discute mañana adopción en parejas gay; ONG volantean en contra. *La Jornada*, August 2nd, 2010.

rights of children.⁴² Catholic groups cited studies about the higher numbers of suicides and stress among children from homosexuals.⁴³

The Supreme Court received eleven formal objections – from the Republic’s Attorney General and other PAN-led states– claiming that the law violated the state’s duty to “protect the family” enshrined in the Constitution. When the Supreme Court rejected these challenges and approved the bill in August 2010, Guadalajara’s Archbishop publicly stated that this was a sign of “moral involution,” an “anti-messianic act that aimed to destroy the family” and that the Supreme Court Judges “could only have reached such absurd conclusions, which go against the feeling of the Mexican people, because they received economic incentives.”⁴⁴ In the local DIF in Barrancas, the passing of these new laws was met with general disapproval. While some DIF workers, such as Iris–the Adoption Department’s lawyer, were indifferent or even in favor of the legalization of same-sex marriage, nobody supported gay adoption. The head of the Adoption Department and other local PAN authorities feared that, based on article 121 of the Constitution –which dictates that civil status legal acts celebrated in one state are valid in other states–, Barrancas would be forced to not only recognize same-sex marriages, but also to extend them the legal rights (such as adoption) enshrined in the local Family Code.⁴⁵ DIF lawyers coincided with the President of the Catholic Lawyer’s

⁴² PAN, en defensa de niños ante adopción gay. *El Universal*, August 17th, 2010.

⁴³ Tendencias suicidas y estrés: Más comunes en niños adoptados por homosexuales. *Aciprensa*, February 18th, 2010.

⁴⁴ “¿A quién le gustaría que lo adopten maricones?”: Sandoval Íñiguez. *La Jornada* August 15th, 2010.

⁴⁵ Legal initiatives to legalize same-sex marriages in Barrancas have been proposed since 2012, generating social and political controversies and manifestations by both LGBT and Christian groups.

College, Armando Martinez, who critiqued the Supreme Court's disrespect for God that would subject children "to an *artificial* familiar model that goes against their dignity."⁴⁶

While other Mexican states have also made amendments to the law to permit same-sex unions and even adoption in the past few years,⁴⁷ the legal and social redefinition of the family continues to be a site of strong contestation in the country. After Mexico City legalized abortion in 2007, for example, more than 20 states have changed their constitution to protect life since conception. In April 2010, the Barrancas-DIF organized a "Meeting with Religious Associations" to "reinforce values and family union in favor of a better society."⁴⁸ That day, the President of the DIF, gave a speech in which she addressed the war on drugs and urged religious associations to unite with the state in an effort to create an "army of the good," to fight against the evils of organized crime.⁴⁹ In her speech, the Governor's wife emphasized how the DIF had created new programs against addiction, in response to the increasing number of drug-related murders portrayed in the media: "What should really intimidate us"—she stated—"are not the hanged corpses under the bridges, but the quantity of families disintegrated because of addictions." To fight against organized crime—she insisted—what was needed was an

⁴⁶ Abogados católicos amagan con juicio político a ministros por adopción gay. *CNN Mexico*, August 15th, 2010.

⁴⁷ In addition to Mexico City, same-sex couples can legally marry and adopt in the Northern state of Coahuila since 2014. Gay marriage—but not adoption—is legal in Quintana Roo; and same-sex unions have been approved in Colima, Jalisco and Campeche since 2013. Since 2010, same-sex couples' spousal rights are recognized in all Mexican states. Gay-marriages have also been performed in individual cases in Oaxaca, Chihuahua, Guanajuato and Michoacán.

⁴⁸ Local newspaper note, April 27th, 2010.

⁴⁹ Importantly, the meeting took place after, earlier that month, an e-mail signed by a newly formed Drug Cartel circulated in Barrancas, de facto instituted a state of siege in the city the weekend of April 16th. The so called "*narcomail*", warned people to stay at home after 8 p.m. to avoid the bloody battles between different drug cartel factions that were going to take place in the city. Representatives of the state suggested people institute a voluntary state of siege, just in case. Moved by fear, parents picked up their children early from schools, and virtually the whole city was closed up that night: businesses, bars, restaurants and shopping plazas closed early that day, and people stayed at home.

“organized” army “of those of us that work in favor of the Good” through which all citizens could become guardians of family values and fight against evil:

Whenever there is such damage in families, the family suffers; the family disintegrates. And many, very many, of these families have moved forwards thanks to the churches. [...] But at the end the only solution, really –if God is the one who gives authority, and chose my husband as authority- only God can help us to fight against Evil. [We need to] organize in topics that are fundamental to our own human nature, such as the topic of Life. [...] Lets unite in topics such as life, marriage, as we all agree that God created men for women and women for men [...]; we all agree in the same, we agree that human life should be respected since conception; we all agree that violence never helps anybody, and that all those that suffer violence are victims and suffer. We are in favor of peace; we are in favor of Life.

In February 2014 the Mexican Congress also created a “Family and Human Development Commission” in order to design public policies that guarantee the strengthening of Christian values that truly “express the feelings of Mexicans about the family.”⁵⁰ Its aim is to stop the proliferation of “fashions” and “tendencies” that support death, and that have given rise to the legalization of such practices as gay marriage and abortion. These events point to the fact that, even though the Mexican state does not have any official religion since 1857, if Mexico can be called a secular nation-state, it would have to be a “Catholic secularism”. As Cannell (2013:235) has shown in her study of US Mormonism, the term secularization might be misleading to understand the relations between state and religion in local contexts.⁵¹ As mentioned in the introduction, the Catholic Church in Mexico has been central in shaping cultural and moral life in Mexico, and has gained more political visibility in the last twenty years. While the Constitutions

⁵⁰ En senado instala comisión a favor de la familia y en contra del aborto. *Excelsior*, June 13th, 2014.

⁵¹ Cannell has argued that secularism in Americas should be understood as a “Protestant secularism” (2013:222), since Protestant values shaped governmental claims and interest even if it was formally not tied to any church. That is, “religious worldviews were foundational in the construction of ostensibly nonreligious aspects of scientific and political culture in nineteenth-century America” (2013:222)

of 1857 and 1917 nationalized Church property, proscribed religious orders, limited the number of priests per state, and formally forbade the Church from participating in politics and education, new Constitutional amendments in 1991 have lifted some of these restrictions. Now the Church can own limited property, has legal status, there is no limit to the number of priests in the country, and its members can vote. Although the clergy is still not legally allowed to hold public office, participate in public education or support political candidates, the Church has been vocal about its political and legal orientations.

As my work in the DIF's Adoption Department shows, the Mexican "secular" state has relied on both concepts of nature and God to justify its work. That is, the Mexican state did not completely privatize religion, but maintained a place for religion within its own domain and order. However, by this I do not mean to argue that secularism retains a religious essence in Mexico, or that nationalism has a religious origin (see Asad 2003:189). Nor do I claim that the latest Constitutional amendments in 1991, signal the infiltration of a pre-determined, self-evident domain of religion into "secular" state practices under neoliberalism in Mexico. Rather, I think of the invocation of God by adoption bureaucrats in Mexico as a particular form in which adoption is "rendered technical" (Li 2007). Here, what counts as "religion" is being constituted in the very "technical" practices by which the state constitutes itself. Categories of politics and religion have historically implicated each other in complex ways, making it clear that the concept of the secular cannot do without the idea of religion (Asad 2003: 200). What is interesting here is how state practices constitute both what the moral family and the state are in their invocation of God and nature. In this vein, I see the invocation of God by workers in the DIF's Adoption Department, not merely as the result of the state's formal

encouragement of religion. As I show in this chapter, the dominant understandings of family and procreation that inform bureaucratic practices in Barrancas are part of larger social landscapes ingrained in religious worldviews. But before continuing with these arguments, let me introduce some ethnographic material that can show how DIF workers perceive their work and make decisions regarding couples' petitions.

God's ways: A Change of Plans in the Adoption Process

A few weeks before the "Presentation" mentioned at the beginning of the chapter, the *licenciado* –as we used to call the head of the Adoption Department– arrived early to the office and offered to get us all *tortas* –a Mexican sandwich– from his favorite stand in the city. He had been very busy in the last months, and had not been able to get the cakes he ordinarily bought to celebrate the birthdays of his staff, so he wanted to make it up to us that day. He came in with his little son, who was not yet two years old, and instructed him to give us all a kiss on the cheek, as is the custom in Mexico. The Adoption Department's other lawyer, Iris, had to go to the Superior Court to file a lawsuit, so the *licenciado* offered to give her a ride in his Ford Truck and buy our *tortas* on his way back. Since I was just "sitting around" in the office, he asked me to join them for the trip, which was going to take a couple of hours.

The trip to get the *tortas* went by fast. The *licenciado* showed me pictures of his son in his camera and we talked of his dream to go brand shopping in the US on a Black Friday. Before dropping Iris off in the Superior Court, we also chatted a bit about the most recent adoption cases, while his son played techno music on an iPod. I particularly remember our conversation about the case of one couple, which had recently been

assigned two siblings by the DIF's Technical Adoption Council. The husband was diagnosed with possible cancer after the "presentation" of the girls, and the *licenciado* –in agreement with the psychologist and social workers– decided to halt the adoption process: "It's our responsibility to assure that children are protected and that they receive everything they need in their new homes, and under these conditions the couple cannot provide them this" –he told us, with his usual formality –"Look, I think that God does things for a reason, and even if the couple is now distraught, He wants something different to happen: another set of parents for the children and time for the woman to dedicate herself to her sick husband." Iris agreed, as she also thought that it was not in the "best interest" for the children to be adopted by that couple now that the husband was sick. Adoption workers had to protect the future of children and avoid placing them in situations of risk.

For the head of the Adoption Department, suspending the adoption process was a decision justified by God's Will, who really intended another family for the siblings. He saw himself as interpreting God's signals, which in this case was the husband's sudden illness—a formal impediment for adoption in Barrancas. While the children would have stayed with the couple if their adoption had already been finalized at the time of the diagnosis, the fact that it happened earlier was understood as God's way of directing adoption bureaucrats towards the right decision. Being attuned to these signals was important to assure that children ended up with the family in which they "really" belonged, according to God's design. As I later found out, that new family was the one of Antonia and Ramón, the couple who I mentioned at the beginning of the chapter. In this example, "God's intervention" introduced bureaucratic detours, delays, and uncertainty.

That day, back in the Adoption Department, the *licenciado* called us all into his office to a fake “urgent meeting” so that we could eat our *tortas* together during working hours, out of the sight of other DIF workers. New regulations in the DIF did not allow workers to eat inside their offices, but the rule was hardly ever applied. While we enjoyed our *tortas*, we joked about the cheesy adoption speeches of the DIF President –who claimed that institutionalized children were “her” children even though she already had seven biological ones– and of her new photo-shopped pictures in a government magazine that made her look slimmer and whiter. We also talked again about Gloria’s nephew, who had recently been abducted by gunmen wearing federal police uniforms and was later found dead, with his face disfigured by more than 40 shots.⁵² Gloria’s sister had been killed herself many years ago, together with Gloria’s brother in law, who was a policeman. Gloria took care of her sister’s children after their parents’ death, so the loss of her nephew, she explained, was like “losing my own son.”

At the time, increased media attention to children involved in drug related activities or as victims of drug addicted parents, became closely aligned to the DIF’s call for stronger “family values” and the need to support adoptions. News articles with headings such as “Criminal children, because of lack of affection” circulated often in the media.⁵³ In Barrancas, the DIF President argued that it was the lack of values, and “human, ethical, moral and spiritual poverty”, instead of mere economic poverty, what caused the emergence of such phenomena as *niños sicarios* (mercenary children) in the state. It was “the poverty of those that haven’t had the opportunity of being close to the

⁵² In March 2010, four decapitated bodies with amputated penises were found on the side of the highway, at the entrance of Barrancas. This marked the start of decapitations in the city after marines killed a big drug lord at the beginning of the year. Two men were hanged from a bridge located in the highway that leads to the state’s *Albergue* and corpses started to be dumped there with alarming frequency.

⁵³ Niños criminales, por falta de afecto. *El Universal*, April 3rd, 2011.

values of human formation”—she stated—, that caused “great damage to our country, states and municipalities.”⁵⁴

For Laura, the other social worker in the Department, such acts of violence in Barrancas could only be explained as acts of *gente mala* (bad people): “Those people are damned, that was pure evil” – she said. “There is no other way to explain this; now with the drug violence we see so much torture, horrible things that one cannot explain why...” When I said that I do not think people are evil by nature, they teased me for being an anthropologist: “You should listen to her, she studies these things” –they said tauntingly to Laura– but Laura was of a different idea: “I really think a part of it is genetic” –she added– “because there is no other way to explain it. I think it’s something that some people already carry inside of them since birth. For example, when you have two children and you educate them exactly in the same manner, one becomes a thief and the other does well in school and moves forward. How do you explain that?” “Yes” –Gloria added– “that is very true, it must be something that is in them since they are born.” So I asked if they thought the same way about adopted children–since it is so often said that their birth relatives are drug addicts, sex workers or offenders. Laura thought about it carefully and responded: “Well, people have good and bad genes. I think it’s something that can or cannot manifest itself. That’s not known. Like in other families, it can come out in some people and not in others. But having the right environment to grow up can make wonders.”

As I learned during my fieldwork, government workers like Laura ordinarily weighed the “risks” involved in adoption. The fact that adoptive families were formed without sexual reproduction made them both fragile and malleable at the same time. They were fragile and “risky” because the new family was exposed to the potential

⁵⁴ News Article, *La Jornada*, July 30th, 2011.

manifestation of children's bad genes; but they were also malleable, because adoption offered children the opportunity to escape the immoral practices of their natal kin and become respected citizens. At the Adoption Department, workers were well versed in the international conventions of children's rights, and supported the view that adoption should always be in the "superior interest of the minor." This meant that every child needed to be given the opportunity of a loving family that could offer them the possibility of bringing out their "good genes." This required the careful selection of adoptive parents, who had to be as close as possible to the idea of the natural family to make up for children's initial abandonment and bad genes. At the time, everyone in the Adoption Department but me had biological children. Gloria and Barbara, who were in their forties, already had grown up children, while Laura, the younger social worker, and Victoria, the Department's secretary, had children in kindergarten and elementary school. They were all married and had never been divorced.

In the Adoption Department, the task of screening couples wishing to adopt was completely female. Except for the *licenciado*, all other workers were women. In the DIF's *Albergue* this was also the case, as I will describe in more detail in the next chapter. All of them were very proud to be able to help deserving couples form families and give children new loving homes. But since they knew adoption had risks, they took their job as "mediators" in the creation of adoptive families as extremely important and delicate. The elements of the selection process of adoptive parents, and their matching with the 'right' children were central to ensure that the new family could have a future together. Thus, much of the screening and selection process was based on trying to prevent future risks within the family and ensure that the future of the child in the family was safe. At

the same time, the task of selecting and screening couples to create new families required the use of technical tools and expert knowledges that were in alignment with workers understandings of the natural family and God's Will.

The Adoption Department staff was in charge of collecting the required legal and administrative documents of applicant couples, as well as generating their own medical, psychological and socio-economical studies of the prospective parents. This required the intervention of a licensed doctor, psychologist and social worker for the production of each report. While Barbara, the psychologist, was in charge of producing the applicant's psychological profile, Gloria and Laura, the social workers, carried out the socio-economic study of the couples. The medical examination was not carried out directly in the Adoption Department. By state law,⁵⁵ couples had to be legally married, between 28 and 50-years⁵⁶ old, with no infectious diseases, mental health problems, penal records, and have good social and economic standing (which in part meant being in good terms with neighbors, co-workers and family members). These initial requirements were assessed at a first interview with the Adoption Department staff, including Iris the lawyer, Laura and Gloria, the social workers, or even Victoria, the secretary. Barbara was usually too busy to carry out initial interviews of prospective couples. If the Adoption Department staff did not see any overt "problems" with the couple –such as a visible physical or mental illness, addictions, or 'immoral' behavior–, they were asked to buy a white binder and fill

⁵⁵ The Family Code was created in 2006, removing the articles pertaining to family law from the state's Civil Code. Reforms to the Civil Code and later to the Family Code started to become more frequent since 1993. Earlier reforms to the Civil Code were made in 1954.

⁵⁶ The Civil Code was reformed in July 15th, 2005, introducing for the first time an upper age limit for adopters, of up to 58-years old. Before that, it sufficed that adopters were at least 30-years old and had a 17-year age difference with the adoptee. Only adopters of children under 6-years old were required to be less than 50-years old. The Family Code was again reformed in August 15th, 2007, changing the age requirements to the current form. Adopters could be single until the 2007 reforms. Following the August 15th, 2007 reform to the Family Code, if the adoptee has a disability there is no minimum age required for adopters.

it in with all the documentary proofs required by the DIF to adopt. These documents are: birth and marriage certificates, official IDs, a petition letter indicating the age and sex of the minor they wish to adopt, CVs with pictures of the applicants, proofs of employment, proof of good credit, proof of legal address and no-penal records, three recommendation letters, and pictures of all the rooms in their homes, as well as of family reunions. Once the couple delivered the white binder with all the required paperwork, the DIF's Adoption Department ordered the production of a psychological, medical and socio-economical evaluation.⁵⁷ If these evaluations were positive, the couple was granted a “*certificado de idoneidad*” (certificate of suitability) and their file became part of the official Waiting List.⁵⁸

As I will show in the following pages, in producing the knowledge about the prospective couple, workers simultaneously crafted the figure of the moral and natural family. For the purposes of the legal adoption file, what mattered was the fact that both psychologists and social workers had a *cédula profesional*, that is, a government document validating their expertise and authority to produce professional judgments.⁵⁹ These expert state workers were in charge of producing objective and measurable data about a couple's capacity to parent a child, including what count as valid forms of expressing affection and emotional attachment. Social work evaluations, on the one hand, were carried out through home visits, in which the couple and the extended family were

⁵⁷ Since 2013 the local *Reglamento de Adopciones* states that couples are also required to attend a 10 session Workshop for Adoptive Parents. While these workshops had been carried out on an irregular basis before, during my fieldwork they did not take place due to lack of personnel.

⁵⁸ Even if biological parents decided to cede their parental rights directly to another couple, the adopters had to comply with all the DIF adoption requirements before the process could be legalized. That is, couples directly chosen by biological parents as recipients of a child had to be legally married, and complete their white binder with the required psychological, medical and socio-economical evaluations.

⁵⁹ In the case of social workers, the *cédula* was usually from a shorter technical degree instead of a *licenciatura*, or college degree.

interviewed. According to the DIF's *Reglamento de Adopciones* (Adoption Regulations), social worker's reports were required to include data about: personal and family background, family dynamics, and future family project; hygiene, eating habits, health and access to medical services; inventory of movables and property, savings and supporting documents; a list of debts, monthly income and expenses, and supporting documents; and all relevant data of the kind of life they could provide the adoptee. In practice, the home visits were limited usually to one meeting during work hours. As I will describe in more detail below, this lack of time also implied that couples were often given "homework" to complete missing sections of the report by themselves.

Psychological evaluations, on the other hand, were carried out through interviews of at least 10 sessions, and a battery of projective and objective tests, which the State's *Reglamento de Adopciones* described as "measurable and easy to verify the emotional state of applicants and the personality traits that could negatively influence the development of the adopted child." Before 2013, the *Reglamento de Adopciones* described in detail what these psychological tests should evaluate:⁶⁰ 1) traits of depressive, anxious, psychopathic or maniac personality, as well as any other pathology identified in the tests that has the possibility of being developed in the future; 2) emotional instability of one or both applicants; 3) limited couple solidity or instability as a couple; 4) tendency to violent behavior; 5) deficient care for oneself or the incapacity to look after and care for others; 6) eating disorders; 7) self-destructive behaviors; 8) identity or role problems; 9) scant adaptation to the environment, or limited social and familial networks; 10) reasons to adopt that do not favor the subject of adoption, such as trying to replace the

⁶⁰ This section was taken out of the official document in August 15ht, 2014. However, it is still useful to understand the general aims of the psychological evaluation.

death son/daughter; feelings of failure in childrearing; not accepting the fact of not being able to procreate or desiring a child without going through pregnancy and labor; 11) additional data relevant to verify the living conditions and personality of the applicants. Both psychologists and social workers considered that the assessment of ‘viable’ couples required the use of detailed observations of their behavior, and sensitivity to minute things that could give away some hidden inner flaws that could be detrimental to the future development of a child.

Thinking of adoption as a moral technology, it is possible to understand the work of social workers and psychologists in the Adoption Office as guided by methods and procedures that generate individuals and relationships according to social norms of morality (Behrent 2013: 56). As I argue, in Barrancas state workers aimed to apply rational, scientifically informed procedures, in the management of human beings and relations to restore a morally correct form of family as nature. That is, as mentioned at the beginning of the chapter, the aim was to correct biological reproduction that escaped the divinely ordered patriarchal family. In this regard, the rules for the selection of the couples were closely aligned with “normalized” standards of morality. In this respect, demands placed on adoption candidates are shaped by psychologists’ and social workers’ own projections and understandings of what counts as normal. Bureaucracy, as a field of normalization, works by channeling and producing moral worlds through expert knowledges.

In the realm of government administration, the positive and technical knowledge claims from psychologists and social workers were used to distinguish what kinds of people and relations were suitable for raising an adoptive child. Here, as I will show,

what counted as “normal” desires and conducts in the formation of adoptive families was also based on moral norms of the family considered appropriate on the part of state workers in charge of approving them. As such, I focus not only on how technical knowledges circulate in bureaucratic contexts, but also on how these techno-scientific knowledges themselves are saturated with other forms of moral knowledge.

In the following sections I explore how government workers, particularly social workers and psychologists, try to produce “expert” accounts of couples’ lifestyles and relationships. I am particularly interested in tracing how procedural aspects of knowledge production shape what counts as good or “viable” parents, and how adoption “experts” within the state bureaucracy present and justify these findings to other authorities in the process of matching couples with adoptive children.

Viability of Adoptive Couples

In early 2010, after four years of preparation, Josefina and Benito Ramirez had finally been able to complete their adoption binder. By then, Josefina and Benito were 44 and 43-years old respectively. He worked in a gas station and she was a housewife. Both were originally from a neighboring rural indigenous town where their parents worked as peasant farmers. They had to help their parents in the cornfields since childhood, so she only finished elementary education, and he managed to finish the ninth grade. He had been a gardener and she a domestic worker before they went together to the United States as undocumented immigrants. They had been living together for almost 19 years, although they had only legally married three years ago to fulfill the DIF’s adoption

requirements.⁶¹ In their petition letter, they had asked to adopt a girl up to two-years old. Their white binder contained all the DIF's "administrative" adoption requirements mentioned above (including the petition letter, three recommendation letters, birth and marriage certificates, pictures, resumes, proofs of income, and proofs of good legal standing), as well as their three required examination reports by a DIF doctor, social worker and psychologist.

I accompanied Gloria, the social worker, to carry out her "socioeconomic investigation" in the couple's modest one-bedroom house, which they had built with savings from their work in the United States. I was in charge of filling in the first section of Gloria's report, while she focused on the family interviews. Gloria's reports (as well as Laura's) followed a format with two sections. The first section was the "economic investigation" which consisted of several charts that had to be filled in with numbers and descriptions of such aspects as family income and expenditures, movables and real estate, housing conditions, type of housing construction, room distribution and furnishings. The second section was called the "social investigation", which consisted of interviews with the couple and their extended family members to fill in the following headings: description of the family, reasons to adopt, social history of the applicants, family relationships; rearing practices; risk factors for the child, educational plan for the minor; social history of the couple and life project.

Since Gloria had requested to interview Josefina and Benito's extended family members, their parents and several siblings had traveled from their natal town that day to support them in the adoption process. He had eleven siblings and she had ten. Sitting around a plastic table in their backyard, and in the presence of more than 10 people,

⁶¹ As mentioned above, since 2007 only legally married couples can adopt in the state.

Gloria asked the couple about their personal, familiar and reproductive histories. Josefina explained timidly in front of all their relatives that they had tried to have children since they got together. When a year passed without a pregnancy, she went to a doctor who could not find a definitive reason, and only told her that her ovaries were “too small.” Once they were in the United States, they went to different healers who gave her teas and herbs to conceive, as they did not have the means to go to a private doctor. Back in Mexico she received hormonal treatments from a state hospital doctor; yet despite all of their efforts she did not conceive a child.

Gloria concentrated mostly on completing her sections. She also needed to know the ages, employments, and children of their parents and siblings, as well as how close and supportive they were of the adoption. Since social workers had to submit a written petition for a DIF chauffeur each time they did a field trip (partly to justify that they were really working during office hours), and this was a lengthy process, their reports were usually based on one single home visit. Because of that, Gloria had asked the couple to bring their relatives to the interview and was also forced to give them “homework.” That is, Josefina and Benito had to complete by themselves the last three missing sections of the report (educational plan for the minor; social history of the couple and life project) and return them to Gloria in person in the following days. Once in the office, Gloria would create a new Word document, by opening a finished report from another couple and substituting their data with the new couple’s personal information while maintaining the sentences or paragraphs that seemed pertinent from the previous couple’s report. The missing sections that the couple completed alone, and which were often handwritten, were changed to the third person, transcribed and included in the report. As a result, the

final socioeconomic studies were usually very formulaic and similar to each other in their descriptions. More than through her written reports, Gloria's positive or negative assessment of a couple's adoption petition was conveyed orally in conversations with Barbara, the psychologist, and in the DIFs Technical Council Meeting.

According to the state Family Code, couples have to prove that they have "sufficient" means to provide for the adoptee as if he or she were "their own child." For Gloria, a woman in her late forties and of humble origins herself, money was not the most important feature in her evaluation. The Adoption Department staff was well aware that DIF adoption applicants in Barrancas were usually not the wealthier ones in the adoption spectrum. On the contrary, they often came from humble and working class backgrounds, and were unable to afford expensive private fertility treatments or adoptions in private institutions. As mentioned in the introduction, other neighboring states allow private pro-life shelters for pregnant women to screen, select and match adoption couples with newborn babies relinquished by their mothers in their facilities. Although these adoption proposals have to be approved by the DIF, they are carried out privately and involve expensive legal and administrative fees. Workers in the Barrancas' Adoption Department knew that upper class Catholic couples wishing to adopt resorted to these centers, which ensured the delivery of healthy newborn babies. Other wealthier couples also resorted to "direct adoptions" with private lawyers in Mexico City, in which birth parents (usually mothers) ceded their parental rights directly to a couple wishing to adopt.

Gloria's emphasis was more on their "will to improve" (Li 2007) their future socio-economic situation. As such, in our home visit she asked me to look carefully at how clean and orderly Josefina kept their house, and their personal appearance. Gender

roles in the couple needed to be clear and “complementary” –she explained me. Their will to “move forward” or *superarse* was expressed in their future projects for self-betterment, as well as their plans to expand the size of their house, and develop or open a new business. Gloria particularly looked for *muégano* families—which refers to a Mexican dessert made out of fried flour squares covered in sugary syrup making them stick together and agglomerate. For Gloria, *familias muégano* represented the best image of a morally cohesive nuclear heterosexual union, with strong ties to extended kin. For her, it therefore also represented the best option for children’s full development.

In this particular case, Gloria liked the fact that Josefina was a housewife and would therefore have time to look after a child. She also noted positively that her extended family supported their application. However, on our way back to the DIF, Gloria told me she could not explain exactly what it was, but she felt something was “missing” in the couple. The fact that Josefina and Benito managed their expenses separately, for example, could indicate that they did not “stick” to each other. She suspected that Benito was not so interested in the adoption as Josefina, who seemed too “submissive and lonely.” Although she thought it was admirable that their whole family had come to support them, she did not think they were “expressive enough” during the interview, and this could mean lack of interest. They were sitting too far apart, did not look at each other or hold hands during the interview –Gloria added. To me it seemed that what was being pointed out as inadequate was the couple’s rural/indigenous background, since in rural Mexico it is usually not considered respectful to show physical affection in public. Yet, neither Gloria nor Barbara referred to issues of class or race in their reports. For Gloria, this lack of affection could signal the possibility of the

husband's infidelity and lack of commitment to the family unit, and the fact of Josefina's submissiveness was seen as indicative of a defective authority and stability in the marriage. Gloria was curious about the "findings" of the psychologist, to confirm if her observations were right: the couple would not be found viable.

Indeed, Josefina and Benito were ultimately not considered viable adoptive parents, because of the results of their psychological evaluation. According to Barbara, the Adoption Department psychologist—who was in the process of completing a master's degree in psychology and was fond of Freudian psychoanalysis—the eight psychological tests she applied showed that their motives to adopt were not the correct ones.⁶² Her final report of the couple said the following:

[Ms. and Mr. Ramirez] share in common the adoption plan; however, this common objective is there to attend to their own personal needs, which could possibly be related to affective deficiencies that may have their origins in infancy. Even if each of their needs tends to be the same, it seems that dad and mom [*papá y mamá*] would enjoy the child separately, even if they are together because they live in the same home. Within the family system, this issue can generate difficulties to invest [*invertir*] the adopted son; that is, to provide appropriate responses to parent-child relations. Therefore, they are considered NOT VIABLE in the adoption they requested. [Emphasis in original]

During the Adoption Council meeting in which the couple's case was discussed, Barbara further explained her reasons to decline their application: she perceived Josefina as a "sad" woman, who saw the adopted child as a way to fulfill an individual need and to have company. She considered that she had marked depressive traits and that not even therapy could solve these issues soon enough.⁶³ Thus, she was not fulfilled in her

⁶² The battery of tests she applied include a Machover's human figure test, incomplete senescence test, desiderative test, couple test, family test, house-three-person drawing test, objet relations test and interviews, applied over the course of 8 to 10 fifty-minute sessions.

⁶³ The DIF is obliged to inform applicant couples if they have found problems with their application, so that they can solve the impediment if possible. If the couple does not solve the problem in the timeframe

marriage. From Barbara's perspective, as a couple they did not share common "elements," even though they lived under the same roof. Gloria, who had paired up her results with those of the psychologists in a more informal meeting the day before, mentioned that she had also noted that the couple did not answer her questions together, and that Josefina, who seemed more nervous and submissive, mentioned she was "incomplete" without children. This was considered a bad sign, because it pointed to the fact that the couple's marriage was not a true "union." Their poor rural origins, Barbara also implied, had probably influenced their affective deficiencies during infancy. Both Gloria and Barbara based their results in a combination of technical and cultural perceptions of the couple, which the application of a battery of psychological tests helped to solidify and confirm. In this case, individual impressions and cultural/religious sensibilities were important components of their "technical" assessments of the couple. As such, the process of producing these reports was strongly based on the alignment between the technical and the moral and cultural scripts of marriage relations. Let me focus on another couple.

María and Pedro López, who both worked at a public hospital in Barrancas –she as a social worker and he as a staff member- were also rejected based on their psychological evaluation. They had been unable to conceive a child in their ten years of marriage, and found it even more difficult as she approached 40-years old. While at work in the hospital, a newborn boy found abandoned in the street was brought in. They immediately petitioned his adoption, and were given permission to visit the state's *Albergue* to feed him. Although formally adoption applicants are not allowed to see or influence the selection of their future children, in this case several local newspapers

established by the DIF, their file is archived for "lack of interest". However, problems requiring psychological therapy are usually considered impossible to solve on time to re-apply.

featured the couple with the DIF President, who publicly announced them as candidates. I saw them regularly in the *Albergue's* nursery, bottle-feeding the baby as often as they could, hoping to become his parents. They completed their adoption binder in a few months, and were approved in their medical and social work evaluations. Yet, Barbara considered that they were not viable parents, because they did not show the “right motivations.” In one of our lunch breaks, Barbara confided us that even before the formal results of the psychological tests were ready, there were usually “visible” indicators that a couple would not prove “viable.” As Barbara later explained to us: “It usually does not take too long, for example, to figure out when a woman has not solved her infertility grief (*duelo de maternidad no elaborado*), or when there is something wrong with the couple’s family dynamic. I usually have a very good idea after the first interview, and later the tests confirm my suspicions.”

In this case, the problem was especially pronounced in Pedro, who –as Barbara mentioned in the Adoption Council meeting– had “indicators of passive homosexuality,” and had not properly assumed his manly role in the household. Maria was also at fault because she was not fulfilling her role as housewife either, as she left their home during the week to study nutrition in Mexico City, and stayed with her mother overnight. The following was the formal psychological statement submitted for the Adoption Council members:

[Ms. And Mr. Lopez] present personality profiles with apparent psychological disturbances, especially Mr. [Pedro], who [...] does not speak of the minor in relation to a desire within the couple’s relationship, which he perceives as incomplete, suggesting the perception that he has of his wife, conceiving her as lacking something and depositing in the child that supplementation which is missing in the relationship [...] In addition, [Pedro] alludes to the child as an element of desire or need to cover a social mandate. [María] appears more clearheaded, recognizing the child as part of the desire of the couple’s relationship

and recognizing dad as the breadwinner for the family, whom she gives the power of creating and obtaining “fruits and rewards”, so that despite her biological difficulty to procreate, this could facilitate the maternal and paternal function, in addition to the possibility of placing the child within the oedipal triangulation (mother-father-child); however, [...] as a joint life project they do not meet the profiles to adequately perform the necessary maternal-paternal functions for a minor. As such, they are considered NOT VIABLE in the adoption they have requested. [Emphasis in original]

The psychological reports of “viable” couples were less elaborate than those of “not viable” candidates, and usually had very similar wordings. Angela and Roberto were one of those more rare applicant couples that had twice been found “viable” to adopt. They were schoolteachers in their late 30s who had adopted a boy through the DIF in 2005, and were petitioning a second adoption in 2010. Their psychological evaluation stated: “[The couple] presents personality profiles without apparent psychological alterations. At this time the couple’s relationship is one of mutual support, with the ability to accept and confront changes within the family dynamic. There are elements that forecast that the couple has the capacity to adapt to the conditions of reality in an adequate manner, covering the needs of a child within the family system. Because of this, they are considered VIABLE for the adoption they have requested. [Emphasis in original]”

The social workers’ report, described in more detail the social and moral characteristics of their family:

The applicants refer that they are working hard to form a patrimony for their child, and are continuing to prepare themselves academically to reach higher positions in their institution. As a couple, they feel consolidated, stable, and are only waiting to complete their project of forming a four-member family, which would mean the culmination of their expectations regarding the number of family members. As parents they are continually preparing themselves to offer their [children] a quality education based on values. In the future they want to build a home in a plot of land they own in [the state], in order to have more space for their children’s healthy development. They are conscious of the responsibilities implied in having children and the changes that they entail. With the arrival of

their first adopted son they have organized in such a way that he is always accompanied by one of his parents; their schedules allowing them to fully attend to the minor. They want to give their children all the best and form them professionally as much as their economical and moral capacity allows them, offering them a better quality of life. They visualize themselves as a family with integrity that is solid and united.

As these cases show, in addition to being able to provide all the administrative proofs regarding their legal, social, and economic standing, couples needed to “show” the right motivations to adopt, and their joint capability to locate the child in the “normal” space of a biological child. As such, couples had to be able to project themselves as ideal future parents, and even write narratives about their life and aspirations as “homework” assignments. The power of the psychologist in determining the couple’s “underlying” problems and grounding the verdict of their application was based on her authority as a professional in the scientific study of mental health and behavior. Social workers were able to include observations about couple’s moral values, aspirations and lifestyle. For the members of the Technical Adoption Council, the fact that Barbara applied several tests to reach her conclusions made her results more objective than Gloria’s, which were based on “subjective” observations. However, one of the paradoxes of psychology is that it seeks to produce positive knowledge of the human as a finished subject, while it constructs individual subjects in the process of being applied. As such, psychology’s claim that “there is an essential human being to be known” (Behrent 2013:73) makes it complicit with the moralization of the human as a pre-determined entity. As Behrent (2013: 71) noted, psychology’s foundation in an understanding of man as an essential being requires the inclusion of extra-psychological practices and knowledges in the analysis of concrete psychometric tests (Behrent 2013: 71). Thus, the discipline’s

“positivistic” view of humans “as measurable and objectively knowable” (Behrent 2013:71), is in contradiction with its hermeneutic practices, which are also based on moral and cultural understandings of the human and human relations. In addition, in the adoption cases I observed, both the socio-economical and psychological reports were embedded in cultural and religious understandings of the moral family.

As I learned during my fieldwork, psychologists and social workers were guided in their "investigations" by their own, culturally informed understandings of what a good family should look like. In their assessments, for example, a normative division of gender roles within the relationship was central to show the “complementarity” of the couple, and how well they would be able to support the child’s needs. Couples where the man was not a good provider, or where the woman did not tend ‘enough’ to her home –like in the case of Pedro and María- were seen as potentially weak parents. Couples in which both partners worked, such as Angela and Roberto, also needed to show complementarity in their schedules to take care of their children. Delegating children’s care to nannies or domestic servants was also interpreted as a sign of a couple’s lack of commitment to their parental roles. Moreover, it was essential that couples aimed to constantly “improve” their social, economic and moral conditions, so as to immerse their children into an ethic of self-betterment and “values.”

For Gloria and Barbara, applicants had to show that the place of their parental desires was well oriented. The adopted child should be taken in as a biological offspring, making sure that applicants did not have ‘selfish’ motivations to adopt. In the case of Josefina and Benito, a humble couple with rural indigenous origins, their commitment to each other over nineteen years was not enough to show their viability as adoptive parents.

Their forms of love and care for each other were not recognized as being the correct ones to form a nuclear middle-class family. They lived together but with purportedly too much emotional autonomy from each other, being unable to articulate their future goals in a “joint” language. The fact, for example, that they wrote their DIF intention letters in the first person singular instead of plural, was a sign for the psychologist and social worker that they did not have a joint family project for the future.

Although in Barrancas families with children can legally adopt since 2005, priority is still given to the applications of childless couples—especially if they are from the state. The fact that adoption continued to be organized around the paradigm of the “childless marriage” generated contradictory expectations (Traina et al. 2008). On one hand, childless couples were regarded as suffering from a kind of “disgrace” for not being able to conceive their own children. Yet, their psychological tests had to show that they had come to terms with God’s Will and this “lack” did not affect them emotionally anymore. Even though state workers continuously made couples talk about their infertility, they had to have elaborated their “grief of infertility”, and be able to “place” the adopted child as a biological offspring (in the oedipal triangulation) without regarding themselves as incomplete. On the other hand, those applicant couples with biological offspring had the added pressure to provide written and oral statements that explicitly justified their desire for an adoptive child, given that God had given them the gift of reproduction. Couples’ motivations were questioned, for example, if it was suspected that they did not have the primary intention of fulfilling a “parental function” for the child, locating the adoptee as a product of their own marital relationship. Adoption needed to be a disinterested act, and not a form of charity or egoistic desires. Reasons like helping or

giving shelter to a vulnerable minor without desiring parenthood were also seen as ways to fulfill inadequate personal desires.⁶⁴ Through standardized tests, interviews and bureaucratic protocols, couples had to express their desires to adopt in normative and culturally acceptable languages that could prove their correct understandings of family life. Acceptable motivations for applicants with biological children, for example, included the fact of having offspring of only one gender, and wanting to “balance” the family with a child of the opposite gender; or such things as recent infertility issues that hindered the couple from having the number of children they had envisioned.

Marriage was also an essential part of the DIF worker’s understanding of the adoptive family, and as such, it strongly guided their concerns in the technical evaluations. Thus, although prospective couples were analyzed as individuals, the psychological and socio-economic assessments circled mainly around their relationship as a married couple. While not all states in Mexico require adopters to be married, in Barrancas the latest amendments to the Family Code have followed a conservative trend, abrogating in 2007 the possibility of single parent adoptions. Through these legal changes, the DIF has solidified in its adoption practices the Christian notion that the natural family is restored once children are placed back under the authority of the father. As I will discuss in more detail the last chapter, children’s birth relations were seen as faulty if birth mothers were single, unmarried or had multiple and abusive partners.

As Das has pointed out, this “appeal to common sense” regarding the place of the father in the morally correct family, links issues of reproduction and citizenship even

⁶⁴ Although ideas of charity were compatible with Christian philosophies, the history of adoption as charitable way of incorporating low-class children as household servants was now widely rejected and feared in the DIF. The assumption was that children desired as offspring by married couples would have the best chances of being fully loved, instead of being exploited for labor.

without the explicit biblical argument about the Will of God (2006: 99). Yet in the DIF's Adoption Department, the idea of God as the author of nature is not openly challenged, even if the state depends on its relation to the family and the figure of the child to imagine the perpetuation of its sovereign power. As Filmer (2000) asserted, the divine laws of nature place the Father as the head of the family, and his wife and children as his dependents. As Das has noted, this implies that "fatherly power was not authored by law – rather the social order was itself founded on the fact that this power embodied the law" (Das 2006: 103). By looking at Indian colonial law, Das (2006: 98) shows how the "natural rights" accorded to a father over his child do not arise merely from the fact of birth, but from the court's acknowledgement that the father is the one that transforms birth from a natural event into a social one. In Mexico, marriage continues to be the institution through which filiation can take place and is the site of accepted procreation and sexual life. While in some countries such as Norway paternity is now based primarily on biogenetic relatedness and DNA testing (Melhuus and Howell 2009:148), in Mexico paternity can still be self-ascribed.⁶⁵ This speaks to the fact that in Barrancas, for example, a father can walk into the Civil Registry to recognize a child as his own without the need to show proof of biological relatedness. Here, paternity "is seen to transform sexuality from primeval pleasure to an obligation of the citizen in reproducing the political community" (Das 2006: 98). In the DIF's Adoption Department, the figure of the father was central to authorize the family's desire to acquire offspring. It was also central to maintain the notion of the adoptive family as a natural unit. As I explore in the following

⁶⁵ Even though the figure of the illegitimate child is disappearing in Mexico, in accordance to international figurations of children's rights that place them as morally neutral beings (Melhuus and Howell 2009:149), the burdens of immorality are still placed in the body of the unmarried mother. I will discuss this in more detail in the last chapter.

section, these figurations of the correct family were aligned with racial notions of resemblance that corporealized (Povinelli 2011) the divine status of the adoptive family.

Looking Like a Family

In 2010, the National DIF's website stated that adoption is an "individualized life-project" for a child in need that requires the state's careful intervention. Its aim is to reconstitute the child's right to a family that can assure his or her happiness and "integral development." In the Adoption Department, becoming part of a heterosexual family and sharing physical traits with their adoptive parents was regarded as central to protect their "best interest." Similarity was regarded as a sign of the naturalness of the family, even if not ensured by biological procreation. Moreover, it was seen as a sign of the restoration of God's family. Appearance brought procreation back into the adoptive family, but without the taint of immoral sexuality.

A day before the official Technical Adoption Council (CTA) meetings, the Adoption Department psychologist, social workers and lawyer held "interdisciplinary meetings" in which they looked in more detail at the photos of both children and parents in search of physical resemblances. Although workers in the Adoption Department knew the adoptive couples in person, this was not the case for children, with whom they had hardly any personal contact. As such, they relied mostly on their file photos to make the matches. All the children's photos were spread out on a desk like a giant puzzle, and matching took place by comparing them with the photos in couples' binders. Since children grew fast and their pictures were often not so recent,⁶⁶ office workers tried to

⁶⁶ In 2010, the Adoption Department started to request two photos from adoptable children: one from the moment of their admittance to the state's *Albergue*, and the other at the time when they were legally ready

focus on aspects such as skin color, hair type, and facial features, to assure that they shared at least one physical trait with their adoptive father or mother. At the same time, state workers agreed that after their adoption, children could grow to look increasingly similar to their new parents if they were properly nurtured and cared for. Children's appearance was only partially determined by inheritance; what mattered most over the years was their full integration into the family. Shared love among family members could be inscribed into their bodies making them look like each other. As such, in the Interdisciplinary Meeting, workers tried to find the best matches for children, knowing that if the adoption was successful, children would morph further with time to resemble their new families.

In Euro-America, the idea that parents and children should resemble each other has been dominant (Strathern 1992; Wade 2012). Here, the transference of biogenetic substance from parents to children is culturally understood to produce bonds of kinship and relatedness (Carsten 2001). Socially, this connection is seen as visible through physical resemblance, which becomes a tangible fact of the truth of kinship and one's connections to others (Nordqvist 2010:1131). Yet, as Malinowski (1929) noted long ago physical resemblance is not necessarily tied to notions of shared blood after conception.⁶⁷

for adoption. This was partly to have "proofs" of children's improvements under the state's care, and to strengthen the adoption file by showing the impoverished state in which children lived with their birth families.

⁶⁷ For the Trobriand Islanders, children never resemble their mothers or matrilineal relatives, with whom they are supposed to share common substance (since children are conceived when a spirit-child brought by a matrilineal-ancestor-spirit enters a woman's body). They resemble their fathers who are responsible for molding them during intercourse, even though they are not thought to play any part in conception. Resemblance also emerges from a father's role in nursing, holding and tending for the baby, and the personal relationship between husband and wife (Holy 1996). Astuti (2009) notes that even though the Vezo in Madagascar recognize strong bodily connections between parents and their children through conception and gestation, this is not related to their understandings of physical resemblance. They emphasize the child's resemblance to other kin members beside their birth parents, a process that starts during but especially after birth as relationships to others intensify.

Scholars studying international adoptions have also pointed out that family resemblances do not merely confirm the biological truths of kinship, but are part of how people construct relations and signify bonds of kinship (Marre and Bestard 2009: 64). At the same time, however, they note that resemblance mobilizes affects of kinship and the idea of family. By looking at the meaning of resemblance within the Catalan family, Marre and Bestard (2009), for example, show how it can be a way of “creating continuities” between the individual and the kinship network. Thus, resemblance makes “explicit the way in which there is always something given, something non-intentional, in the definition of a person as a relative” (Marre and Bestard 2009: 64). Resemblance allows a “consubstantiation” with the family body, by supporting moral ties and intimate relationships through the acknowledgment of shared physical identities (Marre and Bestard 2009: 65). It marks the inevitability of a relationship even if it is not founded in common genes. As Marre and Bestard (2009:67) have pointed out, “kinship is always a previous relationship,” future relations are based in the proper location of the child’s past and origins. By thinking of the adoptive family as divinely ordained, DIF workers also redefine filial relations as located in prior divine connections. Evidence for this is seen in the enhanced resemblance among adoptive families, which sometimes is thought to be even stronger than with birth relatives. These ideas align with broader trends in international adoption, where there is often an idea of “predestination”, pointing to the fact that the child was born with relationships that were dormant and only waiting for somebody to socially acknowledge them (Marre and Bestard 2009:73). Resemblance thus normalizes the adoptive relationship, transforming it into an enduring and predestined bond (Marre and Bestard 2009: 72; Nordqvist 2010). It allows the child to fit within an

ideological notion of the family as based on similarity and reproduction (Nordqvist 2010: 1129).

As noted earlier, during the adoption process DIF workers often described themselves as *mediums* that God used to “correct” nature’s mistakes, through the placement of children in the families where they really belonged. “Don’t you think it is curious? Often, adoptive children look more like their adoptive parents than their real parents” –Gloria told me once. “If I did not know [about the adoption], I would not be able to tell” –she continued – “It is as if God had destined the children for them”. In an interview, she explained to me why it is important that children resemble their adoptive parents:

[...] we try to find physical resemblance so that the child is not a stranger, like in that new TV ad where there is a Chinese-looking child sitting with his family around the dinner table, and [...] they are all white and look alike- and only the Chinese boy –or Japanese, I don’t know- with his Japanese or Chinese traits looks different from the rest of family. It is a *Gamesa*-cookies ad –you should see it! So, in that commercial, the child asks the family: “Why do I look different? And then they respond: “can you pass me the cookies?” –to avoid the topic! But in that ad you can see the difference... We try to make it so that no such differences exist within the family and even less in society.

As it has been noted both in the case of adoption and gamete donation, the lack of physical resemblance continues to be seen as a threat to the legitimacy of the family that could expose it to social stigma (Modell 2002; Nordqvist 2010:1132; Wade 2012). For professionals arranging adoptions in the United States, for example, the promise that the family will look “normal” makes it seem more solid and secure for children (Herman 2008; Modell 2002). As such, adoption bureaucrats’ need to match families and find resemblances also responds to their desire to essentialize the connection between parents and children, making it look inevitable and enduring (Modell 2002). Scholars (Marre and

Bestard 2009; Modell 2002) have noted that the search for resemblances with their children is also common among adoptive parents. Howell and Marre (2006), for instance, have pointed out how the symbolization of bodies and personalities through an idiom of resemblance is also an important part of the “kinning process” (Howell 2003) in adoptive families in Europe. Both in Spain and Norway, parents seek and render relevant psychological and physiological resemblances between them and their children, even if most transnationally adopted children have very different physical traits than their adoptive parents (Howell and Marre 2006:306).

This emphasis on “family likeness” in European discursive kinship practices contributes to adoptive parents’ ideas that there was no “randomness in the origin of the relationships” even in the absence of shared genes (Howell and Marre 2006:307). As Marre and Bestard (2009:67) have noted, the search for resemblances in adoptive families is crucial to infuse relationships with a “sense of destiny” and endurance. Here the notion of fate eliminates the possibility of “pure chance”, locating the family back in the realm of nature (Howell and Marre 2006:308). In Mexico, the idea of fate is rendered divine, as it is through resemblance that God’s Will is expressed within the adopted family. Yet, as Nordqvist (2010:1135) has argued in the case of lesbian families, seeking resemblances does not only create kinship connections, but also entails the creation of distance (from birth parents) and the eradication of the “donor.”

As authors like Yngvesson (2010), Herman (2008) and Modell and Dambacher (1997) and have argued, the paradox of plenary adoption is that in order for the family to appear as natural, the place of birth parents and the workings of the state to deliberately produce the family have to be constantly erased (see chapter three). Although not

stipulated by law, the DIF also matches children with parents according to the age of the parents and the child. To comply with the so-called “laws of nature”, they place infants with younger couples, and older children with older applicants. During the first International Adoption Congress celebrated in Mexico in November 2009, the founder of VIFAC⁶⁸, a private Pro-life organization that works closely with the national government providing shelter for women during pregnancy and also placing their children into adoption, explained to the audience:

[...] we are seeing more and more marriages that are older; the woman is over 40 years old. Then we say: How is it possible that a 45-year-old woman wants a newborn child? The Hague Convention does not recommend this, because physically we know that a woman of such an age will not have the same attitude than a woman in her twenties. [Now] they are marrying later, –they marry close to 35 years-old now– and in addition they want to have the Master’s degree, the PhD, travel, [and own] a house, a car, and so on and so forth; and only after doing all this they want the child! I think they are a bit removed from the reality they are living in.⁶⁹

These upper and middle class views on motherhood were only partially supported by current statistical trends in the country: Between 1985 and 2012 most women had continued to give birth to their children between 20 and 24-years old. Yet while most of these women were married in 1985, in 2012 most were living as concubines. Only women 30 years and older were mostly married in 2012 (INEGI 2014). The Adoption Department’s psychologist and social workers supported the idea that women should bear children young, and advocated to reduce the legal upper age limit for adopting parents from 50 to at least 45-years old. “This couple is 50 and they still want a baby! Can you picture me with a newborn? It is ridiculous” –Barbara complained once about some prospective applicants over lunch. I told her she looked really young (she was 40-years

⁶⁸ The name stands for “Life and Family, A.C.”

⁶⁹ Fieldnotes November 18, 2009.

old), and that I could picture her as a fine mother. “Well –she added- picture me at 50 years old and with a newborn baby, that does not go.... Can you imagine when the child is a teenager: the parents will be walking on a cane, senile (*chocheando*)!” The social workers agreed, saying that at that age applicants “are ripe for grandparenthood.” For an adoptive family to be successful—government workers seemed to imply— they needed to make sure that the elemental “laws of nature” were in place, so that the child could be part of a correct family. As such, the Technical Adoption Council had to ensure that the model of the natural family was maintained, by paying attention to such things as physical resemblance, parents and children’s age and, in the case of multiple siblings, the age differences among adopted and biological children. That is, adopted children could not be of the same age or older than biological offspring in the family, which would defy the logic of biological procreation. These understandings of the natural family also guided bureaucrats’ rejection of international adoption as a “last-resort” option.

In adherence to international adoption conventions, Mexico follows the “principle of subsidiarity”, which stipulates that if it is not possible to reunify the biological family, a child should be placed in a national adoptive family. International adoption is seen as the least ideal option to fulfill the child’s right to find a family. Because of that, in Barrancas international couples can only petition the adoption of children with special needs, or above 5-years old. This argument against international adoption is partly based on the fear that adopted children will experience both cultural and racial disruptions (Howell and Marre 2006:309). That is, the fear that children’s different cultural origin and physiognomy might genuinely threaten their integration into the foreign family and nation, throwing them into the status of outsiders. International adoption broke the racial

similarity of the family, something that was considered to be detrimental to the child, who, it was thought, would be teased and discriminated for being “brown” in a “whiter” family.

Precisely because of the previous suffering of the adoptable child in a faulty family, adoptive couples needed to be carefully matched. The purpose of adoption was also to ensure the social and racial mobility of the child, and his or her reintegration into a morally correct family. As Barbara once said “we are not dealing here with five-star children. If couples want to have the white, blue-eyed newborn, they should not come here.” She was referring, in part, to the fact that in Mexico race and class are closely aligned, and institutionalized children are almost always born in poor families. But she was also pointing to the fact that adoption was not understood as a project for the racial mobility of parents through the acquisition of whiter offspring. It was about incorporating children in mestizo families in which they could flourish as citizens of the nation.

As mentioned in the introduction, being mestizo (or mixed race) in Mexico is a sign of being recognized as a legitimate member of and contributor to the future of the nation. In the case of adoption, dealing with state bureaucracies had racializing effects, and workers in the Adoption Department were aware of it. Being a lower-level state worker, for example, was a marker of being mestizo. At the same time, the state’s approval of couples as “viable” adoptive parents had the effect of situating them as mestizos. As Roberts has pointed out in the case of Ecuador, the ability to evade state institutions in the quest for a child is a form of “assisting whiteness” (2012:21). Whiter and wealthier people could afford expedience and privacy in their quest for assisted reproduction. In Mexico, those couples that deal with the state bureaucracy in order to

become parents, might not be able to whiten themselves through genetically “whiter” children, but are marked as part of the mestizo nation by the fact of being acknowledged as morally correct families. As I have argued, it is through ordering racial sentiments that families are seen as crafted under Gods design. Proving that the match between couples and children is correct, and even more “perfect” than nature, resemblance works to allow children’s mobility into the national *mestizo* family.

As Wade (2012:79) has pointed out, both kinship and race are realms in which ideas of shared substance and identity are constituted. Moreover, these domains intersect through what Wade (2012:79) has described as a relationship of “race-kinship congruity.” That is, the assumption that there ought to be a congruency between people’s consanguineous relations and their racial appearance. This has been unsettled by technologies of reproduction, including “the bureaucratic technology of transnational adoption” (Wade 2012:79). However, as mentioned earlier, even in these ‘alternative’ families, idioms of sameness and resemblance continue being forged.

As I mentioned in the introduction, the post-revolutionary Mexican project of mestizaje advocated for the continuous whitening or *blanqueamiento* of the Indian (or black) populations through guided sexual and moral education (De la Cadena 2000; Miller 2004; Knight 1990; Wade 2005). This process of whitening-through-mixing was articulated within particular understandings of race in which morality and culture were as important as biology and nature⁷⁰ (De la Cadena 2007; Wade 2008:183). As such, Latin American intellectuals, who found inspiration in Lamarckian notions of race that saw it as malleable and shaped by behavior (Stepan 1991), tended to avoid the biological

⁷⁰ Of course, this is true not only for mestizaje but for all racial projects in general. The issue rests in locating the particular configurations of what counts as nature and culture in the case of *mestizaje*.

determinism of scientific racism and supported more cultural conceptions of race (Wade 2012:83). Thus, race was framed in an idiom of “cultural heritage” that partially dissociated it from biological reproduction (Wade 2012:83). This allowed government agents to understand race as intimately tied to the pursuit of morally correct lives, through which indigenous and outcast populations could improve both their race and social standing. Although elites continued to practice a close “race-kinship congruity” (Wade 2012) to assure whiteness, cultural and racial mixture was seen as desirable to incorporate poor and indigenous groups into the nation.

This “racial optimism” of *mestizaje*, Roberts (2012:19) has argued, assumes the malleability of race and “the ability to effect racial betterment within one generation, even within already living individuals.” In the case of adoption, children’s bodies were regarded as capable of benefitting from *mestizaje* inside the family, to move from socially and racially backward birth situations into morally and racially acceptable ones. As Gloria commented, state workers had to assure that no “extreme” differences –like a Chinese looking boy in a Mexican family– appeared in the family or society. For a child to have a new chance of belonging in the nation, *mestizaje* was crucial and started inside the family. Through a new kin arrangement, children could improve their race and become full citizens. For this, the new family had to look as “natural” as possible and blend into the *mestizo* nation. As Wade noted, procreation technologies often serve as arenas in which dominant ideas about race and kinship are both reiterated and renaturalized, shaping what counts as legitimate kinship connections (Wade 2012:85). In the DIF’s adoption office, the original “race-kinship congruity” of adopted children is challenged, in order to place them in families in which this congruity is seen as more

suitable, correcting the mistakes of reproduction and restoring the divine nature of the family. Moreover, as I claim here, this restoration of the family also serves as a whitening tool for adopted children. The need for adopted children to be matched so that the congruity between race and kinship could be restored was seen as a central part of protecting the child from harm and suffering. As Wade (2012:81-82) has argued, here the “race-kinship congruity” principle is more flexible, “in that a straightforward continuity of racial identity between parents and child is not assumed.” Yet, children’s racialized appearance is still explained in terms of their parentage and genealogy (Wade 2012:82), and differences in skin tone and physical traits have consequences in how people are treated within their families (Moreno Figueroa 2008).

In order to attach the child his or her new family –where the child is said to “really” belong– the state has to re-inscribe racial and class-based languages within the family. After some initial physical resemblance is assured, the unrelated child is thought to continue morphing physically to become completely integrated into the new family – leaving behind the social and racial backwardness of his or her birth kinship. As a DIF member explained to me: “[Looking for initial resemblance] is like giving proper soil and water for a new plant to grow. The rest will happen alone, if there is love and values in the family.” Thus, for government workers, creating “individualized life-projects” for children was intimately related to racialized understandings of belonging. In the Adoption Department, race was seen as a depository of affects, intimacy and sentiments of relatedness that needed to be present for a family to be successful. Although race was not something officially stated in government paperwork, it circulated as a shared understanding of what family is about.

Through adoption children's bodies could morph to look like those of their *mestizo* parents. These views found strong support in the plenary adoption model, which requires a "clean break" between the new family and children's natal kinship. This responds to the Euro-American view of kinship as generating constitutive knowledge about a person's identity (Carsten 2007; Strathern 1999). Although kinship knowledge can both constrain and expand choices for individuals (Carsten 2007:410), for DIF workers it only restricted children's transition into a new *mestizo* family. Ensuring that adopted children could socially, morally and physically transform themselves within new *mestizo* families also meant protecting them from the knowledge of their own origins.

As I have shown, child adoption is a bureaucratic technology of reproduction that has the power to transform people's race by changing their relationships. As a tool of "racial optimism" (Roberts 2012), adoption was seen as giving children a chance to change their race and become *mestizos* through their insertion in a state-sanctioned family. Through adoption, children could leave behind the backward aspects of their parent's race and genes, and mold themselves into full citizens of the nation. For state workers, this racial and physical change made visible God's Will in adoptive family, and restored the moral order. Adopted children were seen as "hard to recognize again" in their new families, suddenly looking "beautiful" and "graceful." Yet, as I will argue in chapter three, it was not always possible to maintain children's origins out of the picture.

Final Remarks

In this chapter I have explored the moralization of the family through governmental techniques that produce the figure of the viable/unviable adopting couple

and the natural family. Adoption can be understood as a technology because it constitutes individuals and categories of people, it uses disciplinary powers that aim to diffuse authorship, and because it has positive and constitutive effects. As I mentioned in the introduction, by looking at the production of knowledge in the context of normative understandings of the Christian family, it is possible to think of adoption policies and practices as “moral technologies.” This approach is useful to question the image of technology as a neutral medium to produce knowledge. As Latour and Venn (2002) have argued, this image of “technical mediation” implies the fact that technology merely works to transfer a meaning, cause or force. This view, which resonates with state worker’s own understandings of themselves as mere *mediums* of God’s moral will, situates technology as an instrument that solidifies already present relations in other forms (Latour and Venn 2002: 250). Thus, the work in the office is imagined in such a way that “the person who is in charge of it, or its director, is not so much an individual as a *function* that is exercised by this and that person and that could be equally exercised by someone else” (Behrent 2013: 81, emphasis added).

As I explore in more detail in chapter two, this diffusion of bureaucratic authorship and agency is deeply ingrained in the state’s documentary practices, but also in the worker’s idea that it is God –and not the state– who is in charge of creating families. Yet, as I have argued in this chapter, while state workers present their work as simply fulfilling a function as intermediates of God, the work in the adoption office is part of a governmental apparatus that actually configures the very fields that bureaucrats are supposedly only mediating. While the moralization of the family, for example, is an effect of specific state practices, bureaucrats present it as a starting point that is grounded

in a divine order. By presenting themselves as mere mediators of God's Will, adoption bureaucrats partake of what Ferguson (1990:256) has called the "instrument-effect" of government, which helps to expand bureaucratic state power and both depoliticize poverty and state. As Ferguson (1990: 194) has noted, the principle of governmentality and its conceptual apparatus of development present the state as a neutral instrument used to implement plans for the provision of social services and the engineering of economic growth. As God's intermediaries, state workers discursively erase their own involvement in the generation of the family as a technical domain of improvement (Li 2007) that requires the detection of and intervention in particular kinds of kinship "problems" through adoption.

It has been pointed out that concepts of nature and culture are deeply intertwined in moral and religious languages that are part of debates over reproductive technologies (Traina et al. 2008: 15-16). If we understand adoption as a "bureaucratic technology of assisted reproduction" (Wade 2012) that has to be analyzed together with other more recent forms of technologically assisted conception, then we can also see how adoption raises questions about the nature of "nature". In the DIF's Adoption Department, Christian understandings of reproduction shape understandings of the natural family, marriage, infertility, childbearing, maternity and paternity. As I explored in this chapter, adoption technologies are seen as supporting, instead of eroding, the divine natural family, based on the sacrament of marriage and the complementarity of the heterosexual couple. Adoption, as a form of assisted reproduction, thus enforces religious and cultural beliefs of the natural family in neoliberal Mexico.

In the DIF's Adoption Department, nature is not seen as a secular and scientific category separated from God, but an important "moral touchstone" (Traina et al. 2008: 18). Religion, science and technology are seen as interwoven domains, through which knowledge can be produced and order can be established. Thus, nature and culture do not necessarily contract in the face of science and technology (Strathern 1992), and religious understandings continue to frame understandings of moral life. As scholars (Traina et al. 2008:19) have pointed out, concerns to conform reproduction to religious and cultural traditions continue to be common in many places, including Mexico. As I showed in this chapter, adoption bureaucrats believe that adoption is justified only if it is compatible with divine nature or the natural order of the world. Thus, adoption technologies are naturalized and incorporated into a meaningful framework that allows to maintain and to enhance nature as sacred (Traina et al. 2008:19). As it has been described for Indian Hindu clinical settings (Bharadwaj 2006), disparate domains of the sacred and profane and the human and superhuman can work in tandem to produce the family through assisted reproduction. Workers in the Adoption Department did not see their bureaucratic and technical interventions as dislodging nature, for nature and the family were divine creations. Adoption here is seen as a model to create, correct and sustain the model of the natural family (as opposed to older notions supported by the law that saw adoption as an act of compassion and benevolence).

As such, the Adoption Department was responsible for correcting the immoral use of God's gift of sex and reproduction through governmental intervention. By trying to create families that could "correct" the flaws of children's natal kinship, government workers aimed to produce natural families that were better than the child's biological

relations. In this process, the circulation of adopted children into their new families is reconfigured as a transaction between God, the state and adoptive parents, without reference to their birth relatives. Biology, thus, becomes separated from nature, in the process through which adoptive families are naturalized and biological kinship is rendered immoral. As such, the state becomes the protector of the new family, safeguarding the information about children's birth relatives and avoiding any interactions among birth and adoptive kin.

As a technology of reproduction, adoption offers a fruitful window to think of how notions of inheritance, substance and behavior configure race and relatedness in Mexico. As Wade (2012) has noted, racial thinking is the product of history and social relations and as such, it traverses both familial and governmental domains. By looking at race and family formation, it is possible to look at the mechanisms through which race—as cultural and biological inheritance—is transmitted and perpetuated (Wade 2012: 80). Here, I localize race not so much as the cause—but the effect—of specific governmental practices that have allowed maintaining forms of racial and class inequality. In Mexico, these ideas about family resemblance are embedded in racial histories that assign different values to people in society. For government workers, children's racial—as well as class—attributes were changeable, allowing them to move from a birth family to an adoptive one. As such, resemblance could not only be achieved through biological ties, but also through state intervention, becoming a proof of God's validation of the new families. In Mexico, this modern conception of *mestizaje* also fits well with newer neoliberal understandings of the individual as “responsive” to environmental incentives and market logics embracing the malleability and self-regulation of human nature (see

Behrent 2013:89-90). As such, adoption through a change in children's socio-economic "environment", could also improve their race.

CHAPTER TWO

New Lives for Children: Adoption Documents, Bureaucracy and the Law⁷¹

It was in the context of a media scandal in November 2010 that I was able to visit for the first time the dead archive⁷² of the local DIF in Barrancas. The media scandal involved the case of a poor indigenous mother, Consuelo, who had accused the DIF of unlawfully placing her children in adoption a year earlier. A congressman from the opposition Democratic Revolutionary Party (PRD) and local NGOs backed her case, and demanded an immediate review of all adoption cases administered by the National Action Party (PAN) state government since 2006. I will return in more detail to Consuelo's story in chapter four, and focus here on the state's reaction to this scandal and its implications for understanding the DIF's documentary practices.

The imperative to open the dead archive reached new levels when newspapers reported three months later that the information about the total number of adoptions carried out since the PAN's first state administration in 2000 did not exist. Indeed, according to the written response one DIF worker gave to the NGO inquiring about the scandal, the dead archive "was lost." Another worker had also said that the archive had been burned. In reply, the DIF's director told the press that there were no lost files, but what happened was merely a wrong response on the part of those workers, and then went on to praise the previous Governor's administration. A precise review of the files would

⁷¹ A version of this chapter is in press for *An Anthropology of Living and Dying in the Contemporary World*, edited by Clara Han and Veena Das. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press.

⁷² Common parlance in Mexico refers to files that are no longer in use and have been stored indefinitely as constituting a dead archive or *archivo muerto*.

be made –he promised– to make the information transparent to the public, with punctuality and objectivity.⁷³

As soon as the media scandal unfolded, the *licenciado* received a ‘higher order’: numbers about all adoptions since 2000 needed to be created, and a complete legal adoption file had to back up each number. Those adoptions with no complete file or judicial ruling could not be counted or registered in the official list. Yet there was no record of the dead archive files anywhere, and no way to know what information it contained. A lawyer by profession, the *licenciado* was well aware of the dangers that conjuring up these not-so-dead documents posed to the state government. As he said to me one day in the office: “To dig up all this information is a double-edged sword, it could bring us a lot of trouble in the future.” He feared the powers in these old files –their capacity to come back to life and haunt the state authorities for their own non-conformance to law, and was nervous about making an adoption list with information that could be traced in the future. Who knew what sorts of secrets these documents contained, and how they could further damage the legitimacy of the DIF? The more these legal documents were to be scrutinized outside of their regular bureaucratic path, out of the context that legitimated them in the first place; the more they could “put to death the very thing [...] which *carries the law in its tradition*” (Derrida 1998:79), exposing the fragilities and arbitrariness of the state’s legal work. The dead files held within them the power to expose the fragilities and arbitrariness of the state’s legal work.

In part, the *licenciado* knew his superiors would have preferred the archive to be really dead, forgotten and concealed, with all its secrets and heterogeneity buried forever.

⁷³ “Responde DIF por casos de expedientes.” *Local Newspaper*, February 14th 2011. “Si existen expedientes sobre adopciones, corrige el DIF”. *Local Newspaper*, February 15th, 2011.

But he also knew that there was no other site through which the DIF could try to restore its credibility as a ‘rightful’ holder of legality and the past. As Max Weber (1978:957) famously noted, bureaucratic authority is based upon written documents. The compilation of documents and repetitions of filing was what supported the conditions of possibility for governmental authority (Feldman 2008). For the *licenciado* it was also a matter of pleasing his superiors, and thus of keeping his job and possibly even rising within the DIF’s bureaucracy. As such, it became clear to me how adoption files, in their greater or lesser capacity to fulfill the legal requirements of Mexican civil law, carry a double –and unevenly felt– threat: they are threatening to birth families and parents such as Consuelo, the women of the media scandal, who can be separated from their children definitively with such rulings; but they also pose a threat to the state government itself (Hull 2003, 2012b), as documents that can expose an arbitrary use of the law. The spectral structure of the archive and its documents (Derrida 1998; Posocco 2011), articulated in the demand of remaining death and alive at the same time, is precisely what makes it both a place of danger and hope for future justice.

At the level where bureaucracy imprints itself in law, government representatives fear the traces left by their own production of these legal files at the unstable limits between the legal and the extra-legal. By paying close attention to how government workers, not only “use facts”, but also produce knowledge that can serve as legal “evidence” (Valverde 2003:5), I explore the power of documents to simultaneously terminate and give life to relationships (Coutin 2011; Mulla 2011). As I will argue in this chapter, the ordinary intersection of the law with other normative “non-expert knowledges” (Valverde 2003) both authorizes the state’s legal outcomes and makes

documents a site of uncertainty and ambiguity. Specifically, I am interested in exploring how unquestioned understandings of “stratified reproduction” (Colen 1995; Ginsburg and Rapp 1995) that allow for the imagination of some poor mothers as unfit to nurture and reproduce, filter into the production of official paperwork and help it to move smoothly across the layers of state bureaucracy and its legal system. In the following pages I look at the blurred –and changeable– spaces between the law and its violation (Das 2004; Posocco 2011) in which documents that conform to the requirements of Mexican adoption laws are produced. I am particularly interested in understanding how these bureaucratic spaces are filled in with forms of common knowledge that sanction differential valuations of life for poor mothers and their children.

I understand these legal requirements as involving the production of a certain “form” of uniformity, repetition and generalizability across files, through which a specific content is allowed to move forward. As Veena Das (2004) has argued, legal protocols require re-recording events into a template legible to the law. Here, framing sentences and formulaic forms of recording and encoding truths orient themselves “toward the imagination of how a case will be presented in the court of law” (2004:229), and also how it might be able to move through the system as easily as possible. As such, the form in which documents are created “anticipate and enable certain actions by others” (Riles 2006:21). The creation of ‘sound’ adoption files is in this sense facilitated by normative or “common sense” (Geertz 1983) knowledges about whose life is worth saving, whose relationships can be put to death, and who has the right to reproduce and produce the nation. To explore this dynamic, I will focus first on two events: the discussions and document production that took place in a DIF’s *Albergue* meeting and a

Technical Adoption Council meeting. It is through the procedures followed in these two spaces that a category of children –those who are considered to be legally freed from all previous kinship attachments and thus eligible for adoption– is brought into being. Here, I am specifically interested in how these files are able to produce actionable cases and “effects of law” (Rose and Valverde 1998, Valverde 2003) in terms of their ability to both generate threats and guarantee rights to children (Poole 2004).

Instead of trying to uncover “hidden truths”, such as governmental corruption and disorder beneath an image of order and legality (Nuijten and Anders 2007), my interest is to think of the ordinary processes that enable files to successfully move across bureaucratic and legal sites, facilitating the production of a category of adoptable children. In this regard, my aim is to question where law is located in the first place, looking at how its boundaries are constituted in specific cases. Thus, I pay attention to both the mobility of the documents themselves and of the very line between the legal and extra-legal. Here, Bruno Latour’s work on the making of law in the French *Conseil d’État*, is methodologically interesting because it also aims to study the production of legal knowledge, by treating the law as a network of things and people “in which legality is not a field to be studied independently, but is instead a way in which the world is assembled, an attribute that is attached to events, people, documents, and other objects when they become part of the decision-making process in the *Conseil d’État*” (Levi and Valverde 2008:806). As Levi and Valverde (2008: 817) argue, by examining the “physical and administrative details of the formations of the file,” Latour arrives at the conclusion that legality “is not an inherent quality of certain disputes or even certain pieces of paper. Legality is instead, a quality with which the papers are endowed –retroactively”. As I will

show in the following pages, it is in specific configurations that documents such as birth certificates, reports and visiting logs become legal. Yet, I also pay attention to how the production of the law intersects with unspoken forms of stratified reproduction that allow the maintenance of forms of inequality for poor families.

Finally, in the last part of the chapter, I will describe the DIFs recent attempts to organize and standardize adoption procedures and documentary practices, in the context of continuous suspicion about the lack of uniformity and transparency in adoption decisions and the ambiguous rationalities that guide the removal of children from some families to create new ones. By focusing on the writing and documentary practices in the DIF's adoption office, and the forms of legibility, illegibility and forgery that arise in government worker's attempts to protect the legality of their work, I explore the ways in which government workers produce forms of order and legality while honoring personal relationships and forms of friendship. As in the rest of the dissertation, I remain circumspect in giving precise dates and locations to respect the anonymity of those involved.

The *Albergue* Meeting⁷⁴

The meeting or *junta*, held in the *Albergue*'s ⁷⁵ toy library, started half an hour late, at 10:30 a.m. Except for the main lawyer who directed the event, there were only women in the room that morning. Sitting around adjoined red children's tables were the *Albergue*'s director, psychologists, therapists, lawyers, social workers, and doctor.

⁷⁴ Fieldnotes 03/18/2010

⁷⁵ As mentioned in the introduction, this is the DIFs shelter for children between 0-12 years old. There is another shelter for those children between 13-18 years old that I did not visit.

Counting me, we were twelve people all together. Thirty-five cases –which included groups of siblings– were going to be discussed that day.

In Barrancas, the majority of children enter the state *Albergue* as part of a judicial investigation ordered by the Ministry of the Public Prosecutor (*Ministerio Público*). That is, children are placed under the “temporary” care of a state institution while a crime– such as child neglect (*omisión de cuidado*), rape, sexual abuse, or family violence- is being investigated. *Albergue* meetings, such as the one I attended, take place once a month. They are occasions in which DIF staff assess each child’s legal situation and monitor the status of the reports and investigations that are necessary to resolve their individual legal cases. This means, in part, deciding if children will be sent to another, usually private, long-term orphanage; reintegrated with suitable family members; or if they can become candidates for adoption. Yet, to achieve an outcome that complies with the legal requirement to safeguard the “superior interest of each child”, careful techniques of timing and pacing must be observed in the production of the documents that will serve as legal proof.

For a file to be considered “ready” to be sent to the Adoption Department, it needs to include a series of documents proving the child’s adoptability. Each newly admitted child in the *Albergue* (or group of siblings, which are preferably kept together for adoption) is assigned to a social worker who will be in charge of preparing and handling the child’s file. Usually, children’s files start with an identification and entrance sheet, as well as a copy of the preliminary juridical investigation prepared by the *Ministerio Público*. In the cases where children are placed in the *Albergue* by their parents and family members, a signed form of “voluntary appearance” (*comparecencia*

voluntaria) is also in the file. Social workers also take pictures, as well as foot and handprints of all children, at the moment of admission. More current pictures at the time of adoption are usually also added. These initial documents are supplemented with one or more medical, psychological, developmental and social worker's reports that must be up to date if the child is to be considered a candidate for adoption. As I will explain in more detail below, all these reports now follow standardized formats, which are signed and/or stamped by the respective professionals.⁷⁶

Files also have to contain birth certificates for children to be adoptable. Usually, files also include different "informative notes" addressed to the DIF's Attorney (*Procuradora*) or the *Albergue's* Director, describing children's developmental needs or special situations concerning their birth families that could strengthen their adoption cases. Finally, all files need to include "no-visits reports" (*reporte de no-visitas*) and a statement of abandonment or exposure (*constancia de abandono o exposición*) signed by the DIF's *Procuradora*.

Once in the Adoption Department, an adoption petition file or *demanda de adopción* is prepared. This document is placed in a new file together with information on the adopting couple –who are legally the petitioners– and documents from the child's original adoption file. The adoption petition is based in the presentation of a number of "facts" and proofs", which are extracted from adoptive couple's dossiers, and children's files. As such, this new adoption file also follows a pre-established format or *machote*,⁷⁷ which only requires filling in the personal information of each new couple and child. This

⁷⁶ As mentioned earlier, state employees have to list the number of their professional license (*cédula profesional*) under their signature, to attest that they have a finished degree and are qualified in their fields.

⁷⁷ The word "*machote*" is interesting as it simultaneously alludes to a standardized format or draft and a masculine force.

framing is crucial for the file to be considered and evaluated by a judge (Barrera 2011). In civil law cultures such as Mexico, the development of a particular form of bureaucratic-legal knowledge is particularly salient, given that judicial practice is articulated heavily on written procedures without the physical presence of the involved parties (Barrera 2011:62). Yet, as Valderde (2003:24) has argued, the selection of the correct format is strongly related to “the question of epistemological authority, since certain formats have a built-in tendency to empower certain knowers.” In the case of adoption files, information about birth parents is avoided in the document, unless it appears in the *Ministerio Público*’s juridical investigation, which has to be attached as one of the proofs. Here, in the creation of the child’s file, it is possible to see how government workers produce a category of adoptable children by facilitating conditions under which normative understandings about the family can become part of legal paperwork, in such a way that it delivers the outcomes seen as more suitable for children and adoptive couples.

Let me focus on two cases that were discussed at the meeting. The first case involved two siblings neither of which had a birth certificate. One was a seven-year old boy, the other a toddler girl. Their mother had just given birth to a third child in a state hospital. During the youngest child’s birth, the hospital staff had noticed the older siblings’ state of malnutrition and extreme poverty, and convinced their mother to sign the necessary legal paperwork to send them to the DIF’s *Albergue* while she regained strength. She had stated that she did not have known relatives, was illiterate, unmarried, and poor. A month later, at the time of the *junta*, she was living in a women’s shelter in a nearby city with her newborn child and was unable to find work, but stated that she

wanted to get her two older children back. Yet the *Albergue* staff were suspicious of her moral standing, as she admitted that each child had a different father. The meeting members were reluctant to return the children to their mother, unless she –and I quote the lawyer- “showed interest, got a job with a daycare facility, and underwent surgery to avoid having more children.” In this case, the group agreed that what was needed was to delay the production of the children’s birth certificate until the legal time had elapsed for the children to be declared “exposed” (*expósitos*).

For legal purposes, minors not directly relinquished by their guardians in a legally binding “voluntary surrender,” need to be declared in “state of abandonment” (*estado de abandono*) or “state of exposure” (*estado de exposición*),⁷⁸ in order to be placed in adoption.⁷⁹ Legally in Mexico, the difference between an *expósito* and an abandoned child is that the former has no known legal guardians, while the second one does. That is, while abandoned children will have their parent(s)’ last name recorded in their birth certificate; *expósito* children’s last names are first marked as NN or No Name (*Ningun Nombre*) in institutional files, and then given an “administrative” name in their Birth Certificate.⁸⁰ In preparing such legal declarations, government workers focus on the documentation of family member visits to minors held in social assistance institutions. If

⁷⁸ Historically, *expositio* was the most widespread form of parental abandonment in the ancient world (Boswell 1984). However, authors such as Boswell (1984; 1988) and Panter-Brick (2000) have noted that it was understood as having benevolent aspects, such as providing children the opportunity of a new life through their “exposure” to the kindness of strangers, instead of infanticide. In Latin, the word exposure is closer to *patientia*, which is closer to “putting out” or “offering” than “exposing” a child (Boswell 1984: 12-13). This “exposure” of the child to a new future was allowed by maintaining the anonymity of the act (and of the birth family). Institutions in charge of children often protected this system of anonymity (Panter-Brick 2000).

⁷⁹ The responsibility of issuing such legal declarations shifted in 2005 from the Public Ministry to the DIF’s PDMF (*Procuraduría de la Defensa del Menor y la Familia* or Office for the Defense of the Minor and the Family), in an effort to streamlining the “liberation” of children for adoption through the centralization of the process in the hands of the DIF.

⁸⁰ Donna Guy (2008) has shown how in the context of the Argentinian Dirty War the state turned such practices of parental abandonment or exposition into a military program aimed at getting rid of adolescents by having them disappeared and buried as NN or nameless people.

no visits are recorded in the entrance guard's log since children's admission or for a period of 30 consecutive days, a "no-visits report" can be issued. This supports the elaboration of a statement of abandonment or *exposición*, both of which can terminate parental rights and make children adoptable. In Barrancas, the timeframe for this declaration has been reduced considerably since the 1990s. While the 1993 Civil Code required children to remain at least 6 months in an institution without receiving visitors before being considered candidates for adoption, a subsequent legal reform in 2005 reduced this timeframe to three months, and then to 30 continuous days in 2010 (as mentioned in the introduction).

Aware of the ambiguities of this law, government workers preferred to handle *expósito* rather than abandoned children's files, sometimes omitting information about birth parents from birth certificates and other legal documents to assure a 'cleaner' and 'tighter' adoption file that could move faster and smoothly through different bureaucratic instances and into the Superior Court. The less files said about birth parents, the more they could carry with them the force of the law. Here, we see how waiting and timing is not only part of how subjects experience bureaucracies (Hoag 2011; Verdery 1996), but also how bureaucratic and legal documents are created.⁸¹ The kind of knowledge produced in these files could be responsible of letting cases move quickly or slowly, smoothly or jaggedly through the hands of diverse governmental authorities. As mentioned earlier, in 2010 the pressures to speed up the production of adoptions grew

⁸¹ Mathur (2014) has argued that bureaucratic time is much more complex than the production of disempowered waiting, and is characterized by a clash of various social times that unfold simultaneously. In her study of bureaucracy in Gopeshwar, India, she outlines five distinct forms of social time (the social discipline of everyday time; a sense of urgency; concerns with the near future and nostalgic representations of the past; long-term temporality; and unpredictable timings outside of the state itself). A central task of bureaucracy is to mediate these conflicting forms of social time (Mathur 2014:151).

stronger, in order to reach the goal of 100 adoptions by the end of the year. Perhaps moved by these daily pressures to maintain their jobs and please their superiors, government bureaucrats supported the “simplification” of cases as much as possible, by erasing the traces of children’s birth kinship.

In the case of these two siblings, waiting to elaborate the birth certificate until the “time of exposure” had elapsed gave state workers the ability to register them with “administrative” last names (usually those of DIF lawyers or authorities), leaving the line for their parents’ names blank in the certificate. Without this data in the document, children were legally *expósitos*, and only had “alleged parents” (*presuntos padres*) with no legal rights over the child, even in those cases in which the parents were in fact known to the *Albergue*’s staff. As Yngvesson and Coutin (2006:170) have pointed out, the production of legal knowledge is supported on a notion of “return” that links law to a supposed exterior and prior world from which it claims to derive truth. In this case, the birth certificate “returns” to birth retroactively—as an external occurrence prior to the law—defining it as an event that serves as law’s referent and legitimizes legal identity, kinship and/or citizenship. Yet, this return is actually a circular movement, in the sense that the birth certificate only leads back to the birth as a legally cognizable event, which in turn is the basis for the legality of the document. Moreover, this process of making the legally cognizable and the real equivalent introduces the possibility of alienation: if birth parents are not positioned as a mother or father in the record, kinship ties can be erased (Yngvesson and Coutin 2006:170). In this sense, documents such as birth certificates retroactively naturalize particular histories, making and unmaking persons and relations (Yngvesson and Coutin 2006:170).

The second case was that of a girl named Anahi. At the time Anahi was two-years old. Her mother had voluntarily brought her to the *Albergue*, because she feared for her safety at her workplace. She was a trash scavenger or *pepenadora*, and had just started a relationship with a new man. She had moved into a small room with him at his mother's house, but the child was not welcome. She said she had planned to save money to build her own room and get her daughter back, but she had failed to visit her child regularly. "In this case we have to talk it through with the [*Albergue's*] Director –the lawyer said-, for the good of the child, to see that, if the mother only comes to visit her sporadically, her visits are not registered in our log." The mother does not even have a birth certificate for herself, he explained, and the child could be considered for adoption as an *expósito*. He feared that if these measures weren't taken, Anahi would be deprived of a "proper" family and end up growing up in the *Albergue*. As a social worker commented: "that *señora* takes the *Albergue* as her personal childcare facility. That's all she wants!" Anahi's mother was regarded as an irresponsible woman, who put her own happiness with a new man before that of her child.

As I learned later through informal conversations, Anahi's mother had a history in the *Albergue* which further supported the group's decision: her older baby boy had also been placed in adoption as an *expósito* some years ago. This fact, however, was not mentioned in any of the legal files and did not come to bear in any of the formal conversations. With no birth certificate, there existed no legal relationship between him and Anahi or their mother; yet the *Albergue* staff knew, and evaluated their mother's worthiness accordingly. For the staff, it was in Anahi's best interest to be placed in a new family. As I learned later, her birth mother did show up in the *Albergue* after some more

months to get her child back, but *Anahi* had already been placed in an adoptive family. She was told that the adoption was final, and there was nothing she could do about it. As mentioned earlier neither she nor Anahi had a birth certificate, and there was no legal proof of their filiation. In trying to protect the future life of Anahi, DIF workers had to make her mother invisible to the state and its own system of care. As such, the staff had to agree to avoid recording her sporadic visits (which, if recorded would have prevented the “time of exposure” to run out), in order to assure that Anahi’s adoption could be approved faster and smoothly, and that her file was expunged of ‘excessive’ information about natal relatives that could delay her case.

These two cases elucidate how government workers’ goal to give children new lives in “better” families as soon as possible simultaneously involves purging legal files of excessive references –in this case to birth mothers. As such, in order to liberate minors for adoption by turning them into the legal object of the parentless child, government workers ordinarily move across normative fields that exceed what we often take to be the stable limits of the law. As Poole has argued, the frontier between what the state –and its law- is and is not “runs through the very heart of those offices, institutions, and individuals who seem to embody the very center of the central state” (2004:43). Facts need to be created, filled in or left out to produce a legal image of uniformity and coherence in children’s files. State workers have to manage the particularities of cases, placing them into legal molds and frameworks that will do the work that is needed for them to ensure that the documents travel successfully through different government offices and deliver ‘justice’ to children at the expense, perhaps, of birth parents. For state bureaucrats the boundaries of law are not something fixed. Normative understandings

that discredit the maternity of poor women can thus be invoked to authorize the need to expunge or depurate information from documents, so that they can move forward in the legal system. As Mathews (2005) has pointed out in the context of the Mexican forestry bureaucracy, the state works not only through the production of legibility and visibility, as some scholars have argued (Scott 1998), but also by leaving things out of documents and claiming ignorance (see Hoag 2011; Hull 2012a), which can help perpetuate forms of structural violence against the poor (Gupta 2012:147).

Here, what also allows documents to move effectively are the racialized and class-based understandings about birth parents that support social norms preventing them from gaining access to the legal mechanisms to contest such legal rulings in the first place (Leinaweaver 2009a; Leinaweaver and Seligmann 2009). While men and women are constitutionally given equal rights, in practice women's rights are tied up to notions of moral standing embedded in family and community networks (Hegel-Cantarella 2011:379). Disparities between the formal legal presumption of juridical subjects as autonomous individuals and the cultural realities (some of which I mentioned in chapter one), which locate women and children as subordinate of men (Coutin 2011:460), make women more vulnerable to accusations of immoral or illicit behavior (Hegel-Cantarella 2011: 379). While in cases of sexual assault interventions, for example, women tend to filter into the paperwork predominantly as victims or caregivers of victims (Mulla 2011b:427), in the case of adoption files, as I will further explore in the last chapter, women tend to enter documents as bad or sexually immoral (unmarried) mothers, rather than as victims of male perpetrators.

As these cases show, more than the management of rules and regulations, the government's legal work is an ordinary struggle in which those in charge make use of diverse personal motivations and assessments –such as their sense of what the “best interest of the minor” might be, and their readings of the wishes of their superiors, for example– to produce particular legal effects (Leinaweaver 2009a; see also Das 2004:238-239). More than the expression of rational authority, in which files are extensions of internal coherent norms (Weber 1978), we see here that abstract rules are not specific enough to fit all local contexts, and government workers have to constantly interpret them (Das 2004, Hoag 2011:82). Deviations and reinterpretation of norms are a central part of the social lives of bureaucracies (Brans and Rosbach 1997, Luhmann 1982). As Luhmann (1982) pointed out, bureaucrats always already belong to a social environment, which exceeds the organization (Brans and Rosbach 1997:421-22). Here, unspoken norms about the unworthiness of poor mothers to raise their children as useful citizens become part of forms of “common sense” (Geertz 1983) that authorize certain documentary manipulations and understandings of the law. I now move to the second meeting, in order to show how words are carefully placed in documents so they adhere to a legal form that could create actionable cases.

The Adoption Council's Meeting

As mentioned in the previous chapter, the DIF's Technical Adoption Council is in charge of determining the “viability” of couples' applications and of matching or pre-assigning legally liberated minors (*menores liberados*) with approved applicants. The main points and results of this meeting are registered in official proceedings or *actas*

signed by the Council members, which also need to be carefully worded to make data uniform across other legal documents. It was as the typist of the Council's *actas* that I was allowed to take part in the meetings. The Prosecutor, who was officially in charge of this task, had handed it down to the *licenciado*, who in turn asked me to do it. Since the *licenciado* had taken office in 2008, no *actas* had been produced at all, so I was asked to write the 2009 missing *actas* too, based on tape recordings that he had made.

As I quickly learned, the 'proper' preparation of these and other official documents required careful crafting. The official *actas* –which could later serve as legal proofs–, had to be cautiously worded, avoiding mentioning potentially controversial information or exchanges among the Council members. They had to be “executive” –the *licenciado* explained me- by focusing only on the Council member's reached agreements, and by copy-pasting the same data that was used and repeated in all other legal documents, so that no “unnecessary” information was revealed, which could later generate legal difficulties. As such, my office work was to ‘expunge’ these files from any rich or textured information that I, as anthropologist, would have found interesting for my own research. Particularly, as the media scandal mentioned at the beginning unfolded, the imperative to expunge documents of information about natal kinship grew stronger. What follows is an example of a particular meeting.

Participants discussed the case of two boys, around 4 and 2 years-old, who had been sent to the *Albergue* six months before as part of a judiciary investigation of parental neglect. At the meeting itself only a few people –the *Albergue* lawyer and the head of the Adoption Department- were familiar with the children's complete files. The other members based their decisions exclusively on participants' commentaries and data

sheets that showed only the basic information about each case. Scholars (Gupta 2012:152-153; Mulla 2011b:424) have noted that the vast majority of bureaucratic and legal writing is never read and workers often make assessments over files without reading their content. In this case, in a previous interdisciplinary meeting held the day before, the Adoption Department members had already reached informal agreements about how to vote and what to say in the official meeting. Responding to questions from some of the members who had not read the complete files, the *Albergue* lawyer explained:

In this case, who abandoned them is the mother, a young woman, 22-years old [...] She does not have a stable life, she likes to go out to bars, drink alcoholic beverages, and she only returns home like around five in the morning. She did not legally register the children either. The one that placed the complaint is the alleged person who took care of the children while the mother went out to the parties (*a los bailes*). At the beginning, the mother tried to complete the paperwork [to recuperate the children] but then she stopped coming.

After listening to the lawyer and asking some questions, the *Procuradora* inquired what was known about the children's father. The lawyer replied promptly: "This is precisely a situation where the alleged father is married [to another woman]. And he wants to [live in a bigamous relation]. So we agreed with the mother that she should declare that it is her will to give up the children for adoption, to avoid all the cumbersome legal paperwork involved in retrieving her parental rights." The *Procuradora* added quickly: "Well, in this case the children are not registered as her own.... Look, you know what happens? Sometimes because we try to sensitize [these people] a lot of time is lost [...] Well, what I mean is that those of us who are mothers are always looking after our children. [...] You see, if one of my children would get lost, in five minutes I would already be crazy!" The head of the Adoption Department interrupted: "I have dealt with those cases too, trying to [convince mothers to] do a voluntary surrender of the child, but

[later] they repent, they say we are dealing arbitrarily with their children, that their children are fine with them [...]” The *Procuradora* replied:

Those cases are typical [...] but if we say, ‘lets give the mother another chance’, in two years –if we are still working here- we will see each other again and it’s going to be the same story: the children will be older, and the mother never came, and all that because we paid attention to her (*por estarle haciendo caso*)! Hey, she already committed a crime, she entrusted her children to others (*los encargaba*), she abandoned them, she went out to parties and didn’t give a damn about her kids (*y le valian gorro sus hijos*), and we are still trying to make her understand? [...] If the children have no birth certificate and we registered them [as *expósitos*], at this point there is no [legal] kinship tie with her. What will happen now? Well, we will give them in adoption!

That day the Council members unanimously voted that the siblings should be placed in an adoptive family. Yet, the exchanges leading to the final vote did not figure in the official proceedings, which consisted of the same copy-pasted information that was written down in the children’s adoption file – the one that would be sent to the Superior Court for judicial approval. Anticipating “future moments in which documents will be received, circulated, instrumentalized, and taken apart” (Riles 2006:18), the final version supported the image of an absent mother not available for her children. The knowledge about the siblings’ birth mother had to be managed, limiting the document’s contents to repetitive words. This move was also closely aligned to the need to produce “auditable” documents. The knowledge about the siblings’ birth mother had to be managed, and the document’s contents carefully controlled.

In general, mentioning birth relatives was avoided as much as possible, and when not possible, the word “alleged” or *presunta* was included before the kinship words. If children’s parents’ names did not appear in their birth certificates, they only had *alleged* relatives, with no legal weight. Documents needed to be freed from any excessive

information that might stop or hinder the efficacy of the law in procuring the social mobility of children and their insertion into a new state-approved family. Once uniformity across different legal documents was achieved, and the criteria of their comparability in relation to similar files was met, they would be able to be integrated into a coherent adoption file and move into the Superior Court promptly, where a judge could finally approve the adoption. As this case shows, files establish the limits of reality and juridical knowledge, making particular relations visible or invisible by registering and shaping how events are understood (Barrera 2011:62; Coutin 2011:459). Legal and bureaucratic documents' capacity to anticipate, condition, restring or allow forms of knowledge shows their agency as part of a communicative networks that places them in relation to other documents and practices (Barrera 2011; Riles 2006). As Coutin (2011) has shown, that which is not recorded in documents and is merely "presumed" cannot be translated or moved forward. Omissions such as the reasons for a birth mother's lack of resources, or her inability to find a daycare facility are central to documents' capacity to "record and erase or omit" particular histories (Coutin 2011:459).

For children to move into a new family, the legal adoption files had to be able to move too, and this required the careful wording of documents, to convey both the legal strength of the adoption procedures and the superfluity of natal kinship. As such, as it reaches the court, the file becomes a *juicio especial de adopción* or "special adoption trial", signaling in part the fact that there is no defendant or birth family, only a petitioning couple and free-standing children. Birth parents have been almost completely erased. Here, we see how the form through which knowledge is produced in documents has the power of generating "life-changing fissures or fusions among kin" (Mulla

2011a:354). As Posocco (2011) has noted, the association of adoption with a happy family and a promising new future for children is partly sustained by legal and bureaucratic practices such as those mentioned here, that help to erase children's birth histories from documents (Posocco 2011; Coutin 2011:460). For Posocco (2011) the knowledge of these relationships poses problems for state officials, as it could foster affective states of paranoia, or even suspicions of child traffic, such as in the media scandal mentioned at the beginning of the chapter. Measures such as ISO certifications, which I will describe below, could be seen as attempts to reduce the possibility of the emergence of such "anti-social affects" in the adoption process (Posocco 2011).

Through these cases, the implementation of law emerges not so much as the sole outcome of rules or distant powers, but as a process or movement that is made possible by combining normative understandings about poor mothers with legal imperatives to protect vulnerable minors. As Poole (2012:84) has shown in the implementation of participatory budgets in Peru, law is not a transcendental expression of the State's will, but a space of experimentation in which flexible understandings of norm and risk intervene. As I have shown here, the bureaucratic space of the DIF is also inflected by different normative understandings about children and families that authorize the elaboration of official paperwork.

In the remaining of the chapter, I will further explore the intersection of law and norm by looking at (1) the government's attempts to standardize adoption procedures through market languages, and (2) the everyday practices through which state workers make the law 'do justice' to friendships and personal relations. As Hegel-Cantarella (2011:380) has pointed out, the fact that institutional documents structure knowledge and

practice according to bureaucratic logics does not imply that they are entirely depersonalized. Their meanings are shaped by other understandings beyond the institution, legitimizing forms of legal interaction. As such, documents are not simple repositories of information, but can generate outcomes that are not necessarily contingent upon the veracity of the information they contain (Hegel-Cantarella 2011:381).

As I will argue, for the law to deliver justice to particular people and children, it might have to participate in its own violation. My aim, however, is not to pinpoint the “corruption” of certain government workers or agencies (as there is nothing extraordinary in these cases), nor to present corruption as a coherent and unified system, but rather to think of how—at the level of governmental bureaucracy—, forms of stratified reproduction are brought to bear in the law to create particular effects and outcomes that are seen as beneficial for children. While some authors have focused on how structural forms of bureaucratic corruption allow the exercise of violence towards the poor, and have made calls for increased transparency (Gupta 2012:91-92, 138), I pay more attention to how the shifting lines between public and private interests in the office are constantly reshaped and redrawn by government workers, who move between imperatives to both produce legal outcomes, while honoring personal relations and forms of friendship. Here, again, the borders of what constitutes law or its corruption are not clear-cut from the outset.

Languages of Standardization

In 2009, the Barrancas-DIF formally started the process of “Quality Management Certification” of its adoption procedures, under the international ISO 9001:2008 norms.⁸² Through its adhesion to the ISO, or International Organization for Standardization, the DIF hoped to make the adoption process more agile and transparent for children and adoptive parents, “strengthening the confidence of society in its authorities by supporting a new culture of adoption.”⁸³ The Adoption Department would become the first government office to hold such a title within the state, and would also make Barrancas the first state in the Republic with a certified adoption process—it was advertised.⁸⁴ These efforts were later abandoned in 2012,⁸⁵ once a new governmental administration took office in the state. However, they portray both the long-term fragility of governmental programs and, and the changing political environment in which bureaucrats work and produce legal “results.” As Grindle (1977:41) noted long ago, political and bureaucratic time in Mexico has been historically guided by the *sexenio*, or six-year Presidential term, which structures the governmental administration and its goals. At the municipal level this occurs every three years.

At the time of my fieldwork the work was hard for the Adoption Department staff, as all employees had to comply with the training and certification steps while also continuing to carry out their daily office tasks. This usually meant staying in the office

⁸² As a widely used business management tool, the ISO norms focus mainly on enterprises supplying services or products, helping them to increase productivity, operational performance and financial benefits. The ISO 9001 requires audits by independent third-party certifying agencies, which confirm that organizations have met the appropriate requirements.

⁸³ *Local Newspaper*, January 14th, 2010.

⁸⁴ *Local Newspaper*, October 7th, 2010.

⁸⁵ Yet, the nationwide the DIF now implementing an Informatics Adoption System (Sistema Informático de Adopciones) to maintain a register of all adoptions carried out in each state.

for many extra hours, sometimes until late at night, without extra compensation. Each area in the Adoption Department involved in evaluating prospective couples and generating legal paperwork had to learn how to use the corresponding new formats and codes to register all their assessments and evaluations. At the same time, members of the Adoption Department and related areas (such as the *Albergue*) were required to take part in internal audit committees to assure self-betterment and internal control of the quality process.

Above all, the certification process involved the production of large amounts of paperwork, much more than anything the Adoption Department had ever produced before. As other scholars have pointed out (Mathur 2012, Riles 2006), the materialization of transparency in bureaucracy is achieved through the production and circulation of “correct” documents (Mathur 2012:173). Now, each action carried out by the Adoption Department needed to be documented in a specific format for that action, so that the process could become as standardized, transparent and “rational” as possible. Uniformity had to reign in all forms, styles, fonts and formats used by the Department, according to a manual that was created for that purpose. Since the start of this process children’s files produced in the *Albergue* had to follow the same formatting styles as other Adoption Department files. Moreover, the duties and profiles of all employees had to be defined, as well as the formats and forms for the medical, psychological and social work evaluations. For example, the ISO standard required that organizations issued and maintained at least six documented procedures (control of documents, control of records, internal audits, control of nonconforming product, corrective and preventive actions), as well as any other procedures that they required for their operation. ISO also requires organizations to

issue a quality policy (with quality objectives), quality manual and records of all their daily activities. Each employee needs to know and understand the quality policy and work toward measurable objectives. The recorded data will help the organization make decisions about the quality system, which has to be regularly audited internally and also by external personnel. The main purpose is to have records that can provide documentary proofs of each single step in the adoption process, in order to trace all activities to its source.

Although the ISO certification normativity had to be adapted to the particular requirements of the adoption process, it still relied heavily on market languages. This introduction of market languages points to the simultaneous co-production of kinship and economy in the context of adoption (Leinaweaver 2013b: 560). Through this system, the DIF became the formal provider of a “service” to adoptive couples, which were regarded as the state’s “clients.” Adoptable children –and their files–were thus labeled as the “products” delivered to the “clients.” Following the business model, the DIF had to determine customers’ (i.e. prospective adoptive parents’) requirements, and have an efficient system to communicate with them to explain all the relevant information regarding their “product” child. To improve the quality of the adoption service, it was important to receive feedback, complaints, inquiries and monitor improvements. As such, couples wishing to adopt had to sign receipt forms, satisfaction surveys, delivery forms, etc., something that had never been done before in the office.

At the very beginning of my fieldwork I attended one training session for internal auditors, which I found particularly illuminating. Let me focus on some exchanges in the conversation that highlight the language and “moralities of public management”

(Strathern 2000:2) of the ISO certification. During the meeting, an instructor of the training company explained to the DIF's internal auditors about the "beauty" of the ISO Quality Policy and Quality Manual: "Each paragraph of the text is auditable, and can be demonstrated. That is the beauty of the norm, its universality: It can be used by an engineer, an astronaut, or by you here in adoptions. It is the same; it always carries out the same processes." After some questions and commentaries, the instructor continued explaining:

It's necessary to apply very concrete controls to design and develop the product. The point "*7.3 Design and Development Planning of the Product*" is not applicable, since the product proper, the [adoptable] child, cannot be designed! We can only use the format as a guide. So let's move to the next point, which is "*7.3.2 Determine the requirements related to the product.*" Those who want to be parents know what documents they need to hand in and only then they can be parents. If the client arrives and says: "I want a child, 4 years old, Caucasian, etc." The question is: Can I give him such a child or not? [...] In this case the client can only express her preference in the age and sex of the child.

Some of the DIF participants seemed a bit skeptic and asked him how this system would prevent the possibility of bribery and corruption; another worker even described a case in which they had been pressured "from above" to favor a particular couple wishing to adopt. The instructor ignored the comments and continued with the next point:

"*7.4 Purchasing*": This refers to how one determines the entry of the product into the process. Although the product of adoption is not a "purchase" as such, this point does apply to the external servers, the *Albergue's* staff, who is in charge of producing the child's internal file. The concrete "product" is called "child", but the child cannot be audited because it has no voice, so the concrete product becomes the child's file, which is what can be audited. Well, I personally am not against calling the child a product, since even doctors [in Mexico] call it that way!⁸⁶

⁸⁶ Fieldwork 01/15/10.

As Latour (2010) has noted, thinking in terms of files produces different effects than thinking in terms of people (Levy and Valverde 2008:817). Focusing on children's files can minimize the emotional aspects of dealing with cases instead of lives (Fuglerud 2004). Through documentary techniques of ISO Certification, children's lives were transferred into neat records that could constitute them as files, similar to what Chatterji has shown for clinical settings (Chatterji et al. 1998). For geriatric patients in the Netherlands, for example, a "file self" is created that allows medical bureaucrats to treat persons as problem-cases that need to be solved (Chatterji et al. 1998:186). Here, the adoptable child had to become a file in order to be treated as a freestanding "product" (unrelated to birth relatives) and in need of placement with the appropriate "clients."

The process of certification was taken very seriously by people in the office, who were proud of learning the "modern" languages of ISO Standardization, and to work in an office that could claim efficiency and transparency in its procedures. Yet, office workers were also aware that personal transactions could not be completely left out of this image of governmental rationality, and that sometimes it was only the appearance of transparency as a sign of integrity that mattered most (see Morris 2004; Strathern 2000). As Akhil Gupta (2013:438) has pointed out "increasing processualism does not necessarily diminish corruption and can even help to augment it. [...] And what happens on the ground becomes irrelevant as long as the paperwork is in order, and as long as it is internally consistent." Drawing on ethnographic material from a government hospital in Papua New Guinea, Street (2012) also shows how bureaucrats' performance of institutional transparency often works more as a form of theatrical display than as a radical change in technical knowledge. As a bureaucratic technology, it elicits affective

responses and motivations from an audience that in turn generate new forms of visibility and power relations (Street 2012:1). This, of course, is not something exclusive to bureaucracies in the global South, but part of what characterizes bureaucracy a “technology of governmentality” (Gupta 2013: 437).

The ISO Standardization of the Adoption Process required the careful realignment of longstanding work ethics and forms of sociality in the office with the new international “quality norms” of service provision. During my fieldwork, for example, I assisted in the creation of the first drafts of the “employee profiles”, which stipulated the minimum requirements for each post, assessment of capabilities, as well as projects towards self-improvement. This new practice was unprecedented in the DIF’s Adoption Department, since historically many employees had been appointed through friendships and other personal connections, and as such often did not cover the minimum requirements of the post. Because of that, the Adoption Department superiors now faced new challenges to adjust “employment profiles” so as to maintain current employees in their posts, while creating the image of a rational hiring process for ISO Certification.

Oftentimes workers had to resort to creative measures to fill in the gaps of previous documentary mistakes or omissions. As Gupta has found in India, lower-level state officials regularly supplement government procedures with practices “of their own invention that were neither authorized nor standardized” (2013:436). As an external audition approached, for example, the Adoption Department superiors, and certifying company members, noticed that in the early stages of the ISO certification process the staff had forgotten to ask some (about thirteen) new couples in the Waiting List to fill in their questionnaires of “client satisfaction.” This omission meant that the substantiating

documentation of the correct implementation of the ISO Norm was going to be incomplete for the purposes of the upcoming audit; and workers feared the consequences of negative results. Failing to receive the certification could mean to loose one's job. Since the most important aspect of the ISO certification –beyond workers actual thoughts about its applicability– was seen as being able show the full documentation and paper trails for each action taken in the Adoption Department, the solution was seen as simply creating the missing papers and forging the signatures. As mentioned above, this was in alignment with longstanding bureaucratic practices that regarded the conformance of governmental paperwork to a certain form of uniformity as the best expression of order and rationality. Manipulating these kinds of survey documents was seen as a harmless task that could be done over jokes in the *licenciado*'s office without further questions. More than the truthfulness of the content, what seemed to matter most was the production of coherence and uniformity within files, which was encouraged by the new ISO certification process. I had come to know, as the other workers did, that hardly anybody read full files, or compared paperwork in state offices.

Yet it was the completeness of a file that allowed it to produce a particular outcome, and later to be stored away. As Coutin (2011:459) has pointed out, documents' enchainment with other documents gives them power. What matters for state workers is the outcome, I understood; while the content is mostly important as long at it conforms to the required form of the file. As mentioned earlier, one of the attributes of bureaucratic documents is their reliance on standard formularies that claim to produce comparable, coherent, and efficient documents that simplify processes and assure results (something that the ISO certification reinforced) (Barrera 2011:67). Through particular documentary

aesthetics and language choices, bureaucrats reanimate the law's past in their use of legal language, and anticipate social events and the operation of the law in the future (Richland 2013:219). For DIF workers, documents and paperwork were routine instruments of bureaucratic practice that had as their goal the achievement of legal decision (Barrera 2011). More than the veracity of each single document, what mattered most was its place as a "small part of a whole" file that could be acted upon in a legal setting (Mulla 2011b:430). As parts of an ensemble, documents could produce chain reactions and call for official acts (Barrera 2011:64-65; Visman 2008). At the same time, this conception of paperwork as mediums to achieve an end focuses on the results of institutional acts (such as judicial rulings), and minimized the role of bureaucrats and legal actors in the production of documents and law itself through files as artifacts of knowledge (Barrera 2011; Riles 2006).

Here, important questions about agency and responsibility arise: while the adjudication of personal responsibility requires agency, government institutions constantly diffuse responsibility from individual members in the production of particular documents even if individual authorship of words and marks is maintained (Hull 2003). As mentioned in the first chapter, government workers also recur to the figure of God, to present their work (and that of the documents they produce) as mere mediators of His Will, and not as individual actors or agents in their own will. Hull has shown how while discourse has to be anchored on signs such as signatures to authorize its use in official settings, corporate agency is also achieved through "circulatory and discursive strategies" that merge writings with their broader context of production and ground them in the corporate order instead of individual authors (2003:294,299).

Through the ISO certification, files were subjected to a new regime of documentation that aimed to rationalize practices in such a way that they could more effectively create collective agency. As Hull (2003) shows, such rationalizing efforts are appealing precisely because state officials often fear how their documentary authorship might hold them responsible for their actions in the future, as I noted at the beginning of the chapter. For this, the temporality of bureaucratic positions is also an important factor. By the time finished records with a juridical ruling might be reopened, those in charge of them might probably not be in their posts anymore, and there will be nobody who can be made personally responsible. Yet, the achievement of collective agency through attempts of rationalizing documentary production (Hoag 2011; Hull 2003) is not only guided by an internal logic that allows them to remain stable despite changes in personnel and political regimes (Weber 1978), but also by individual efforts to avoid personal responsibility and “ritually diffuse the agency of individuals” (Hull 2003: 290).

Even though the forged documents were not used at the end (as a member of the certifying company discovered the inconsistencies before the formal audit), older oral conventions guided what was acceptable or not in the office; and it was well known that forged documents are a mundane part of bureaucratic work. This was considered something internal to the workings of the state that merely facilitated the work in the office without really affecting their delivery of just legal outcomes. What I want to highlight by focusing on this particular episode is the way in which forms of legality and forgery merge into each other in the daily workings of the state. As Goodale (2008) has pointed out, legality and illegality are in “constant motion” with each other; that is, they are never finally settled discursively. Rather, they belong to the same conceptual

framework within which the law works (Goodale 2008:216). The forgery of signatures was merely something that needed to be done to move forward with the certification process and to create a desired outcome—which in this case was the appearance of order and efficiency. Even in the context of new languages of standardization and productivity, the daily work in the office entailed the constant mixture of personal motivations in the interpretation of rules and procedures.

Technologies of transparency, such as the ISO certification, aim to correct the deficits and arbitrariness of bureaucratic decision-making practices by instituting forms of universal accountability and audit (Ballesterio 2012:160, Hetherington 2012:243, Strathern 2000). This move seems to follow Weber's (1978:973-5) promise that "bureaucracy develops the more perfectly, the more it is 'dehumanized', the more completely it succeeds in eliminating from official business love, hatred, and all purely personal, irrational and emotional elements which escape calculation." Yet, this was not the case in the DIF. On the contrary, these requirements were folded into already existing forms of documentary practices in which forgery could lay the basis for transparency, and vice versa. As Mathur has shown in the Indian context, instead of making things easier, the need for more paperwork sometimes even posed "a hindrance" to the regular working of state bureaucracies (2012:167-168). As Strathern (2005:465) has pointed out, public sector audits have aimed to make "certain social processes explicit, especially monitoring how aims and objectives have been achieved." While audits, for example, aim to alleviate the "institutional uncertainty" that is part of public service (Strathern 2005:466), through management audits the future of the organization is also rendered fragile: the organization has to constantly "strive to improve" (Strathern 2005:465) to meet its targets.

The bureaucratic apparatus thus has to orient its actions to the future and project how its actions will be read and interpreted beyond the current administration.

As such, standardized documents also invite particular modes of engagement from those in charge of producing and monitoring them, and shape forms of intervention, inclusion and exclusion of those who are the subject matter to be documented (Mulla 2011b: 415-416). In this regard, authors have noted how these bureaucratic and documentary practices allow the direct exercise of indifference towards some people (Herzfeld 1992). I will return in more detail to the issue of bureaucratic indifference in the last chapter, but for now I just want to stress the intimate connection between writing practices, transparency, authorship and forms of governmental practice. Gupta (2012:32), for example, has pointed out how, in the case of development programs in India, forms of ordinary violence are normalized and routinized in the practices of state institutions, making them invisible and taken for granted (2012:5). Yet for him, it is the arbitrary and contingent interpretation of rules that produces repeated and systematic forms of violence towards the poor, and not the lack of care or callousness of individual workers. Even if individual bureaucrats and politicians are sincere in their goal of helping vulnerable groups, the structural procedures of bureaucracy reveal the state's "specific modality of uncaring" (2012:23). As such, the very programs that are supposed to improve the lives of the poor systematically produce forms of violence "without intention" (2012:22).

Moreover, quests for further standardization and transparency continue to take place within fields of normativity that prescribe the superior value of children's lives over their parents. As Carsten (2007) has noted –and I will discuss further in chapter three–, in plenary adoption there is a particular tension between the value of transparency and

information, and the protection of those involved and vulnerable to its effects. Scherz (2011), for example, has shown how actuarial risk assessment tools used since the 1980s by the United States Child Protective Services to “standardize decisions” and address concerns of lack of transparency continue to allow value conflicts to be “papered over by the appearance of technocratic regularity” (Scherz 2011:33). As Scherz (2011:34) argues, while these risk assessment tools may lend the appearance of increased transparency, accountability and rationality, they end up concealing the heterogeneity of decision-making processes involved in defining what counts as abuse, neglect or risk. In the DIF, promises of transparency have also contributed to justify the erasure of data about birth parents in the name of producing files with more standardized forms and protecting children from ‘harmful’ information. Standardization claims to “legibility, commensuration, and hierarchy” (Dunn 2005:183) were central to their ability to obscure local political economies and their impact in adoption procedures. As Morris has argued, in Thailand the rhetoric of transparency and corruption has replaced references to structural inequality to discuss social and economic ills (2004: 227-8). Paradoxically, ISO standards –which are based on distinctively market languages–, were appealing to DIF officials as a way to conjure away the specter of economic inequality, corruption and “traffic” in child adoption. As such, transparency was also meant to ‘clean up’ adoption from its conditions of possibility in the poverty of birth families.

In this regard, the ISO certification process raises interesting questions concerning the relation between the adoption program’s knowable and technical domains and its “constitutive exclusions” (Li 2007:231) of political-economical relations shaping the availability of adoptable children. For example, what was the DIF’s rationale in thinking

that the adherence to international ISO Standards and improved transparency would make adoption more legitimate? The Adoption Department's reliance on auditable files was supposed to increase transparency and thus confidence in the production process of the adoption procedure and the DIF's overall institutional accountability. Yet, this accountability and confidence was largely directed to those considered the DIF's "clients": adoptive parents and prospective couples. The new confidence that the DIF delivered was also its promise that the child (as the "product") was free of kinship stains and could not be claimed back by biological relatives. Thus, standardization also worked as a mechanism to make the "cut" between children and their birth relatives more "clean" and unproblematic. Here a shifting relation between visibility and invisibility also takes shape: while the technical production process of the file is made visible in new ways, children's origins and birth kinship is made increasingly irrelevant and invisible.

Adoption becomes part of a "technozone" (Dunn 2005:180) that is said to share the same problems as other programs in different geographies. As Collier and Ong (2005:11) noted, a "standards regime" operates as a "global form" that produces comparability regardless of the context in which it is set up. Elizabeth Dunn (2005:176) has shown how in the context of the meat industry in Poland, for example, standards such as the ISO 9000 series do not only shape the quality of a finished product but discipline firms by shaping the organization of the whole production process, and promising to deliver consistency. Audits, as globally dispersed disciplinary tools of standardization, aim to act as internal mechanisms of self-improvement (Dunn 2005:176; Strathern 2005:466). This could be seen as part of the "calculative regimes of accounting and financial management" that characterize advanced liberalism in their new configuration

of expertise and politics (Rose 1993:295) Yet, as mentioned in the introduction, in Mexico adoption welfare as a domain of substantive intervention inscribed in the calculations of rules emerged at the same time that these new devices –such as the ISO certification– of audit and transparency. These processes that aim to render expertise governable in new ways, destabilizing the former governmental trust in professional credentials (Rose 1993:296), are unfinished at best and work alongside older truth claims based on bureaucratic forms of expertise that continue to imbricate the moral and the technical in ordinary procedures.

Making Documents “Do Justice”

I felt something strangely familiar when I saw a baby girl’s picture in her legal file. Her “administrative” name was Lucia. As mentioned in the introduction, I had asked for permission to review some institutionalized children’s files in the *Albergue*, to get a better sense about their trajectories and those of their birth parents. With help of the head of the DIF’s Adoption Department, I was given permission to review the files in the *Albergue*’s small archive, which held documents since the 1990s divided in adoptions, transfers or reintegrations. That particular day, I was reviewing the files of children who had been reintegrated with members of their birth families. Lucia’s file was one of them. Yet, the picture in her file belonged to a baby, less than two-years old, who I had met in the arms of an adoptive mother. In fact, both of her parents, Esperanza and Paco, were low-rank government bureaucrats, who I had met during my fieldwork. Puzzled by the discovery of the file, I continued reading carefully. How could this file say that she was reintegrated to her birth mother, when in fact she had been recently adopted? Was it only

a coincidence that the babies looked so much alike? As I continued reading, I learned that Lucia had been abandoned inside a church as an infant, and that the sexton took her to the police, who in turn went to the Public Ministry to file a complaint for “omission of care” (*omisión de cuidados*) and “exposure of incapable minors” (*exposición de incapaces*). Since then, Lucia was placed in the state’s *Albergue* as an “exposed” child and nobody had visited her in the following five months. As I continued turning the file’s pages, the documents became more and more intriguing to me. The file was complete and well ordered, following all the proper legal and bureaucratic formalities—even those of the recent ISO 9001:2008 Certification process described above—, but the actual data that it contained was mysteriously confusing for me. Lucia’s *expediente* included a “voluntary appearance” (*comparecencia*) of her birth mother, who was said to be Esperanza, the government worker. The documents themselves followed the proper format, style and legal wording of all other documents that I had reviewed so far in the DIF. The only difference this time, which the file’s form and careful formatting did not reveal in itself, was that I personally knew that Esperanza was not Lucia’s biological mother. Knowing Esperanza’s adoption history, I could see that only her full name was accurate, as all the other identifying information in the file, including the copy of her ID, had been made up. According to the narrative of the file, Esperanza appeared in the *Albergue* with the child’s birth certificate in hand to recover her child. The copy of the birth certificate in the file, did in fact list her and Paco as the legal parents of the child (Lucia), who they had officially named María Guadalupe. Esperanza was supposed to be a 20-year Old Catholic housewife from another state who had moved to Barrancas with her husband Paco. Her statement said something like this:

The reason why I present myself here is to get my daughter, María Guadalupe, back, who I know is called Lucía in this *Albergue*. I know that what I did is nothing good, and that even though I left her in a place where I knew she would be fine, my intention was never to abandon her. Back then I did not know what had happened to me, but now I know that it is called postpartum depression, because in that time my husband was away (in the USA). During the time that he was away I had an affair with an ex-boyfriend who lured me into procreating a child. When I realized what I had done I tried to hide my pregnancy as much as I could and when I was about to give birth a friend, whose name I am not mentioning to protect her, told me she knew a midwife in a nearby town that could help me because I could not pay a hospital. After I delivered we went to the Church to thank God, and there I saw people who could take care of my baby, and that is why I left her there. However, when my husband returned I was drowning with desperation and I told him the truth. He supported me and we went back to the church to ask for my baby, and they told us that he had been sent to the DIF's *Albergue* and that he might have been already given in adoption. That is the reason we are here today, to solicit the reintegration of our child, with whom I can prove legal kinship. I will never do this again, as I learned my lesson and I am receiving psychological therapy and a social worker has visited our home.

The *comparecencia* was signed by her, and also had an attached copy of her official voting card, which again contained Esperanza's full name, but an incorrect address and a photo that I knew belonged to another person. After the baby's birth certificate, the file contained a "certificate of egress" (*acta de egreso*), in which it was formally stated that Lucia was reintegrated with her birth mother. If I had not known Esperanza or her adopted child before encountering the file, this would just have been one more *expediente* in the *Albergue's* archive that followed all the proper legal formalities and guidelines. It was a complete file with proper signatures and stamps, and all the necessary documents to complete a child's reintegration were present. Yet, as Hull (2012a:259) has pointed out, inauthentic documents can "lay the foundation for authentic ones and create tangles of legal conflict that are irresolvable."

I never talked openly about this incident to Esperanza or anybody in the DIF. It was a secret, and whoever else knew about it pretended as much as I did not to know. The

“official” story, which Esperanza had told me, was that she had adopted María Guadalupe in another state, as she and her husband could not meet the Barrancas-DIF’s requirements. Esperanza and Paco had tried to get pregnant for five years before adopting María Guadalupe. They had tried to adopt legally through the DIF, but were rejected because of their meager income. She was only a secretary and he worked in maintenance. They did not have a house and Paco’s family was opposed to the adoption. Moreover, they did not intend to tell their child she was adopted, this was going to be another secret which the DIF psychologists, such as Barbara, did not approve of. At the time I met them, they lived in a wood and tin room in Paco’s parents plot of land. The property was shared with Paco’s parents and siblings, who came from peasant origins. Esperanza was not well liked by Paco’s family, and things became even more difficult as it became evident that she could not get pregnant.

Yet Esperanza and her husband were well loved by her coworkers and superiors. Esperanza had a particularly sharp sense of humor, and everybody liked to eat lunch and chat with her. When she told people in the DIF about her adoption, workers were happy for them and thought they “deserved” a child. Nobody doubted that the child would be loved and cared for. Some of her co-workers mentioned to me that they had gotten their child by “divine justice.” Yet, as I knew, it was her co-workers and friends who interceded between her and God to make the delivery of the child legally possible. For me, the preparation of the file I read was a sign of friendship by those who signed and endorsed the documents to give her a child. It was through friendship, that a legally sound file was produced allowing her and Paco to have access to a child as their own. In addition, none of the information in the file could be traced back to Esperanza, and it

protected those involved by following all the proper procedures of the law. For legal purposes, as the state workers knew well, what mattered most was the internal coherence and uniformity within the file, and not so much its relation to the actual people it represented. Although documents were forged, they still followed all the proper bureaucratic formalities, and looked as legal as those in other children's files. They followed the law's commitment to form, maintained the relevant content that ensured a particular legal outcome. Through these documentary practices of forging, new kinship bonds could be made. As Mulla (2011a:353-354) has pointed out, forging can both mean making and faking kinship: documents can bring kin together at some times and sever relations at other times; and contribute to the form and modality of relatedness. In this regard, documents not only formalize kin relations, but also create, sustain and inflect the qualities of these obligations (Mulla 2011a:353).

This case indicated for me the desire of adoption bureaucrats and co-workers to help out a friend. As Grindle (1977:30) noted in her study of Mexican bureaucracy, exchange relations are often based on enduring personal bonds between individuals, often as a result of alliances between superiors and subordinates. These alliances, which can lead to career mobility, are based on informal norms of reciprocity. That is, even if Esperanza and Paco did not meet the legal requirements to adopt, those who knew them thought of them as good enough parents and "corrected" the shortcomings of the law to deliver a "justice." This, as I learned, was part of how government bureaucrats understood their work, and the malleability of the law and legal outcomes. Yet, it was also the existence of these ambiguous sites that made the archive a fearful place for state workers, as shown at the beginning of this chapter. If all these manipulations of legal

forms were to be illuminated with a different light, the appearance of the state as a detached and rational entity would not be able to stand untouched. The “secret” of the archive is also the fact that the law—and those government workers in charge of producing documents that can carry its force— are always already imbedded in that from which it claims distance: the private, the personal, and extra-legal.

Through the presentation of these examples, my aim has been to think of how the bureaucratic sites where law is done are usually “unstable places” (Goodale 2008:223). As Poole (2004) has argued, such categories as the “state” or “law” are to be understood as framing devices more than actual sites where social practice unfolds (see Goodale 2008: 217). Law is fragmented, dynamic, contingent and multiple (Goodale 2008:223), and it takes place at the crevices of what is considered legal and illegal. The creation of legality through forgery is not foreign to state bureaucrats, and its actually central to its functioning. As the case of Lucia’s adoption shows, state workers understand the creation of legal documents as not necessarily something impersonal, but as embedded in codes of friendship and loyalty, making use of legal languages to “do justice” to personal relationships. These practices also make documents affectively charged material forms within bureaucratic settings. As Navaro-Yashin (2007) has pointed out, documents retain, carry and have affective effects in the process of being produced and circulated. In this regard, documents do not accomplish control as mere “vehicles of information” (Hetherington 2008), but by following particular conventions of writing that can produce the correct affective outcomes.

The concept of transparency supposes a “representational relationship between documents and reality” (Hetherington 2012:45), which might be misleading to locate the

power of documents and their effects. As Hull (2012a:259) has pointed out, the effects of a document are often not determined by its truth or falsity. As we saw, their inauthenticity can be irrelevant for government workers if they can deliver the desired results (Hull 2012a). As such, their effectiveness is not so much bound to forms of factual certainty or transparent meaning, as to how well there are able to adhere to certain aesthetics of uniformity (Riles 2006). In the DIF's documentary economy what mattered more than the veracity or transparency of the *expedientes* was their ability to create networks, maintain friendships and produce results. Being endorsed with the proper stamps and signatures of the right authorities gave documents a "productive capacity" (Hetherington 2008:52) that went beyond their claim to be mere repositories of "transparent" information.

Final Remarks

I started this paper with a media adoption scandal in which a birth mother's story threatened the legitimacy of the state institution charged with regulating adoptions, and forced it to review its own 'dead' archives. Later I moved to the DIF workers' daily attempts at managing both the content of files and the form in which this content is presented, in order to focus on the materiality and work that goes into producing an archive. By looking at the early stages of the elaboration of documents that serve as proofs in legal adoption files, my intention has been to focus on the movements and procedures (Das 2004, Poole 2004) by which the legal object of the parentless child is produced. As I showed, while bureaucrats' knowledge of the general rules of the office is part of their "technical expertise" (Weber 1978:958), this expertise extends into concrete knowledge of how to manipulate, extend and break those very rules. As such, it is

possible to see how government workers do not simply implement the law but also create the conditions under which implicit normative ideas about the family and reproduction can be realized. Through the chapter's ethnographic passages, it has been possible to observe how the norm is brought to bear in the implementation of the law. Here, the production of legal evidence in adoption cases falls within a general field of normativity that presents poor single birth mothers as irresponsible and unfit to parent their children (Scheper-Hughes and Sargent 1998).

Through the generation of a certain uniformity and generalizability across files, cases re-record known kinship relations into a template that fits into the general form of the legal case. This involves truncating the ambiguities of kin relations that do not conform with the requirements of the legal case. The management of the content of the file is what will allow it to constitute itself into an actionable legal case, determining the legibility of the information, and the limits of what can go in it. Here, legal outcomes are made possible precisely through the invitation of common sense knowledge and understandings about birth mothers as unworthy and irresponsible.

Government workers are aware of the state's investment in the creation of files that follow a certain legal form that they need to learn and master. However, files do not always contain clear referents to those they talk about. The demand to produce large amounts of paperwork, sometimes from one day to the other, also means that workers need to make the production of the documents as fast and "efficient" as possible. This means using *machotes*, and copy/pasting information from one file to the other. Filling in existing *machotes* is another way to standardize the data in the office. Copy-paste techniques are crucial to the state's working, and ensure uniformity across files. Yet, it

also flattens the information contained in the files about particular people to formulaic expressions and repeated data. Children's reports, thus, become patchworks in which parts of previous documents remain in new ones and words are repeated over and over. The emphasis is in having a "complete" file, (with no internal contradictions in dates or names, following the proper formats and forms, and signed by the pertinent authorities), more than the actual relation of the words to those children or birth relatives that it refers to.

By exploring how government workers, rather than only using facts or applying rules, actively produce legal evidence and the borders of the law itself, I highlight the power of documents to simultaneously extinguish and give life to relationships. Here assumptions about who is entitled to reproduce and raise a family become absorbed into common sense knowledge that supports the image of institutionalized children's mothers as unfit parents. As Coutin (2011:459) has noted, "documents can be overridden by a user's assumptions," and even if they are intended to create uniformity, those in charge of producing them can create heterogeneous results. Such understandings authorize the production of official paperwork that can move efficiently across state offices and produce adoptive families, while erasing children's birth kinship.

The legitimacy of the state is constantly brought into contact with the domain of norms that sanction different valuations of life for children and birth mothers, and which are central to governmental work and the implementation of the law. In fact, arbitrariness is central to how the state is able to give materiality to the law, by producing legibility and illegibility, opacity and transparency. Documents, as such, are both legal and personal pieces of work. As Deborah Poole (2004:62) has argued, particular styles of

privatization (or corruption) are ordinarily located between ideals of justice and judicial processes. At the Adoption Department, the desire of standardization to ensure the legality of the government's work is embedded in simultaneous attempts to maintain personal relations and commitments. As the case of Esperanza and Paco shows, new attempts to modernize state practices, by stripping them from private influences through market languages find new ways to invite forms of privatization.

Paradoxically, as the state increased its advertisements about legal and transparent “plenary” adoptions, the specter of those left out—particularly birth mothers— became more and more apparent in the media. As mentioned at the beginning of the chapter, birth mothers backed up by the opposition party protested publicly the removal of their children, renewing suspicions of child traffic and illegality in adoption procedures. Through the cases I presented in this chapter, it is possible to think of how the implementation of the law, and the creation of legal effects is both personal and impersonal, legible and illegible. Government workers in charge of guarding the law and the paperwork by which it gains form and legibility, also negotiate the daily production of these very documents in spaces that are known to be outside or above the law. Thus, as Veena Das has argued, the instauration of forms of governance through technologies of writing simultaneously opens up “the possibility of forgery, imitation, and the mimetic performances of its power” (2004:227).

CHAPTER THREE

Scarred Bodies: Temporality, Secrets and Racial Languages of Relatedness

Daisy was one of the twelve children officially “delivered” by the Barrancas Governor to new adoptive parents for Father’s Day 2010. She was nine years old at the time and had been living in the state’s *Albergue* for one year. The *Ministerio Público* (Ministry of the Public Prosecutor) sent her there in 2009, after she was found lost in a Walmart supermarket and claimed not to know the whereabouts of her family. Since she had no known birth certificate at that time, the *Albergue* lawyers arranged her registration six months later as an *expósito* child –that is, as someone with no known parents (see chapter two).

According to the psychological report that was analyzed by the Technical Adoption Council in May 2010, at the time of her institutionalization Daisy had a “devalued perception of herself and was fearful of returning to her birth family, due to a history of physical and emotional abuse.” Yet, the *Albergue*’s psychologist considered that her institutionalization had helped her re-establish a “sense of self-worth and independence, giving her hope of belonging to a new family that could protect her and care for her.” The *Albergue*’s social worker mentioned in her own report that although Daisy knew the name of her mother, and stated that she had a grandmother, no relatives could be found. Besides, Daisy had expressed that she did not want to live with her birth mother and stepfather because she was physically abused, had to carry out heavy domestic chores and take care of her siblings instead of going to school. The social worker thus recommended her adoption, as long as Daisy agreed.

As described in the previous chapters, one day before the Technical Adoption Council's meeting, the Adoption Department staff hold an informal Interdisciplinary Meeting to decide which couples from the official Waiting List will be nominated as ideal matches for adoptable children during the formal meeting. I was invited to look at the pictures in the couple's binders and children's files during the meeting in which Daisy's new parents were selected. While flipping through the photos, Barbara, the Adoption Department psychologist, noted a very strong physical resemblance between Daisy and the woman from couple number two in the official Waiting List. The resemblance was strong, and this was considered very important to assure the success of her adoption, as I have described in chapter one. Besides the fact that this couple was also older—which made them good candidates for an older child, it was thought—, no other factors were taken into consideration to make the match.

Couple number two, whom I call Fernanda and Eduardo, had been waiting for a child since 2008, and at the time were 46 and 62-years old,⁸⁷ respectively. They had stated in their petition letter that they would be open to adopt a girl up to 8-years old and Daisy was 9-years old, which was close enough for the Council members. Both were schoolteachers in a neighboring state. The next day, at the official Technical Adoption Council meeting, the majority of the members relied only on executive sheets with basic data about couples and children, and focused mostly on their files' pictures to make their final decision. Barbara stressed again the fact of their strong “physical compatibility” with Daisy, which made them the ideal couple for the child. So, that day the Council

⁸⁷ Even though the law stipulates that adopters cannot be older than 50 years, in the local DIF lawyers consider it enough if one of them complies with the age limit.

members voted unanimously for the “pre-assignment” of Daisy to couple number two, and continued reviewing the cases of other children and couples.

In June 2010, three days before the formal Father Day’s *Entrega Oficial* (Official Delivery), Daisy was “Presented” or introduced to the selected couple at the DIF’s *Albergue* for the first time. I was given permission to observe the procedure, which took place in the Director’s office. It was only at that moment when they learned that Daisy was nine-years old instead of eight, as they had imagined; that she had been living in the *Albergue* for about a year after she was found lost in a Walmart; and that she had been physically abused by her birth family. “At the beginning she showed many indicators of abuse and depression and didn’t want to socialize with other children”—the *Albergue* psychologist quickly explained without disclosing more details about her past— “But with time she has made big progress and finally she herself asked for the adoption, as she wants a family that loves her, and [she] is now very happy, although also nervous to meet her new parents.”

Fernanda and Eduardo mentioned with nervousness and excitement that they had been waiting for this moment for many years. Her room had been standing ready, but empty, for a long time, and they were so happy their daughter could finally occupy it. She had been included in their daily conversations for years, with the name of “María Luisa.” Yet given her age —they asked— was still a good idea to change the child’s name? The *Albergue*’s psychologist responded that this would only be possible if Daisy also wanted it. When Daisy finally entered the office, Fernanda could not contain her tears. Both she and Eduardo opened their arms to embrace her, and she shyly agreed but maintained her arms clenched to her body. The Adoption Department staff—including Gloria, Laura and

Barbara—were also present, and took pictures with the couple’s camera and their own phones “to keep the memory of one of the most important moments of their life” —as they said with enthusiasm. After only three days of mandatory “affective bonding”⁸⁸ at the *Albergue*, the psychologist signed and approved the “empathy sheet” for Daisy’s adoption file. This document officially states that the affective tie (*vínculo afectivo*) between parents and children is adequate to form a family. The couple then participated in the formal *Entrega Oficial* at the Governor’s house, and was allowed to take Daisy to their own home that same day. In Barrancas, children can legally stay with their assigned adoptive parents under “provisional custody” (*guarda y custodia provisional*) while their adoption is given judicial approval in the Superior Court (a process that can take months or more than a year).

Two months later, on a Monday morning as I arrived to the Adoption Department, I noticed a nine year old child playing on the computer of one of the social workers. Nobody else was in the office at that moment. The social workers were fetching lunch and *el licenciado* was out for the day. She looked familiar, but at first I could not recognize her. Her name was “María Luisa” – she told me in a shy voice. I looked at her while she played, unable to place her familiarity. When Laura, the younger social worker, returned, she whispered in my ear that the girl used to be Daisy, the one adopted by the schoolteachers. I was surprised. She looked quite different: her straight long black hair was now short, above her shoulders, and adorned with a ribbon. She wore a red-and-black-squared party dress and white tights with shiny black shoes. She seemed very composed and shy. The social workers were even more impressed; they considered her

⁸⁸ *Vinculación afectiva*

new trimmed appearance a very positive change produced by her adoption. For them, she had morphed into a new person, and looked even more like her new mother now.

However, the reason why she was there that morning was not so promising: her new parents were very worried because María Luisa –as she was also called by the staff in the Adoption Department now- had escaped their home the day before. She had stolen her new parents' money to take a bus back to the *Albergue*, but she did not get very far and the police found her wandering in the street after five hours. So Fernanda and Eduardo took her immediately back to the DIF, with her few original belongings in hand. They were sad and disappointed, and had been talking to Barbara, the psychologist, all morning. Only later, while they went off to have lunch, Barbara joined us to eat her sandwich and told us what had happened:

Ms. Fernanda was crying profusely. Both were very sad; they love her very much. They even call her their 'princess' [Barbara said, clearly moved by this gesture] They told her how long they had been waiting for her; but when they first took her to her new bedroom, María Luisa could not believe it was for her. They assured her that all they had was hers too. Everything was ready for her to finally join them... But, it wasn't easy. Fernanda was too distraught when she saw her daughter's naked body for the first time: As she was helping her to take her clothes off to go into the shower, she saw her back and shoulders all full of scars, and almost fainted in front of her. Can you remember if this was discussed during the Presentation? –Barbara asked Gloria, whose answer was “no”– Can you imagine what she felt? It's one thing to be told abstractly that your child suffered physical abuse, but another to see your daughter's body full of scars!

Barbara asked us to review the girl's file while she went to talk to “María Luisa” in the toy library, before her parents returned from lunch. I brought her file from the *licenciado's* office, and we read it together. According to the file, the *Ministerio Público's* medical examiner had noticed that she had old abuse scars, including cigarette burns above her pubis, multiple scars in her back and burns in one shoulder. Pictures of

her naked body were attached to the police report. The social workers were surprised to see all this information only then. The truth was they had never read her full file before – not even for the Technical Adoption Council meeting–, and they had not paid attention to the details of her case at the time they decided on her adoption. When Barbara returned, she confided us that she thought the “affective bonding” period had been too fast: only three days to meet the Governor’s demand to deliver the children to their new parents for the Father’s Day celebration (which was expected to receive considerable media attention). Usually, this bonding period took at least one week and up to ten days. Gloria then mentioned to Barbara that the file had, in fact, recorded many indications of abuse. “Yes,” Barbara added, “María Luisa just told me that her ‘other mother’ used to burn her on her back while she covered her mouth with a damp cloth so that she couldn’t scream.”

As I learned later, María Luisa did stay in the *Albergue* that day. She also insisted on being called Daisy again. The head of the Adoption Department consented to her stay, as he feared that the DIF could be made responsible if she went missing; after all, her adoption trial was not yet finalized and she was still officially a ward of the state. The social workers in the Adoption Department were not happy about Daisy’s return. Laura, for example, told me with sadness:

Her parents shouldn’t have left her here; they should have made more efforts. Barbara [the psychologist] is of the opinion that the girl is only throwing tantrums and that she doesn’t want to return with them because she is ‘spoiled’ [*malcriada*]; but I think the parents also failed. They left her back here [in the DIF] with all her belongings at the first indication of trouble, and went away as if she was not their child anymore, as if she had never lived with them at all!

Laura was angry because she considered it Daisy’s last chance to be part of a loving family: “The girl now says that she wants to go to a permanent orphanage to be

with the friends she made in the *Albergue*, but she is not aware of the decision she is making. She will only realize what she lost when it's too late... Somebody has to help her understand what she's missing!" –she lamented. For Laura, the best place where Daisy could be was in a nuclear family, under the care of a father and a mother with 'good values', and lack of proper psychological counseling was not allowing her to realize it.

The fact that Daisy's adoption process was failing was also not pleasing to the Adoption Department's superiors. The *Albergue*'s psychologist in charge of her case was removed without notice. The assumption was that if provided with the "correct" psychological therapy, Daisy would realize the unique opportunity she was offered of having a family, and would accept her reintegration with her chosen adoptive parents. A new psychologist, considered more "competent," was thus assigned to her case, and was put in charge of "helping" Daisy accept her new adoptive parents. Other methods were implemented as well, to make Daisy's stay at the *Albergue* less pleasing: Since her return, she was isolated at nights and asked to sleep in the nursery with the babies to "think about what she was doing," instead of rooming with the older children who she considered her friends, and her main reason for wanting to return. Yet, she did not change her mind –at least not soon enough. Daisy could not fill in the place of María Luisa, the "princess-child" that her adoptive parents had been dreaming off, in a plenary adoption model that had no room for her old scars and the pain inscribed in them. After the violence that she had suffered in her own birth family, she was not able to be part of a new family that dreamed of an intact child. Here, guarantees of belonging to a "good" nuclear family could not erase the hurts brought by her previous kin relations. The forms

of care and desire invested in her by her new parents and the role of daughter that she needed to fill in the ‘parental triangulation’, seemed to be oppressive.

At the *Albergue*, all adult caregivers are called *mamá* or *papá* (moms or dads), yet children do not have to fulfill roles as sons or daughters. A permanent orphanage did not request the same forms of relatedness or retribution from her than a nuclear family.⁸⁹ Daisy’s body expressed the fact that a family is not only about unconditional love, but also about pain and hurt. The marks of her previous kin relations were all over the surface of her body, as the best expression of her soul. Yet, her new adoptive parents were scared of the calls that the pain living in those old scars made upon them, and had a hard time acknowledging that it could be part of the body of that princess-daughter they had dreamed of. Government workers had also avoided mentioning her scars to the new parents during the Presentation –or failed to make themselves aware of them, as they were too invested in finding physical resemblances. They seemed to assume that by seeing themselves reflected in their adopted child’s external features, parents could avoid having doubts and fears about children’s unknown pasts and the future of their relationships. In her new family Daisy had to forget the scars, as her parents wanted to forget them too. In order to become part of a “plenary” or “full” adoptive family, her past had to stay behind, or become mute. Even though the adoption itself was not a secret to her, there was no openness for that aspect of her life within the new family.

That September, the *licenciado* asked me to file an advertisement of the DIF’s adoption program that he spotted in a lawyer’s magazine. Since the ISO Certification process began, the Adoption Department had been compiling all the newspaper and

⁸⁹ Contrary to the United States or Sweden (Yngvesson and Coutin 2006), there is no legal figure of foster care with non-relatives where I conducted my fieldwork. As described in the previous chapter, children can be sent to a permanent orphanage, re-integrated with birth relatives, or placed in adoption.

magazine adds praising adoption procedures in the state, to prove the success of the state program. At the top of this add was the picture of Daisy with her adoptive mother and a small legend –similar to the one from the adoption billboards described in the introduction–, announcing that 76 children had been “given” in adoption so far, getting closer to the goal of 100 adoptions to commemorate the Mexican Revolution. *El licenciado* looked at it and said with irony: “Imagine, so much propaganda and this case didn’t even work out!” I asked if her adoption would still count toward those 76 adoptions that were being advertised. He said “yes:” the numbers were not going to change,⁹⁰ because the government had done the work of assigning her new parents, and their efforts (in the Adoption Department) had to count –at least during this administration– to reach the numbers that the DIF’s President was requesting. The last time I saw Daisy was at the end of October 2010, in a new official *Entrega*, now coinciding with the birthday of the Governor’s wife. This time Daisy was not among those children being “delivered” to new parents, but part of a chorus of about twenty *Albergue* children that were in charge of singing *Las mañanitas*–the Mexican birthday song–for the DIF’s President at the start of the event.

Daisy’s “failed” adoption begs us to question the kinds of erasures and secrets –of painful scars and kinship histories–, that can be part of the plenary adoption model, and the place of race in effecting these erasures. It questions the limits that state forms of family formation pose for those children for whom plenary adoption and “full inclusion”

⁹⁰ The number included both “internal” and “external” adoptions (as mentioned in the introduction, there were no international adoptions during my fieldwork). Adoptions are “internal” when the DIF is in charge of matching children and parents that have no previous relation to each other, as described in the previous chapters. “External” adoptions are those in which the state legalizes the adoption of relatives, or birth parents direct request to transfer their parental rights to another couple. Yet, in all types of adoption, the state has to admit the adopting couple into the official adoption Waiting List.

forecloses the possibility of acknowledging the previous scars and injuries through which they themselves have previously experienced kinship and family. In this vein, it highlights the forms of suffering inscribed in a family model that requires the silencing of particular aspects of relationships. Under this model of plenary adoption, Daisy had to distort herself to be known by her new parents. In fact, the request for intactness in plenary adoption converted the certainty of her parent's knowledge into the measure of her own invisibility to them.

In the DIF, the nuclear heterosexual family has been presented as an “integral” and “natural” site through which children can be socialized into citizens and the social tissue can be repaired. As mentioned in chapter one, for DIF workers the creation of new families required particular techniques to restore the family to its (divine) nature, and correct the flaws of immoral reproduction. For this, adoption bureaucrats also relied heavily on languages of (racial) resemblance and similarity that were seen as ensuring uniformity and stability within the family and nation. Through practices such as physical matching, adoption workers could understand themselves as intermediaries of God, and attempt to put aside their own doubts and uncertainties regarding their role in the production and termination of relationships. That is, by deploying racial languages of the body to picture the successful adoptive family, state bureaucrats avoided other conflicting aspects of children's pasts that could destabilize the image of the natural family as a domain of unquestionable certainty. As in Daisy's case, adoption workers focused strongly on finding physical resemblances to decide on her adoption, stressing the predetermined qualities of the adoption and leaving out of the picture those complex

aspects of Daisy's past which, according to socio-legal understandings of plenary adoption, could not be part of the new family.

Yet, as Daisy's story also shows, the temporality of the state's image of "success" in the formation of a new family contrasts with some of the daily struggles that adoptive families and children have to face when trying to figure out relatedness. While the state imagines the new family as "successful" and "complete" once the adoption is legally approved and the correct couples have been matched with their children (to restore the natural family), parents and children face continuous challenges to live in relationships. As I learned, after the matching process had been concluded, the DIF's intervention in the formation of the adoptive families quickly faded away. Once children lived with their new families, and had also been "officially delivered" to their parents by the DIF's President (or the Governor himself), there is a legally sanctioned follow-up period of two more years. The DIF stipulates home-visits by a psychologist every three months, and monthly presentations of the child to the DIF. However, given the overload of work in the Adoption Department, home-visits did not take place at all while I was doing fieldwork. After those two years, what happened within the family to which children were "given" back was not seen as being of the immediate concern of the state anymore.

What are the limits of the state in creating kinship and delineating what constitute correct families for children? What languages are made available to adoptive parents and children to think of relations in this model of plenary adoption, and what forms of pain can be silenced or left unacknowledged? How are the disparities of class and race that made the adoption possible worked out on an everyday basis, as relationships form, grow

or fall apart? How are ordinary anxieties over relatedness projected on the body of the adoptee?

In this chapter I want to think of these questions, by looking at the complex entanglement of secrecy and race through a comparison of (a) the bureaucratic/juridical temporality by which DIF adoption workers both ‘blind’ themselves to the uncertainties of kinship and act as guardians of ‘dangerous’ knowledges, in order to maintain a certain vision of the successful adoptive family; and (b) the place of race and secrecy in the temporality of the family itself, in which success is not measured as the achievement of resemblance in a fixed point in time, but as an unfinished process that is shrouded in uncertainty and doubt. What interests me in pursuing this comparison is to think of how socio-legal configurations of kinship and plenary adoption support certain racial languages of resemblance and similarity, and how these languages –such as doubts about hidden truths carried in the adoptee’s body– find expressions in families’ daily lives.

By contrasting and stressing the continuities between these two sites and temporalities, I emphasize how both the state and families produce and inhabit adoption secrets. I think of the secret in adoption as dealing with knowledge and information that is considered dangerous, for its capacity of being constitutive (Carsten 2007). Although forms of uncertainty and doubt are an ordinary part of relationships, I argue that the plenary adoption model as it is supported by Mexican socio-legal and bureaucratic technologies, has made available particular racial languages in adoptive families to negotiate forms of closeness and distance in kinship relationships. As I will argue, race allows to both stress connections and distance, by emphasizing certain aspects and blinding others.

In the following pages, I start by discussing how the state's adherence to a picture of the "strong" and "integral" adoptive family –as one that is freed from the interference of children's previous kinship connections–, guides adoption worker's attitudes towards informal adoption arrangements and their understanding of how a successful family ought to look like. I make use of archival research in the state's *albegue* to discuss cases in which informal adoption arrangements were dissolved in favor of state sanctioned families. Later I explore how the state becomes an intermediary and bearer of secrets to 'protect' the new adoptive family. Here, I stress the role of adoption bureaucrats in guarding information that is seen as dangerous and threatening to the family. I show how bureaucratic practice demands that workers 'blind' themselves to the complex aspects of children's pasts, in order to maintain a fixed image of the successful family. In the last part of the chapter, I look at how secrecy regarding birth kinship finds expression in the story of an adoptive family. In plenary adoption, I claim, racialized languages to understand relationships can sometimes allow deferring or avoiding acknowledgement of one's own implications in the lives of others. I take inspiration from Cavell (1979) to think of how feelings of doubt in relation to one's implications in the histories of one's closest relatives –which are a part of kinship more generally–, come to life within families marked by adoption secrets.

"Permanent" Clean Breaks and the Temporality of Plenary Adoptions

Plenary adoption, as mentioned in the introduction, is a recent legal possibility in Mexico (since 1998), and has been strongly influenced by international adoption conventions originating in Europe and the United States. Shaped by a "rights" framework,

plenary adoption laws have imagined children as individuals whose connections to others are epiphenomenal (Leinaweaver and Seligmann 2009:9). As such, this form of family formation has been legally framed as an “exclusivist, either-or approach to adoption” (Leinaweaver 2011:387) that conceives the complete integration of the child into the new family and/or nation as possible only by completely supplanting children’s birth kinship with new connections (Fonseca 2009a, Modell 1994; Yngvesson 2007, 2009).

As Yngvesson has noted, the plenary adoption model has reified several legal fictions to ensure the creation of new adoptive families: the status of the child as freestanding or orphan, the voluntary relinquishment of birth parents, and the concept of a “clean break” from the child’s past (2007: 569). These “fictions” of legal liberal adoption assume a singular identity of the adoptable child, who “can only be one thing or another and whose adoptability requires the cancellation of one identity, so that identity can be replaced by another” (Yngvesson 2007: 569). Legally, the insertion of a “clean break” between birth and adoptive kinship allows framing the adoptive family as being located in an unproblematic and natural beginning (Yngvesson and Coutin 2006:179-180). Since birth certificates and other identity documents are amended to present adoptive parents as the child’s (original and only) birth parents, authors like Modell (1994), for example, have called these families “as-if” begotten families (see also Yngvesson 2007, 2009). By rendering the child “socially naked” (Howell 2006:6), adoption technologies have the power to “produce new persons” who, like in Daisy’s case, can even be completely renamed by their new families (Yngvesson and Coutin have noted, 2006: 180). In this regard, plenary adoption is backed up by state policies of secrecy that aim to

erase the knowledge of other aspects of children's identities related to their previous kinship connections (Yngvesson 2007:565).

As mentioned in the previous chapters, in Mexico the legal and documentary practices that ensure the production of a “clean break” –including the careful production of birth certificates, the termination of birth parent rights, and the sealing of *expedientes*–, have been seen as a way to restore Christian understandings of the “natural” family, and correct reproductive practices tainted by an immoral use of sexuality. As such, the state, on behalf of God, is seen as authorized to intervene in biological processes through governmental technologies, in order to restore (divine) nature. That is, by maintaining the image of the intact family and the intact child, the plenary adoption model continues to restore the myth of the family as grounded in natural connections (expressed in languages of physical appearance and resemblance) that are beyond human agency. In Mexico, the legal and bureaucratic support of this picture of plenary adoption, seen as the best way to ensure “strong” or “complete” family relations, has also supported adoption worker's dismissal of other forms of family formation that fail to conform to this model. While plenary adoptive families in which resemblance between parents and children is assured are presented as having a “strong” future –and as such to be in the “best interest of the child”–, those families formed through informal fostering or adoption that do not conform to this “natural” model of the nuclear family are regarded as temporally “fragile” and “insecure” for children.

Several scholars working in Latin America have shown how the state's imaginary of proper families differs from the way kinship is experienced and understood by the families of poor children in state orphanages. As mentioned in the introduction, in the last

decade scholars have started to pay attention to past and present forms of “child circulation” in Latin America (Blum 2009, Cardarello 2009, Fonseca 2004, Halbmayer 2004, Leifsen 2009, 2010; Leinaweaver 2008, Leinaweaver and Seligmann 2009; Milanich 2009, Reyes Kipp 2014, in press; Walmsley 2008, Weismantel 1995), noticing how the children of the poor rarely grow up in isolated nuclear families, often moving in and out of households and state institutions, without severing ties to their birth families in the process. Fonseca (2004), for example, describes how the children of poor favela families in Brazil are routinely placed among relatives, friends or neighbors, and may even make a stop at the orphanage in a moment of need. These understandings of kinship have been labeled as “additive” in contrast to the “restrictive” model informing plenary adoption laws and procedures (Bowie 2004).

The fact that the children of the poor have been moved or “circulated” among relatives and non-relatives without state intervention (see Blum 2009), has historically not received much governmental interest in Latin America (Fonseca 2009b; Milanich 2009). This is particularly true in Mexico, where there have been no direct attempts to target these informal practices systematically, as long as they are not brought to the immediate attention of the state (for example, through the placement of a legal complaint in the *Ministerio Público*). Yet, the novel emphasis on the creation of plenary adoptive families has shifted state workers’ attitudes towards informal child placements with non-relatives in Mexico—if only at the moment of deciding the future of those children that are already institutionalized. As mentioned in the introduction, the recent intervention of the state in correct family formation (through plenary adoption) and the consequent governmental *problematization* (Ferguson 1990) of child circulation as form of child

neglect or abandonment, has been crucial to open up a new –even if incipient– domain of governmental intervention.

My own archival work in the DIF's *Albergue* made me aware of how state workers usually dissolved arrangements of “*encargar*” (especially when they involved non blood relatives) in favor of adoptions or other forms of institutionalization. *Encargar* (entrusting or leaving in charge of) is the Spanish word used to describe practices in which parents leave their children “temporarily” under the care of other people. It can involve arrangements that last for many years or only a few days, de facto placing children under the care of neighbors, friends, in-laws, or even patrons, without legal state intervention. As I learned from the *Albergue* files, in some cases it was precisely those people temporarily “in charge” of the children, who brought them to the *Albergue* when the arrangements of the *encargo* became undesirable; such as when mothers failed to send them money or come back for the child after a while (see Reyes Kipp 2014).

This was the case, for example, of why Yuri and Ana entered the DIF's *Albergue*. The *Ministerio Público* filed a legal complaint against their mother for “neglect” (*omission de cuidado*), when it was established that she had left them *encargadas* with different people. Ana, 9 years old, was admitted first, after being found wandering in the streets wearing her school uniform. In her declaration at the *Ministerio Público*, Ana stated:

I have nine more siblings named [...], and where we live with my mom and my siblings we rent, my mom works cleaning a house [since early in the morning] and comes back at six in the afternoon, and my sister [Yuri] stays with us the whole day; my mother does take care of us, she doesn't beat us, she used to take us to school herself, but she told us to stay with a woman named [Jacinta] because it was far away from the house and we stayed the whole week with *señora* [Jacinta], my [three] siblings and me, and on Saturdays we stayed with my mom, and my sister [Yuri] saw that my mom gave money to *señora* [Jacinta] and

[Jacinta] used to take my siblings and me to the park to play; [the day I was found] my mom took me to school because my siblings were sick and told me to go with the *señora* [Jacinta]. And later I went to look for the *señora* but she was not home, and I went to the bus stop [...] and it got dark and the policemen passed by and took me here to the police station [...]

A month later, Ana's grandmother went to the *Ministerio Público* to leave Yuri (Ana's 10 years old sister) in the DIF's *Albergue*. Their grandmother, a 48 years old woman who had studied four years of elementary school, was also a domestic worker. In her declaration, she explained that ten days ago Guadalupe, the woman with whom Yuri had been *encargada*, brought the girl back to her house without an explanation. Since Yuri's mother had not come to pick her up and she had to work too, she could not take care of her grandchild. The social work report in the sisters' file mentioned that they came from a family of 12 siblings, although only nine of them –between 16 and 1 years old–still depended of their mother. Their father was an undocumented worker in the United States and did not contribute economically to the household. The file's psychological report added that the siblings had different fathers and concluded that: “their mother, does not have economical support given that she works as a domestic worker and obtains limited resources that do not allow her to properly cover the needs of all of her children, so she frequently leaves them *encargados* for periods of time with other family members or acquaintances: that is why [Ana] was living with a *señora* [Jacinta] when she was found wandering the streets.” After staying seven months in the DIF's *Albergue*, both girls were sent to a permanent orphanage. Given their age and the fact that they had a known birth certificate, they were not considered as adoption candidates.

In some occasions, women taking care of a child who had been *encargado* also petitioned to formally adopt him or her in the DIF.⁹¹ Yet, I did not see any case in which such a petition was approved, as these women could not meet the state's requirements for adoption—such as being legally married or show proof of a stable income. More often, these arrangements were dissolved in favor of plenary adoptions with state approved couples, when children could not be “re-integrated” with other blood relatives. In February 2010, for example, a poor couple came into the Adoption Department with an infant girl in arms. She was in her forties and he was over sixty-years-old. Iris and the *licenciado* talked to them in the waiting room, since the two available offices in the Department were full with people preparing for the next ISO Certification audit. The woman explained that the baby's mother was extremely poor and had seven more children, so she could not cover the needs of the baby and left her *encargada* with them almost since birth. They had gotten attached (*se encariñaron*) to the baby after several months, and wanted to legally adopt her. However, after briefly inquiring about their age, income, and family histories, Iris and the *licenciado* told them that their adoption plans were legally impossible or *improcedentes*. Given his age and lack of stable employment, their minimal education (she was illiterate and he had studied only a few years of elementary school), as well as their meager income, the fact that they were not legally married and that both had several children from previous relationships (each more than five)—there was no point in even trying to fill out the initial adoption paperwork. It was clear for the Department's staff that they were never going to be approved as adoption

⁹¹ While legally there exists the figure of “*entendido*” to grant rights to woman who have been caring for unrelated children since infancy, I did not encounter any of these cases during my fieldwork. In Brazil, Fonseca (2009a:106) also describes how the 1990s Children's code leaves open a legal loophole allowing parents to legalize forms of private adoption.

candidates. The *licenciado* advised them to place a formal complaint against the baby's mother in the *Ministerio Público* for the neglect or abandonment of her child, and urged them not to come back to his office again.

The *Albergue*'s archive contained other similar cases. A 2005 adoption file, for example, described the case of a child born in November 2004 whose mother, a poor woman from a neighboring state, had had an affair with a married man. After learning that the child's father did not intend to support her, she privately made adoption arrangements with a couple (a nurse and a gardener), who paid for her pregnancy expenses. She had voluntarily left the child in the DIF's *Albergue* while the couple completed all the required paperwork to be considered adoption candidates (see chapter one). However, the couple was not found viable by the DIF, and the mother petitioned to get her child back. Yet, the child was placed with another couple approved by the DIF's Adoption Department. As these cases show, although the DIF does not actively look to regulate widespread forms of child circulation, once a case is brought to the attention of the state, government workers tend to dissolve these arrangements and often punish those mothers that engage in practices of *encargar*, if their children happen to end up in the orphanage (see also the previous chapter).

As mentioned in the introduction, state worker's disapproval of those poor mothers and families who have historically relied on the *Albergue* as a temporary solution to care for their children, has found support in new neoliberal rationalities that aim to diminish the state's assistance of the poor and promote forms of individual responsibility and self-improvement (Anaya 2009:287). As such, the amendment of the local Family Code in 2010– to allow the legal adoption of children after being held for 30

consecutive days in a state institution without receiving visitors—was specifically envisioned as a measure to avoid that birth mothers relegate their parental obligations and “take advantage” of the state by using the *Albergue* as a temporary “daycare” or “boarding home.”

Secrets, Erasures and the Anxieties of Cross-Class Adoption

The new legal-bureaucratic adoption apparatus also legitimized other old cross-class adoption practices in Mexico. In these practices, upper and middle class families have traditionally adopted poor children as their own, by producing false birth documents to make children appear as biological offspring (see Fonseca 2009a). As Fonseca (2009a) has noted, these “secret” practices have historically been the most common way to create adoptive families among upper and middle class families in Latin America. In her work with members of a novel association for adopted children in Brazil,⁹² Fonseca observes “a line of continuity between the secrecy traditionally associated with adoption, the confidentiality decreed by adoption services, and adoptive parent’s strategies to guarantee their full inclusion in the family” (2009a:92). Before the 1980s, Fonseca notes, hospitals were strong institutional agents in Brazilian adoptions, helping to register children directly under the name of an adoptive mother, without having to go through a formal adoption process (2009a:98). Children of pregnant maids, for example, could be “falsely” registered as patrons “legitimate” children, while keeping the adoption process as an extra-legal and secret procedure.

⁹² In Mexico, at the time of my fieldwork, there were no organized associations of adult adoptees with media impact.

In Mexico, this is a reality that is also well known to state workers themselves. Barbara, the Adoption Department's psychologist, for example, has an adopted brother that at the time of my fieldwork was in his thirties. As she explained, his adoption today "would probably be considered illegal." Barbara's parents had housed his birth mother—a poor young woman from a neighboring state—in exchange for domestic work. After some time passed, the woman asked if she could leave her child *encargado* at Barbara's house for some weeks, while she looked for another more permanent job in the city. However, months went by and she did not return for her child. Barbara's family decided to adopt him. When they went to the *Ministerio Publico* to inquire about the child's formal adoption, state officials advised them to register him directly as their own son in the Civil Registry.⁹³ In these cases in which legal birth certificates are created with false information, as Fonseca (2009a:99) also notes, "legality" is not necessarily associated with the law. In Mexico, as in Brazil, this speaks to the fact that the distinction between legal and illegal adoptions has not been particularly relevant to government officials until very recently. In the DIF's Adoption Department, for example, social workers and psychologists did not really know about earlier "simple adoption" laws described in the Introduction, which had been in place until very recently. Instead, they assumed adoption had always worked through the "plenary adoption" model of family formation. As Fonseca (2009a:110) has argued, the "clean-break" principle of plenary adoption existed in practice much earlier than its formal legal appearance.

⁹³ At the same time, as mentioned in the introduction, even if mothers have to show proof of birth records to register a child as their own, fathers do not need to show any documentary proof to claim a child as their own.

In this regard, it has been argued that present-day adoption laws partly helped to legitimate the views of the more affluent adoptive families, who have been frontrunners of official policies (Fonseca 2009a:111). Its new forms of concealment and secrecy, gave “security” to wealthier and ‘morally correct’ adopting families, sealing them off from the reach of birth kinship. As Leifsen (2009) has pointed out in the case of Ecuador, the model of full adoption triumphed at the cost of the exclusion of birth kinship from the decision making process. That plenary adoption laws, and the imperative to “clean” the child from its previous kinship attachments, respond mainly to the fears and desires of the middle and upper class adoptive families, and not to those of birth mothers –for example– was visible in a conference speech given in 2009 by the founder of VIFAC (the private upper-class Pro-life organization mentioned in chapter one). As part of the speech, she explained about her contribution to the development of “modern” adoption in Mexico:

I, as an adoptive parent –because my four children are adopted–, wondered why I could not [fully] adopt here in Mexico. So we [a group of upper-class Catholic adoptive parents] took a proposal to the [state governor in the 1980s] where we asked him for the complete removal of parental rights [from birth parents]. Why? Because we didn’t want the biological mother to be able to claim her baby back at some point in time. Second, we didn’t want to meet the biological mother, [that is, we asked] that adoptive parents do not get to know her. This would avoid any type of blackmailing; and finally, [we asked] that [adoption] should be made definitive. That is, [we asked for] an amendment to the [simple adoption] law that made [adoption] irrevocable. [...] However, it was with the next interim governor, when [the state] understood exactly what we wanted: security at the time of adopting.

In this way, in the process of protecting the desires of adoptive parents, the state also redraws some of the boundaries of class and race in Mexico, through the language of “complete” or permanent adoption. Reinforcing the idea that birth mothers are immoral, mercenary, or even mentally unstable (see Leinaweaver 2009b and chapter four), and that

“adoptive parents should be protected against the venal demands of their child’s biological family” (Fonseca 2009b:162), the state has worked as a mediator between poor birth families and adoptive parents –by protecting the interests of the later. This complicates the picture of freedom in adoption, pointing to the violence implicit in the image of a “freely given” child, or in the argument that “everybody is equally free to adopt a child” (Yngvesson 2010:84). Through legal and bureaucratic techniques of timing and pacing in the production of adoption documents, as those discussed in the previous chapter, government workers can erase the traces of children’s original families, making it virtually impossible for a birth parent to trace back the whereabouts of an adopted child (see Fonseca 2009b:162).

In this process, I argue, the state also becomes the holder of a double secret: from birth parents who should not know *anything* about the child’s new family and future, and from the adopting parents, who should not know *too much* about the child’s past—to ensure its *full* integration into the new family. As such, the state grounds its authority on its ability to effectuate this double secret—and guard dangerous knowledges in favor of adoptive parents—, by regulating the kinds of families that can be formed through plenary adoption (as opposed to practices of informal fostering or *encargar* discussed above). In fact, I observed during my fieldwork that many adoptive parents “elect” not to know details of their children’s birth family, in order to avoid withholding dangerous (and potentially non-sharable information) from their children.

As Carsten has pointed out, the theme of secrets inhabiting kinship has long occupied a central place in European and North American literature (2007:408). However, there has been a shift in focus from secrecy to knowledge and disclosure of information,

which has characterized much of the literature of adoption in the West (2007:408). Taking inspiration from Strathern's (1999) work, which differentiates between constitutive and regulative knowledge, Carsten (2007) has looked at what people do when they acquire kinship knowledge. As Carsten has argued, this kind of knowledge is *constitutive*, since the information about kin has to be incorporated into one's sense of identity (2007:402). As she notes, the idea that adoptees have a "need" or "right" to know their origins has grounded the constitutive force of this information, linking kinship, identity and truth. Because of this, many adoptees seeking reunions with birth relatives frame it in terms of becoming "complete persons" (Carsten 2007:409).

While in Europe and the United States the need to know one's origin and identity is claimed as an important factor to legally promote "open adoptions" (Yngvesson 1997, Volkman 2005), in Mexico such debates are publicly absent. As Seligmann (2009) has noted, there are strong anxieties around the possibility of disclosure in domestic adoptions, which have fostered the legal protection of social dynamics of inequality. Contrary to international adoptions, where children move from poor to richer nations leaving their birth families and social backgrounds behind (and often far away), there is usually no such spatial distance in cross-class domestic adoptions in the global South. While in Euro-America concealment of kinship knowledge is seen as deleterious (Carsten 2007; Strathern 1999), and members of the DIF's Adoption Department are aware of this trends, there continues to be an unresolved tension between the value placed on information and the protection of the adoptive family from the inequalities that make adoption possible. For state bureaucrats, the constitutive effects of kinship knowledge are seen as dangerous for children, constraining and threatening their future choices within

new morally correct *mestizo* families. While for Strathern (1999) there might be some positive and liberating value in refusing information about one's origins, in the DIF Adoption Department the refusal to give information is mostly taken out of the hands of adoptive children and parents, and placed in the hands of state workers, who are in charge of "freeing" children from knowledges of what is considered a damaging past.

As such, in plenary adoption the secret is reworked within the legal-bureaucratic framework that aims to protect the child's "best interest," ensuring his or her full inclusion into a new family. In Brazil, for example, Fonseca has shown how the "principle of confidentiality" which is the pillar of plenary adoption, has also been confused with "court secrecy," making one wonder whose interests are being protected through state adoption practices⁹⁴ (2009a:110). She described both the omission/opposition of adoptive parents to discuss their children's adoption, and the reluctance of government officials to provide information about birth families (Fonseca 2009a:93). In these "confidential" adoptions, adoptive parents have been supported to hide not only the identity of birth families, but also the very fact of the adoption itself (Fonseca 2009a:95). Secrecy, thus, has historically worked to ensure formation of "complete" and "full" relations in adoptive families, instead of what are deemed as "fragile" inclusions (such as informal practices of *encargar*). Here, as we saw in Daisy's story, subjects in adoptive families are often asked to embody forms of knowledge that cannot be openly shared, but that find expression in anxieties over old scars, or in

⁹⁴ Carp (1998) has shown how in the United States, for example, the institution of secret adoption records was aimed at protecting women who had given birth outside marriage, more than preventing children from access to information about their birth (see Carsten 2007). In the case of Mexico, however, secrecy in domestic adoptions is strongly predicated on the need to protect the adoptive family from the intrusion of children's birth relatives.

languages of bodily difference and race, that point to the fact that the body has a history outside of the new family. As we saw in Daisy's story, there was no space inside her new nuclear family to mourn the loss of friends, self, and the world that she had inhabited before. The event of the adoption was legally and bureaucratically shrouded within a zone of silence.

As described in chapter one, the idea that adoptive children could become expressions of the moral flaws of their birth parents, was a fear that was also present among DIF workers. Partly because of this, the need for concealment and secrecy within adoptive families was justified as a way to protect the new family and their children from 'dangerous knowledges' of the past. Even if at the time of my fieldwork psychologists – including Barbara – advised parents to tell their children about their adoption (following international conventions), this was treated as a matter of *knowing* a fact, more than an openness to the claims that this fact could make on the families on a daily basis. As such, this knowledge seemed to be merely a feat of cognition that did not implicate a need to *acknowledge* the calls it made upon family members to act in accordance to it.

Even in the case of infant adoptions, for example, DIF psychologists at the *Albergue* recommend to introduce the knowledge of the adoption in languages that were general and metaphorical, such as through pre-established tales that had been taken from adoption books and manuals. Containing or retaining painful or shocking knowledges about adopted children was the preferred way to give life to a new family. Since the new adoptive family had to be oriented toward the future, certain aspects of children's pasts could not find expression or be acknowledged without shaking the foundations of the

myth of the nuclear family upon which plenary adoption rests. The knowledge of children's life outside the new family, thus, had to remain without expression.

As part of the juridical-bureaucratic temporality of the state –which required making speedy adoption decisions to produce an image of the family as “finished” and “successful” at the time of the official adoption–, DIF workers also had to ‘blind’ themselves to these multiple ‘dangerous knowledges’ in children’s files and lives that had the power of destabilizing and introduce uncertainty into their ‘executive’ decisions. That is, DIF adoption workers were aware of the dangers of kinship knowledge, and its unpredictable effects (in kinship and identity) when activated in relationships (Carsten 2007:422). However, their job required emphasizing those aspects that could redraw the ‘naturalness’ and divine foundation of the family, as the best way to ensure the *full* inclusion of the child and the flourishing of family relations. As Daisy’s story shows, forms of avoidance, temporality and race interlaced in complex ways in the adoption technologies of the state. Languages of physical resemblance and racial similarity were seen as the best expressions of the family’s future success as a (divine) ‘natural’ unit. It was through the achievement of resemblance at the fixed moment of the technical adoption decision, that the state aimed to ground its temporal vision of the ‘successful’ adoptive family, turning it into a finished and unproblematic entity.

As mentioned in chapter one, the idea that parents and children should resemble each other has historically been dominant in Euro-America (Strathern 1992; Wade 2012). Bonds of kinship have been seen as arising from shared biogenetic substances, which in turn are materialized through physical resemblance, as the visible truth of kinship connections (Carsten 2001; Nordqvist 2010). Yet, in adoptive families, where this

biological connection is absent, resemblance has become a language to signify bonds of kinship, “create continuities,” and mobilize the idea of the family (Marre and Bestard 2009: 64; Howell and Marre 2006:306). It does this, as Marre and Bestard (2009:64) have argued, by making explicit the given, inevitable and non-intentional definition of a person as a relative. That is, it re-situates adoptive kinship as a “previous relationship” outside of the domain of governmental/private intervention and it erases the child’s other origins outside the new family (Marre and Bestard 2009:67). For adoptive parents, resemblance can also emphasize the solidity of relations and, as such, is part of the process of forging kinship bonds (Howell 2003, Howell and Marre 2006, Marre and Bestard 2009; Modell 2002). In the DIF, the language of physical resemblance also allowed adoption bureaucrats to redefine the adoption process as God’s Will, and to imagine their work as merely activating preordained relationships. Thus, the sense of destiny and predetermination associated with physical resemblance (Marre and Bestard 2009; Howell and Marre 2006), located the family back in the realm of divine nature.

In this way, languages of resemblance helped to normalize the adoptive relationship and imagine its temporality as everlasting and based on enduring, unbreakable, essential bonds (Marre and Bestard 2009; Modell 2002; Nordqvist 2010). Yet, as Nordqvist (2010:1135) has argued in the case of lesbian families, seeking resemblances does not only create kinship connections, but also entails the creation of distance (from birth parents and state technologies) and the eradication of the “donor” or birth relative from the picture of the family. For adoptive families to be solid and successful, they had to be expunged from those aspects related to both the child’s prior kinship connections and the intervention of the state (Herman 2008, Modell and

Dambacher 1997, Yngvesson 2010). By focusing on languages of nature and physical resemblance, adoption workers aimed to produce a timeless and successful adoptive family.

The “clean break” requirements in plenary adoption supported DIF’s workers image of a successful adoption as one in which adopted children’s bodies could morph to become *mestizos* like their parents (as described in chapter one). As we saw in Daisy’s case, after some initial physical resemblance was assured, the unrelated child was thought to continue morphing physically to become completely integrated into the new family – leaving behind the social and racial backwardness of her birth kinship. As a DIF member explained to me: “[Looking for initial resemblance and compatibility] is like giving proper soil and water for a new plant to grow. The rest will happen alone.”

Ensuring that adopted children could socially, morally and physically transform themselves within new *mestizo* families also meant protecting them from the knowledge of their own origins. As mentioned earlier, this tied racial languages or resemblance to notions of secrecy and avoidance, which partly responded to the Euro-American view of kinship as generating constitutive knowledge about a person’s identity (Carsten 2007; Strathern 1999). Although kinship knowledge could both constrain and expand choices for individuals (Carsten 2007:410), for DIF workers it only restricted children’s transition into full and solid *mestizo* families.

The DIF’s matching process, for example, also continued to reveal the government’s desire to conceal within the family the fact of the adoption: while adopted children could *know* that they were adopted, this was a private matter that did not need to be visible to outsiders, to ensure “that no such differences exist within the family and

even less in society”, as Gloria recounted in the first chapter. This logic of knowledge assumed that once you *have it*, it is satisfied. Physical appearance, as described earlier, was seen as a way to make relationships “stronger”, by securing the invisibility of legal adoption procedures, even if children themselves were allowed to *know* the fact of the adoption. Children’s physiognomies, it was thought, if not properly aligned, could also come between relatives, making it impossible to create affective connections. As if by being physically different, adopted children could also become opaque to the new family entirely. As such, the emphasis in racial matching also supported the sense that, by seeing themselves reflected physically in their children’s bodies, parents could forge kinship connections and bring to rest more serious doubts about the nature of their relations.

It was through the achievement of physical similarity that state workers sought to put to rest this secret (about the child’s prior origins and the state’s own intervention in the creation of the family). Particularly, it helped them to anchor the picture of the family to a timeless and fixed temporality, in which success was measured at the point of its “correct” formation. By focusing on physical matching and the restoration of the natural order, adoption bureaucrats could leave outside of the picture other anxieties and ambivalences constitutive to kinship relations. Since DIF bureaucrats had to produce adoptive families with a decree of certainty, attaching their decisions to visual perceptions of similarity allowed them to reach a decision promptly and move on to the next case, without pausing to see different aspects of children and parents. The uncertainties of kinship and relationships, thus, had to be put aside to locate success in the visual perception of a family as “natural.”

In this regard, plenary adoption entails sanctioned ways of seeing and understanding kinship and relationships to others that restrict bureaucrats' definitions of the family, and foster an "inability to experience the paradox of seeing something as something else" (Robinson 2009:116). Bureaucratic practices, thus, require that workers systematically blind themselves from perceiving multiple aspects of kinship and adoption, in order to make quick decisions and preserve a fixed, stable and often inflexible view of the adoptive family (for example, through the legal requirement that there be only one mother or one father for a child, which is modeled on an 'either/or' model of kinship). Because of this, it could be argued that DIF adoption technologies involved some forms of what Wittgenstein had called "aspect blindness" (Cavell 1979; Robinson 2009). That is, an inability to see different aspects of one object or relationship, and to perceive change. The temporality of the "successful" adoptive family as the one that is physically similar at the moment of the adoption, which I described here, speaks of some of the forms of aspect blindness necessary to bureaucratic adoption work.

Yet, as I will explore further in the rest of the chapter, this view does not correspond with how families themselves have to produce and navigate relationships in their daily lives. As several authors have noted, uncertainties about relationships unfold over time and run through kinship and the family (Carsten 2000; Strathern 1992). Here, success cannot be measured as the achievement of resemblance at a fixed point in time, but is an unfinished process often shrouded in forms of uncertainty and doubt. In the case of adoptive families, as I will discuss below, these uncertainties can acquire particular languages that place problems with adoptive children in a history outside the family and the mutual relationship. In the temporality of families more generally, race and inclusion

are never finished, but adoptive families have to deal with the notion of multiple origins that acquire a certain life in kinship relations.

Mujer, Casos de la Vida Real

Early in January 2010, I turned on the TV on Channel 7. A show was about to end, but it grabbed my attention: A disheveled young man in his twenties had an older woman in her fifties grabbed by the arms and was pushing her around in the living room of an upper-class Mexican home. He wanted her money and was looking around for things to steal. She, a whiter woman of frail complexion, asked him with tears in her eyes: “What wrong have I done to you, so that you treat me this way? I am your mother!” The son, presumably a drug addict, responded with disdain: “*Haberme dado la vida* [Having given me life].” Then, the woman’s voice changed to a more serious tone as she slowly confessed: “I have to tell you a secret. You are not my son. I adopted you, but now I repent because you have *mala sangre* [bad blood].” Yelling, he said that this truth did not matter to him; he only wanted her money. He slapped her face and left. Still crying alone, the woman got a heart attack, but managed to call her maid for help. The maid called an ambulance and stood by her side until she recovered. In gratitude, the woman decided to change her will and leave the maid all her possessions. We never see her adopted son again.

It turns out that this was a rerun episode of *Mujer, Casos de la Vida Real* [Woman, Cases of Real Life], which was produced from 1985 to 2007 for Televisa, the largest mass media company in Latin America. In it, Silvia Pinal, a prominent Mexican actress, used to present the social aspects of “real” cases, supposedly taken from letters written to

her by women in Mexico. This show reminded me of the different occasions in which I had heard adoptive children's relatives describe their relationships and problems through racialized languages of appearance, blood and substance.

Plenary adoption, which follows an image of the natural family as one of intactness and correspondence, opens up new ways of distributing and rearranging relationships and practices of closeness or indifference towards others. Particularly, it makes available specific languages of the body and bodily substance to imagine, experience and practice forms of kinship and express relatedness within families. As I have argued, the legal erasure of children's past in the production of adoptive families is important to understand what can be worded about relationships and how anxieties or doubts about one's connections to others find expression in everyday lives. Of course, the existence of forms of skepticism and doubt in kinship relations is not singular to adoption. However, as has been noted above, idiomatic discourses of resemblance and pre-determined bodily connections hold distinctive power in adoptive families, and signal the kind of work that is needed in the creation of new forms of relatedness and the acknowledgement of others and ourselves in relations (Yngvesson 2009:105). For me, this also raises interesting questions about how race and temporality enter languages of relatedness, giving voice to doubts and anxieties about connections when they are mediated by secrets.

Scholars interested in child adoption have paid careful attention to the work and time involved in creating kinship (Carsten 2000, Howell 2003, Yngvesson 2007, 2010). Adoption, it has been shown, highlights the fact that "connection requires work; it is not a biogenetic given" (Yngvesson 2009:104). That is, adoption unsettles the power of the

distinction between the biogenetic and social aspects of kinship, showing how kinship is a social formation that can take many different forms (see Yngvesson 2007:564). In this vein, several authors (Goodfellow 2003, Modell 1994) have pointed out that what makes kinship real is its duration in time, yet its outcomes are unpredictable. Howell (2003, 2006), as mentioned before, coined the term “kinning” to express the processual aspects of forming adoptive families in Norway. In these efforts, authors have focused their attention mainly on the completeness and incompleteness of temporality and identity when looking at the making of adoptive kinship.

In an innovative article, Carsten (2000:687), for example, has paid close attention to adoptees reflections on personal biography and notions of biographical completion in the context of reunions with birth relatives. Looking at the ruptures and continuities of time in kinship, Carsten (2000:691) focused on adoptee’s need to know about their origins to complete their identities, and the breaks in the flow of time in relationships. In adoption, she describes, some relationships are halted to start new ones and their temporalities may be difficult to meet. In these cases, the media suggests that “ties can simply be taken up where they had been left” (Carsten 2000:693) with birth kinship, but this is usually not the case. Yet physical resemblance, which is often the only marker of connection to birth relatives, does not follow with the creation of emotional ties among adoptees and birth families. Here, the newer Euro-American imperatives to tell children about their adoption and offer the possibility of meeting with birth relatives, seem to assume that knowledge of the adoption suffices to complete a person’s identity.

Such assumptions, Carsten (2000) notes, seem to imply that “knowing” the truth of biological relations can put to rests the anxieties over identity and belonging that haunt

adoptive families. Yet, this is often not the case. In Mexico, as in other places in Latin America (Fonseca 2009a; Posocco 2011), the possibility for adoptive children to find their adoptive parents is already foreclosed by the very file-producing and archival practices of the state itself, which include its own forms of erasure and secrecy (see chapter two). For government workers the fact that there are things untold, forgotten or silenced within plenary adoptive families is usually regarded as unproblematic— perhaps because of the bureaucratic requirement, described above, to focus on fixed aspects of relations (such as resemblance), in order to make adoption decisions. Avoiding to make the past knowable, or excluding certain aspects of relationships to create new ones, is part of the state’s everyday practices in the creation of adoptive families.

I part from these insights to think of the breaks and fissures in the time of the adoptive family—between the time of “kinning” within the new family, and the time outside of the adoptive family (of children’s previous histories)—, and what happens when this ‘other’ time becomes an issue in adoptive kinship relationships. In the outside/inside model of plenary adoption, the fact that the body of the adoptee has had a life and temporality ‘outside’ of the new family (which has been formally erased or maintained secret), can reemerge and inhabit relationships in moments of uncertainty and doubt.

Through fieldwork with transnationally adopted adults in Sweden and the United States and stories of reunion, Yngvesson (2003, 2007) has also paid attention to the productivity of the “space of erasure, where biology is both cancelled and discovered anew as a site of surface (dis)connection, and continuity is produced over time in a series of returns” (2007: 561). For her, the experiences of adult adoptees in Europe show how the legal fictions that aim to produce a freestanding child work through forms of

commodity thinking that assign children singular and restrictive identities. Yet, they cannot get rid of traces of the past that haunt adoptive families and nations. In part, this is why in Europe adoptive families are encouraged to include children's past as "culture" trips and find birth mothers (Yngvesson 2009: 569). Yet, adoptees still have to struggle and find relationships with "legally non-existent" kin (Yngvesson 2007:570).

As in Daisy's case, there is often an "irritating presence" (Yngvesson and Coutin 2006:181) of scars and forms of pain that inhabit the adoptee's body, and refuse to disappear. As Yngvesson and Coutin (2006:179) have pointed out, "adoption is haunted by the canceled persona." Plenary adoption laws have configured the child's previous biological kinship as "a place and time that they occupied before they originated either officially or socially" (Yngvesson and Coutin 2006:182). However, especially with older adoptees such as Daisy, the "back" is not easily erased, and it imposes itself into the new family in uncomfortable ways. Instead of the "back" being a past perfect that has been definitively left behind, for children and families "Traveling such a temporal path entails multidirectional movements, not simply from present to past or future, but sometimes from one present to another" (Yngvesson and Coutin 2006:184).

As mentioned earlier, because of the figuration of plenary adoption as modeled on natural connections, even if children are allowed to *know* about their adoption, there is not much room for *acknowledging* these relations within the new adoptive family without fear of losing one's connection to one's child. When looking at the ordinary struggles and relationships of adoptive families, this idea of completeness through knowing facts can foster forms of fear about not knowing who your child or relative is (for example, when imagining him or her as being made of a different substance, or having an unknown

origin that is impenetrable). In the next pages, I want to focus more closely on the kinds of languages of closeness and distance that become available among adoptive parents and children. Particularly, how notions of resemblance, inheritance and bodily difference become available in plenary adoption to describe feelings of estrangement in relationships. Affects of kinship are channeled through languages of otherness and distance when it is impossible to acknowledge the other as other. As I will also argue, when looking at everyday relationships, *knowing* where one comes from does not suffice to put to rest anxieties and suspicions over relatedness and fears of becoming a stranger to another.

Rosalba's Secret

I visited Rosalba a Monday morning in March 2011. Her sister, Leticia, a psychotherapist whom I had met earlier through a common friend, had put us in contact after learning about my research interests. Leticia thought her sister's story was exemplary of the problems that can arise from adopting "children with other people's genes", and urged me to contact her. Rosalba was still putting her makeup on when I arrived to her three-floor house in an upscale neighborhood in the city. I waited patiently in the TV room while a maid cleaned the wooden floors.

When Rosalba was finally ready, she guided me into a heavily decorated living room with fancy but run-down furniture. We had to whisper, she warned me, because her husband and the maid could hear us otherwise. Although she had been married for 39 years, she hardly talked to her husband lately, trying to avoid him as much as she could around the house. Rosalba –a slim woman with pale skin and short gray hair– turned on a

cigarette, and looked out the window to start telling me her story. She apologized for not looking at me while talking, but she was taking antidepressants and she could not concentrate otherwise, she explained. So we sat there, very close to each other, whispering for more than three hours.

Her life had been very ugly and sad –she told me with humid eyes. The worst part was her relationship with her husband: “Honestly, it has been a very difficult marriage. He kept making me feel less since the start –she admitted– because I did not study; I had no knowledge [she is a secretary and he an economist]. All my life I had to hide from him, shut up when he came; he was arrogant, hard, crude; never tender. I think with love everything is possible, but with resentment it’s hard. He made me feel that I was less.” When I asked her why did she stay, she whispered back: “co-dependency, as they say.”

She could not get pregnant after seven years of marriage and her husband, a fervent Catholic, wanted to have many children. “I could not understand why I couldn’t get pregnant; when my period came again, I just had to cry.” He convinced her to adopt, and that would be their secret: “Here I have a very strong lacuna” –she warned me– “because I kind of did and also did not want [the adoption]. He did want it, he always wanted... I was unsure.” Both had family and friends working in the government so the adoption procedure was very fast. In a month they had a five-month-old girl, –white with black hair, as they had requested–, whom they called Regina Rosalba. “It was a secret, so that nobody knew. They are my children, our children, and nobody should know” –she recounted. Even if select friends and family members knew their secret, the children should never know, they had decided. The pediatrician himself had also told them it was better not to say anything to them: “*ni les mueva el tapete*” [don’t disturb them] –he

recommended. So she destroyed all their adoption paperwork, fearful that the children could find it as they grew up. The moment of the adoption had to be fully erased from the narrative of their kinship ties. Moreover, the knowledge about the adoption was considered poisonous and too painful to find open inclusion into their new family. Instead of being pregnant with a child, her body became pregnant with this secret about her body's impossibility to give birth.

“When my girl was a baby, the first three or four years things were good: The most happy moment in my life was when I held her in my arms. But it has been very hard...” –she continued whispering. “Regina received a lot of love, but there were also many problems, because there was a lot of jealousy from the part of [my husband’s] family. I am the oldest daughter, and my parents loved me very much, but unfortunately I have always been a victim of everything, so a lot stems from there.” Rosalba was alluding to the fact that her husband, whom she calls *El Señor* (The Mister), and his family did not support her when she was forced to take in her sick father, after he was diagnosed with Parkinson’s disease and her mother died. She cared for him for almost 20 years in their house, until his death in 2006. Now, her sister, who had recently lost her daughter to leukemia, was also living in their home. For Rosalba, these tragedies marked her family life, together with the early death of her brother in a car accident when she was 18 years old. After her brother’s death, her mother became seriously depressed, and she also feels this affected her own attitude towards life. She only studied to become a secretary, and became like a mother to her three siblings –a younger boy and two girls.

After two years, Rosalba’s husband suggested her to adopt another boy. “I felt more or less with the girl. At the time he had some friends at work [in the government],

who helped us [...] So they showed me a baby boy, but I saw that he was not right, he was wired, he could not hold his head, so I said no; so they showed us another boy, and he was so charming; he was almost a year old.” They adopted him and named him Juan Pablo, like his new father. Rosalba considered that her children’s childhood was quite ordinary, and uneventful, compared to other families that had to deal with problems such as sexual abuse. “The childhood of my children was, I think, more or less normal”—she insisted— “I played a lot with them: I took them to the park, to children’s parties; I took them to school. The homework... [I helped] more or less, because with Regina I always had lots of problems. She was a very difficult child, with a very, very difficult character.”

When her children were in high school, Rosalba had to start working again because her husband lost his job in the government. Regina was sent to a nun’s school and Juan Pablo went to another private school: “I picked Laura up from school and Juan Pablo walked alone to school until he was in high school. And we had a lot of problems. I think he started doing drugs when he was 16 years old. He told me once: ‘Mom I sell drugs’. But I had not idea what that problem meant. So problems started in high school, conduct, behavior, *se metio de todo* [...] He had lots of car accidents, and I always saved him.”

Rosalba felt that her children did not live up to her expectations: Her son never finished college, nor did her daughter. Juan Pablo went to rehab for the first time in 2003, while he was studying marketing. Later he started studying psychology, and dated several married women, before ending back in rehab. Regina married after she got pregnant, and brought her unemployed husband to live at her parent’s house for seven years. Rosalba paid all their bills and supported her daughter’s two children. At the time

of the interview Regina was divorced and lived with a new boyfriend, but her children (10 and 8 years old) still lived with Rosalba, who took care of them during the week. Rosalba felt used by her children. “They have lots of problems. Now they are angry because the dog is gone... They are spoiled, rude, disrespectful [...] I don’t want to see [Regina], I have a lot of anger. I think she is bipolar [...] There is a lot of aggression in the family, a lot of fears.” Juan Pablo, who was 33 at the time, moved out in 2009 because he could not endure the constant screaming in the house. Now he works in a cleaning agency for the DIF. Regina works in the Industrial Bank Police so she only visits her children during the weekends. For Rosalba, her daughter was not a good mother:

She is not a mother. She is not a mother... And because she was abandoned... I don't know, I feel that... I don't know Citlalli. Then she got divorced, and [there were lots of fights] that if the pension, if this or the other... She did not study, she studied a lot of things, chemistry, than she switched to biology [...], she did not finish, she did not want to... She wanted medicine, and then is when I told her she had to go to a psychologist. She said she would go [...] She went to the [university], we would pay it: pure waste of money... The same with my son, he stole a lot of money from *El Señor* [her husband], because he kept the money at home: “It was not me, it was not me”—he always said. And when we confronted him he said he would sue us for this or for the other, for him the word “suing” works for everything.

Rosalba also went to therapy for many years, but, as she said “I did not get anything clear out of it; well, only the fact that I forgot some of it!” The thing that she could not easily put into words, but she kept referring to as we moved deeper into our conversation, was her feeling that her children carried inscribed in their bodies, the mistake’s of other people (from their birth families) that could not be erased, even with the secrecy of the adoption, and that this truth determined their character and behavior throughout their lives. Although she knew that her family had lots of problems, the idea

that her disappointment with her children could be located in reasons outside of her own family history surfaced over and over: She found some kind of relief thinking that her children's problems may be the result of kinship connections beyond of her own doing. Just as in the TV show mentioned above, Rosalba's sister told me once that her niece and nephew were forlorn "from the start:" they carried "bad blood." "All families have problems" –she explained me– "but somehow these problems can be worked out with children of your own, when you know *de qué están hechos* [what they are made off]. But when you mix in other people's genes, from who knows what kinds of families, then you end up like my sister: carrying other people's burdens."

Feeling betrayed and unable to stress connections with her children, Rosalba could not maintain the secret of the adoption anymore. Fearful, in part, of her own implications in her children's failures and that her sacrifices would remain unappreciated, she felt the urge to reveal the secret to them. This secret was "*un peso muy grande* [a heavy weight]" –she explained. Rosalba complained of their inability to find each other again after an argument, as if words crossed their ways without finding a home in their bodies: "*Las cosas no se arreglan, así se quedan...* [things do not get solved, they stay as they are]" –she lamented. It was as if she had speech but her children could not hear her voice, and she could also not hear theirs. She told Juan Pablo the secret first, while he was again in a rehab clinic. It was during a week of "forgiveness," when intern's mothers and fathers come in one by one:

My sisters told me "this is your opportunity, you cannot keep carrying this [secret], *ellos tienen que saber su verdad* [they have to know *their* truth]. But I did it also for them to see all what I have *given them*; so that they could realize the special moment they had had by coming into our family, that we are... were a family with a lot of problems, but we were good people. That is, we are not bad people... I wanted them *to thank me* [...] I told him: "[Juan Pablo] do you

remember when you asked me if you were adopted? [...] Well, yes, I want to tell you that, yes, you are adopted.” And immediately he started to cry.

After leaving the clinic, Juan Pablo begged his parents not to tell Regina anything about the adoption. He wanted to protect her. He was in pain and feared that she was not going to endure this knowledge. After all, Juan Pablo and Regina had been “victims of language” (Das 2007:7), when the word “adopted” was able to reveal more about them, than they were aware of themselves. It revealed what others already knew about their history, and they had not been able to put into words. At the time, Rosalba agreed to honor Juan Pablo’s request to protect Regina, but this did not last long.

Two years before we met, angry at her daughter’s lack of maternal responsibilities, ingratitude, and bad behavior, she told Regina the secret of the adoption too. In both cases, the knowledge also came as a form of punishment that allowed Rosalba to distance herself from her children’s problems. The initial decision to hide the fact of the adoption from their children (when they were small) had responded to a hesitation to introduce this knowledge into their relationship, fearing it could interfere in their desire to become close and be “full” parents to them. But later, by revealing the secret knowledge to her children, Rosalba was looking for another effect: to draw them back to her in gratitude, without losing her own intactness and higher moral standing.

One day, Rosalba took Regina out to a café and told her she was adopted: “I want to tell you that when you were born it was the most happy day of my life and I awaited you with a lot, a lot of illusions, but you are adopted *hija* [my daughter]” Regina cried a lot:

I told her because I didn’t want more time to pass; because I had never had a strong relationship with her: A mother-daughter relationship; never. And with her

dad it was also always distant. They say that she has his father's character, and [Juan Pablo] has mine. But you know, addicts are liars, but we managed. But with her I didn't. I trusted [Juan Pablo] more than her. He allowed me to talk a lot about their father, because all my life I complained about their father. Nowadays I don't talk about anybody! I felt bad [...] I don't know... I told her so that she could realize all what had been *done for her*, all what had been *given to her*... She said: "I do not recognize another father or mother than you two."

Although new plenary adoption laws aim to avoid the language of gratitude in the formation of families, gratitude and ingratitude can still be useful to think of how proximity, obligation and distance are negotiated in adoptive families, and the maintenance of relations of inequality within kinship and family formation. As mentioned in the introduction, previous simple adoption laws in Mexico allowed the possibility of revoking an adoption on the grounds of a child's ingratitude. This made explicit the situations of inequality in which child adoption has historically unfolded. However, as Leinaweaver (2011:393) has pointed out, there is still a sense today that adoptees owe something to their parents and society. Rosalba's story shows how the desire to own her children's gratitude motivated her to tell them the secret of their adoption. Through this revelation, Rosalba presented her children's adoption as a kind of gift to them. Yet, as Leinaweaver (2013b:559) has argued, both the gift and kinship are arenas embedded with ambivalence. A gift can create closeness and familiarity, but also indebtedness, constant examination and suspicion. Particularly, expressions of ingratitude in kinship can reveal a misalignment in expectations of obligation and duty (Leinaweaver 2013b:560). As Leinaweaver has suggested, ingratitude has the ability to incite "discourses of moral failure and responsibility" (2013b:561). At the same time, the emphasis on her children's ingratitude, can also be seen as a shift in Rosalba's understanding of the forms of relatedness she shared with her children. With the word adoption now available to define

their relationship, the kinds of attachments she had with her children could also be rethought under a different light.

Even though Rosalba told me that she worried she was not a good mother or that her husband had emotionally crippled her children as he did with her, she found relief thinking that the main origin of her children's troubles was outside the history of their relationship. In the case of Regina, she explained: "I have talked to my sister, who is a psychologist, and apparently their behavior has something to do with... because she has problems with everybody". "To do with what?" –I asked– "With the genes, or that she is adopted, because she has a horrible character." Rosalba explained that she came to believe in "Family Constellation" therapy, which aims to resolve present problems within the family by looking at influences from previous generations, even if those affected have no knowledge of past painful kinship events. In one of her sessions, Rosalba told me, she came to the realization that Juan Pablo's birth mother must have been very young when she abandoned him, and that Regina's birth mother probably was a prostitute. Rosalba thought this explained *why* her daughter was such a terrible mother to her own children, and her son had so many issues with addiction.

Later I asked her if she would adopt again, and she firmly said "no." Her husband had wanted to adopt a third child, but she refused; she was overwhelmed. I asked her if there were moments when she felt her children were strangers to her (*los desconocía*). "Sometimes yes" –she answered– "As they started to grow up, sometimes I did not know who they were; I did not know what I was up against [*no sabía a lo que me enfrentaba*]. Sometimes I feel I don't know who they are now... Maybe it's an issue of their genes, maybe..." Ordinary relations of kinship (not only in adoptive families) are full of

anxieties about the validity of what we do and say, and the strength of our connections. It is the acceptance of this fact what allows us to recognize our finitude, our imperfection and to embrace the everyday (Laugier 2006). However, in adoptive families the myth of the child's intactness and transparency (for example, that biological kinship can tell us with absolute certainty what one's children's bodies and souls are made of) is unsettled by the fact that children have another origin outside the family. Here, ordinary moments in which parents and children become strange to one another, find expression in particular languages of the body that imagine the other as being made of a different substance and as physically a stranger to one's self.

While her children were younger, Rosalba had tried to stress connections: "when [Juan Pablo] was drunk, he used to come and tell me: "isn't it true that I am adopted? Isn't it true?" And I responded, "look at your little ears, they are the same as mine, what is wrong with you!?" [...] They never asked as children. We always told them they had two mothers, the Virgin and me, [Rosalba]." However, at the time of our conversation Rosalba told me she thought that in reality "they are not at all like us [*no se parecen en nada a nosotros*]." Those connections, if they had existed, seemed to have vanished for her. One could say that she became blind to them at that point. This was not an act of mere rational interpretation; her children's changed physiognomies expressed her own experience of herself, and her relationship to them. Shared physical appearance had once helped her to stress connections to her children, but this perception had changed, as she found herself unable to picture herself in their bodies and souls. The ambiguities of visual perception, as a privileged sense for knowing the other in plenary adoption, thus, allowed Rosalba to express her changed relation to her children: from a sense of closeness and

(visual) likeness, to one of distance and physical difference. Since visual perception cannot lead to knowing another with absolute certainty, anchoring knowledge on physical appearance can also lead to forms of skepticism about one's connections to one's kin. Rosalba's children were still the same, yet she was unable to see those shared aspects and could not project her features into theirs anymore. As Yngvesson and Coutin (2006:170) have argued, racialization can be "found" or "discovered" by adoptees at particular moments of proximity and distance in relationships, while it is also something that is always there, just waiting to be rendered salient.

However, the revelation of the adoption secret was not meant to put a definitive end to Rosalba relationship with her children either. On the contrary, Rosalba meant mainly to change the terms of their engagement. She was not happy, for example, when Regina told her grandchildren about the adoption: She wanted the secret to stay between her and her children only. At the moment Rosalba brought in the doubts about the quality of her children's "genes," she casted them as strangers to her. By stressing the fact that they did not share the same bodily substances –and looked like strangers–, she also placed herself in a distant and superior position in relation to them. These ideas pushed her to see her children's body as veiling their mind and separating her from them. Of course, it is not clear what Rosalba would have seen even if she could project herself completely in her children's bodies. The idiom of blood and racial or genetic difference, merely expressed her inability to stress connections within the family. The Wittgensteinian notion that the soul is there to be seen, since the human body is the best expression of the human soul, elucidates how what blocks our vision about our

connections to the other is inside of oneself: our incapacity or unwillingness to draw the right connections (Cavell 1979:368).

Rosalba's story highlights how doubts and anxieties in family relations can find expression in languages of substance and physical difference. This contrasts with the state's own perception of physical resemblance and similarity as the best ways to assure certainty and permanent success in adoptive families. Paradoxically, that which is supposed to make the adoptive family strongest, is also what haunts it and provides the languages to express uncertainties in relationships over time. While for government workers physical appearance is seen as necessary to produce closeness among family members, within adoptive families doubts about relationships do not stop at the surface of the body. What is at stake is the very substance of one's children's souls, expressed in the language of blood, genes or inheritance. Biological origins, thus, become anchors to figure distance and estrangement from one's relatives, as in the case of Rosalba and her children. Here, contrary to the state's fixed image of the family, temporality acquires the unfinished and imperfect sense of the everyday, in which kinship relations unfold. Yet, sanctioned languages of relatedness made available by the plenary adoption model – which stressed an either/or picture of relatedness–, also allowed her to stress distance from her children. Her way of seeing them, as arriving to her family already marked (or scarred) by other's mistakes, made her feel that they were more (or less) than “only *her*” children.

Of course, what made Rosalba feel distanced from her children, as if an aspect of their past had suddenly come between them, was her particular stance of mind. That is, the way in which she understood her relationship to her adopted children, as well as their

history. What came between her and her children, separating them, were her own ideas about what they were supposed to be, or “look like,” within their family: Her inability to accept that she could never *know* them with absolute certainty. As such, it seems to me that Rosalba also suffered a kind of blindness, which she projected upon her children. This was an impulse to avoid being reminded of her own imperfect human condition, by maintaining the fantasy that one can attain uncontested certainty of relationships by knowing where people come from (and what kind of “blood” or substance they are “made of”). However, contrary to DIF workers who were required to blind themselves to make adoption into a bureaucratic practice, Rosalba’s blindness was related to her inability to stress connections between her own family history and her relations to her children. It was related to her unwillingness to acknowledge her implication in her children’s lives—as an attempt to protect her separateness or intactness and put herself out of reach (Sparti 2000). As such, I do not mean to argue that there is an underlying reality about kinship relations that remains hidden to Rosalba. While there is nothing hidden, Rosalba is stuck in one reading of her relation to her children. What I want to stress is the constitutive uncertainty or instability that haunts the possibility of making a claim to know the other, which finds particular languages in adoptive families.

As Cavell has argued, the failure to stress the right connections: “is something we cannot see and not merely that we cannot know about the other” (1979:368). It manifests our action and orientations to the other (Mulhall 1996). What Rosalba could not see about her relationship to her children, is perhaps the fact of her own stains and imperfections, and the impossibility to “know beyond doubt” in kinship (Cavell 1979:482). What she had to be prepared to reveal about herself is that there is no such thing as families without

stains, even if the biological connections and normative frameworks of the nuclear family remain unquestioned. What is asked is an acceptance of imperfection, and of humanness, or the everyday. That is, even if someone was born from your own flesh, relationships cannot be secured in the form of possessions. The imagination of the family as grounded in natural connections, and therefore exempt if doubts about relatedness—which is the basis of the plenary adoption model—, is a myth that obscures the ordinary lives of relationships. This image of natural kinship maintains the myth that the child's body is transparent and can be known in its entirety by his/her parents.

By maintaining this myth, plenary adoption forces a secret upon the new family, which is supposed to displace uncertainties about the impossibility of grounding kinship in a “knowledge without doubt.” However, as in the case of Rosalba, the secret itself becomes a site to express anxieties over one's relationships to those that we love. In the case of plenary adoption, as argued in this chapter, the forms of uncertainty and doubt that emerge in relationships can be deflected without acknowledging one's responsibility in them, by anchoring them in languages of racial difference (as appearance or substance). Here, race, as the inner and outer substance from which adoptees are made, allows imagining a relative as stranger for having a history outside the relationship.

The return to the everyday in Rosalba's relation to her children asks for an openness to accept that her children will never be only “hers;” that her relations to others are different from exclusive ownership without doubt and cannot be defined by images of completeness (Cavell 1979:454). It brings to a realization that there is no relationship that can be secured in advance (as if frozen in time), and there is no way to know another absolutely. Adoptive kinship, in this regard, has the potential of unfixing the stability of

what we see, unsettling the experience of the word family and of kinship relations. However, it can also highlight the most ordinary fears in kinship, about the impossibility of *knowing* our loved ones (those with whom we feel the most vulnerable). Even though bureaucratic practices impose a restricted interpretation of kinship relationship to avoid exposure and uncertainty, it is precisely openness to this exposure what is called in everyday life kinship relations. The limits of this normative picture of kinship (as grounded in the supposed certainty of race, appearance and substance), can limit our ability to relate to others in the everyday.

Final Remarks

In this chapter I explored the nexus of secrecy, avoidance, adoption and race through two main stories and settings. Daisy's failed adoption story helped me to think of the limits of the state in delineating what constitute successful families for children, and how its deployment of languages of resemblance work to picture the family as an intact and timeless unit. I focused particularly on the legal-bureaucratic temporality that requires DIF bureaucrats to blind themselves to the uncertainties of kinship in order to make prompt adoption matches and imagine the plenary adoptive family as finished and permanent. I argued that the state's adherence to physical appearance as the best way to form "strong" adoptive families is supported by the insertion of a legal "clean break" between children's past histories and new families. This legal break requires the erasure of a temporal aspect of children's lives, which becomes important to think of what is silenced and what can be worded about the family. To support the image of the full and intact adoptive family, thus, the DIF also grounds its authority as a bearer of secrets: guarding dangerous knowledges from the adoptive family, while protecting it from the

class disparities and state technologies that made the adoption possible in the first place. The adherence to this image of the plenary family also implied stronger regulation of those “temporal” informal adoption arrangements (such as *encargar*) that did not ensure the fixed image of a stable and successful family sanctioned by the state.

Through the story of Rosalba and her children, I explored how race and secrecy also find expression in the everyday temporality of a family, where success remains an elusive and unfinished process. By ending the chapter with this story, my aim has been to think of how the plenary adoption model grounds itself in forms of secrecy and racial languages (of resemblance and shared physical substance) that traverse both governmental and familial domains. Particularly, I wanted to question the extent to which these forms of defining the family sanction certain practices of seeing and perceiving relationships, voicing anxieties and doubts about relationships. While forms of uncertainty and doubt are an everyday part of relations, the plenary adoption model makes explicit certain fantasies about the certainties of (biological) kinship knowledge. In adoptive families, where the legal erasure of children’s past and birth histories is often coated with forms of secrecy, racial languages of shared substance and appearance become anchors to stress both connections and detachment, by emphasizing certain aspects of relationships and blinding others.

The image of the natural family as grounded in absolute certainty through the sharing of substance and appearance, supports the fantasy that it is possible to know what the word “parent” or “child” is, for example, by relying merely on an external structure of meaning (Sparti 2000). That is, it assumes that it is possible to know in advance what a relationship ought to feel or “look like” just because it is based on some form of natural

or biological reproduction. Yet, this fantasy would mean that it is possible to empty our contribution to the words we speak in the everyday (and that love can be unquestioned and automatic)—as if we could have responses that are independent from our commitments and did not reveal anything about ourselves (Sparti 2000:91). The fact that this is not a possibility in human relationships is not a failure or barrier, but a constitutive quality of our form of life (Sparti 2000:90). However, in adoptive families this fantasy continues to express fears, anxieties and frustrations in relationships, by allowing placing the burdens of imperfection in a time and space outside of the relationship and family (namely in children's physical origins and kinship histories). Here, instead of focusing exclusively on issues of identity and anxieties over personal origins or biographical completeness, my aims has been to interrogate the languages of avoidance, race and secrecy that become available in ordinary relations, in this case within adoptive families.

Rosalba's and Daisy's story highlight the limitations of the state's endorsement of physical resemblance as the best site to assure a permanent and unquestioned family union by showing how these languages can also voice anxieties and uncertainties in relationships. They also illustrate how visual perception is not a fixed and permanent stance, but a process that can change over time. While for government workers physical appearance was regarded as essential to ensure permanent love and closeness among family members, for adoptive families racial languages often also express feelings of estrangement and distance. Contrary to the state's fixed image of the family, kinship relations in adoptive families unfold in unfinished and evolving temporalities. Rosalba's and Daisy's story emphasized how, contrary to the image of plenary adoption, there is no such thing as a family or body without stains, even if the biological connections and

normative frameworks remain unquestioned. The legal framing of plenary adoption relations “as if” they were founded on biological reproduction and natural connections—and therefore supposedly exempt of doubts about relatedness (as if frozen in time) — works as a myth that obscures social relations within adoptive families. The maintenance of this legal-bureaucratic myth forces a secret upon the new adoptive family, that aims to erase all traces of children’s pasts. However, both Daisy’s and Rosalba’s stories highlight the temporal impasses that emerge between the state’s understanding of a successful family and the way uncertainties and doubts are experienced in particular families over time. Even though state practices hold a restricted and fixed perception of the family that is permanent and given in advance, it is precisely an openness to the uncertainty and exposure to the other what is called to inhabit everyday kinship relations.

CHAPTER FOUR

Expert Knowledge, Grotesque Discourses and the Politics of Motherhood⁹⁵

In late 2010, Blanca Rocío and her sister, Karina, both pregnant, were the only two interns in a brand new pro-life Catholic shelter that had opened its doors to vulnerable pregnant women in Barrancas. Since the private organization also provided adoption services, arrangements were made to place Blanca's girl in an adoptive family.⁹⁶ However, after leaving the shelter, Blanca Rocío and her aunt went directly to the *Ministerio Público* (Ministry of the Public Prosecutor), to file a complaint against the director, arguing that she had coerced Blanca into agreeing to her child's adoption. At the time of our talk in 2011, more than seven months had passed and no legal actions had been taken against the institution.

I contacted Blanca Rocío and other women mentioned in this chapter, through an NGO working with a local congressman, whose lawyers were supporting them to legally recover their children. Working again as a live-in domestic servant in the city,⁹⁷ Blanca Rocío had asked her *patrona* for permission to talk to me one afternoon at her aunt's house. While she rocked the small basinet where her sister's baby was sleeping in the

⁹⁵ Parts of this chapter will be published in the article "Trayectorias de Maternidad: Empleo doméstico, adopción y circulación de niños." In *Trabajo doméstico, género y etnicidad. Un estudio comparativo a partir del caso de las empleadas del hogar indígenas en Monterrey*, edited by S. Durin, M. E. de la O and S. Bastos. Mexico: CIESAS/EGAP/Tec de Monterrey.

⁹⁶ As mentioned earlier, in Barrancas only the DIF can authorize adoptions; because of that pregnant women at the shelter were taken to another state, where this private institution could legally start adoption procedures.

⁹⁷ For example, from a sample of 50 *Albergue* files from 2004 to 2010, 18 files specified that the children's mothers were domestic workers; other files mentioned grandmothers, sisters or aunts as domestic workers as well. These numbers seemed interesting to me to think of the historic relation between female domestic work and the circulation and adoption of children in and out of social assistance institutions mentioned in the introduction. Many poor, indigenous and migrant woman, immersed in forms of social and familial violence since childhood, have worked as domestic servants and other informal employments at different points of their lives, without being able to take care of their children "intensively" as it is expected from "good" mothers.

living room (Karina was working also as a domestic per-hours at the time), Blanca started to cry. With tears in her eyes and a hoarse voice she explained me: “Ah, because since [the director] thought that I was going to suffer with my baby, then she started telling me: ‘better give her up for adoption because you will not be able to give her what she needs. She needs to study... and diapers, and clothes, and milk; how are you going to get all this?’ And so, I stayed like this [thinking]. But rather they washed my brain... I thought they were right.”

Blanca Rocío and her sister grew up moving between relatives, neighbors and orphanages in a coastal state. At the time of our talk in 2011, they were 20 and 17 years old respectively. Their mother, an indigenous woman, cleaned houses, and their father –a better off married man– worked in a slaughterhouse. When their mother took up residence with her third partner, Blanca Rocío and Karina were left *encargadas* with their maternal grandfather, while their two older brothers –from a different father– stayed with their paternal grandmother. They were 9 and 6 years old, respectively. Their mother had another four more children with her new partner, who remained living with her.

It was only when their mother found out that her father had started sexually molesting them, that she put them in a local orphanage. The sisters would be transferred to three different orphanages as they grew up.⁹⁸ When Blanca Rocío turned 18 years old, she was released and Karina left with her. Given that they had not even finished elementary school, an aunt in the state-capital took them in and found them jobs cleaning

⁹⁸ As mentioned in the previous chapter, contrary to state officials’ views, placing a child in a state shelter is often seen as a temporary measure for poor women in Latin America, that does not imply the “abandonment” of their offspring (Fonseca 1986:21). Instead of a measure of abandonment, the orphanage is regarded as a way to secure adequate care for their children (Fonseca 1986:22). At the same time, as Fonseca (1986:21) noted in Brazil, there is a certain continuity between families and parents that have had experiences in the local orphanage as children, and their use of the orphanage to place their own children in times of need.

houses. After moving in and out of different domestic employments, Karina was sent to Mexico City as a *muchacha de planta* (live-in domestic worker) and Blanca returned to her hometown, where her mother's neighbor took her in, also in exchange for domestic work. It was then that a cousin convinced her to work in a canteen, with the promise of earning more money. Blanca left without telling her family and started to receive money for sex. She soon realized she was pregnant. By a twist of fate, Karina also became pregnant a few months later. Both were sent to an aunt in Barrancas and from there to the new shelter for pregnant women.

Blanca Rocío explained to me that following the birth of her child she felt very sad, and suffered a great deal of pain as the result of a bad vaginal tear and episiotomy. The pain was such that she was unable to stand up, and she failed to hear her baby cry at night. Instead of supporting her, the nurses started to discipline her, telling her that she did not know how to breastfeed or change a diaper correctly. The shelter's director – a wealthy Catholic woman with adopted children in her family – insisted that, because of her lifestyle (as an uneducated girl from an indigenous background who had engaged in sex work), she would not be a good mother and could not provide the child with “the best future.” Feeling insecure, Blanca Rocío signed her daughter's adoption documents in another neighbor state—where, contrary to Barrancas, it is legal for this private organization to make adoption arrangements. Since Blanca Rocío was very weak and had not yet recovered from the episiotomy, she had to stay in the shelter after signing the adoption paperwork, but without permission to see or feed her baby.

The nurses bound her breasts to stop her milk production. Blanca Rocío cried a lot and was very confused: “And always when I went down to eat I got this feeling [*me*

entraba un sentimiento]. . . And even more when we were [in the kitchen]. They have those little machines where one could hear if she cried. ¡Oh no, when I heard her cry, I started to cry too!” At her insistence, the staff gave her permission to bottle-feed her baby once in a while. However, the shelter’s director took further measures to “produce scarcity” (Scheper-Hughes 1993:325) and help Blanca “make up her mind” ordering the staff to stop giving her diapers, baby clothes, or formula so that she could “realize” how hard it would be to take care of her daughter once she was out of their humanitarian institution. Blanca Rocío sold some rosaries that she learned how to make in the shelter, and with the money she bought some milk. When the milk ran out, a nurse secretly opened a bottle of formula for her, and her sister bought her a bottle. But this did not last long: “I had to tear my shirts so that I could put them on my baby and I had to buy a plastic so that the beds didn’t get wet, because I didn’t have diapers or anything . . . I wanted to leave, but the door was locked.” After some weeks of this, Blanca Rocío finally acceded to leave her baby in the shelter before they called her aunt to pick her up: “I felt that [I could] no more, that I could not . . . And I panicked”—she explained. When her aunt found out about what had happened she got very angry and immediately took Karina out of the shelter too, to avoid repeating the same story.

What modalities of reasoning and projections of care and abandonment made it imperative to free Blanca Rocío’s baby from her custody, even at the cost of her own suffering? How do the efforts to improve children’s future and lessen forms of risk through technical and legal interventions—as well as other governmental pressures to produce adoptions—, sanction specific diagnosis of motherhood that can locate the female body as the culprit of failed kinship and sociality? What kinds of moral effects do these

regimes of expertise and discipline have, and how do they render broader forms of inequality inoperable by becoming commensurable with images of good vs. bad mothers?

Blanca Rocío's case speaks to these questions. Given her life story and pregnancy circumstances, the director and nurses read in her body an impossibility to be a "good" mother for her daughter. To convince her of her impossibility of embracing pregnancy correctly and protecting her baby's life, the staff resorted to pedagogical and disciplinary measures such as restricting her access to basic supplies, to "teach" her that being a mother was not right for her. From the perspective of the director, Blanca Rocío could not offer a "future" to her daughter. Their interpretations, of course, were in part supported in dominant representations of poor woman of rural and indigenous backgrounds as ignorant, immoral and incapable of affronting maternity on their own (Durin 2011:88). For Blanca Rocío this had strong consequences in her life and her reproductive trajectory. Back as a live-in domestic worker, it was more and more difficult for her to navigate the legal system and search for her daughter, as she desired.

Ethnographic studies of disease and poverty have tended think of the relationships between state and family and their implications in the suffering of the poor through the dichotomy between "care" and "abandonment", "indifference" or "social death." Joao Biehl, for example, has argued that in Brazil the neoliberal polis contains spaces of social death, where human bodies are abandoned in "the face of increasing economic and biomedical inequality and the family's breakdown" (2001:137). For him, the "*abandonados*" are the "poorest and useless," the ones that are left out of the social contract and new experiments with *governmentality* and condemned to "social death" in places such as "Vita" (2001: 138). In this ruthless system, those who fail to make

themselves marketable can only be included and made visible through their “dying in abandonment” (2001:139). As he shows, these abandoned “ex-humans” or “non-citizens” are only made visible in the system through labels that allow recasting their pain as self-generated (2001:141, 142). He asks: “What are the various interpersonal, medical, and institutional interactions that turn humans into ex-humans and make their abandonment not only possible but also ordinary?” (2004:476).

Through the story of Catarina, a woman living in “Vita”, Biehl argues that the family is increasingly an agent of the state that can dispose of their unwanted and unproductive members when they do not comply with their medical regimes (2004:475-76). As such, for him the family can replace a state that does not care, deciding to make persons and relationships work or let them die (2004:481, 489). Under neoliberalism—Biehl argued: “The destinies of the useless, so to speak, are determined by a whole new array of networks, and as formal institutions either vanish or become nonfunctional and as government becomes increasingly remote from the citizenry, the household is further politicized. That so many are regarded as socially and morally superfluous testifies to the further dissolution of the country’s moral fabric” (2004:484).

In her study of child death and maternal love in Northeast Brazil, Nancy Scheper-Hughes (1993) also questioned what might constitute care and abandonment in the context of scarcity and loss. Looking at how extreme poverty and exploitative economic conditions have made maternal love “frantic” (1993:15), she challenges naturalized notions of motherhood and the intentionality of child abandonment. For her, the real “horror” was not so much to learn about women’s practices of selective care toward their infants, but the “bureaucratic indifference” (1993:288) and normalization of human

suffering in ordinary forms of governmental practice. Through the work of minor civil servants and bureaucrats, women encounter the State's "implacable opacity, its refusal to comprehend, and its consequent inability to act responsibly to the human suffering that presents itself. Bureaucrats and civil servants respond to pain and difference with a studied indifference—*la belle indifférence*" (1993: 294-5, emphasis in original).

While these approaches have shown the intimate relationship of family and state in the production of forms of suffering for the poor, they have tended to reproduce a particularly paternalist and moral model of understanding care and abandonment (and specific assumptions of how care and protection ought to look like). Abandonment presupposes an underlying position of subordination and dependency that define who can be abandoned and by whom. Das (2008:290), for example, has shown how the notion of social death for woman raped and abducted in the context of the Indian Partition, often conceals how families depart from the collective scripts of shame and honor and make efforts to provide care for their daughters and wives. Writing in the context of childhood, Panter-Brick (2000:9) has shown how terms such as care and abandonment work as prescriptive "moral discourses" that are embedded in normative judgments of what childhood, family life or motherhood should be. For instance, it is interesting to question how notions of social abandonment are grounded in images of failed domesticity and the moralization of the family as locus of love and protection. Such forms of moralization of the family, for example, have given force to the notion that mothers are to blame for their inability to take responsibility for children and other family members (Han 2012:234). Moreover, they presuppose that care and protection are easily discernable and stable concepts.

Das and Addlakha's (2001) study on domestic citizenship and disability is illuminating in this regard. Instead of finding support on generalizing notions of abandonment to describe how families and institutions deal with undesired kin, their ethnographic study of Punjabi kinship and hospitalized female psychiatric patients offers the possibility to think of various kinds of belonging that show how the Indian state can be both "in alliance with and in competition with the family at various sites in the construction and management of disability" (2001:529). By looking at cases of both "denial of citizenship within the domestic" (2001: 521) and alignments of the family and the state, they capture "the variability of the familial norms, capacities, and resources that interact to create the life trajectories of family members with disabilities or impairments" (2001:529). As Foucault has argued, even though the family organization has been used to support such things as population controls and forms of medicalization and psychiatrization of individuals, "the father in the family is not the "representative" of the sovereign or the state; and the later are not projections of the father on a different scale. The family does not duplicate society, just as society does not imitate the family" (1990:100). The family can be instrumentalized, but it is not the model of the government of the state nor do they share *a priori* moral objectives.

Instead of assuming that care and abandonment are stable and transparent concepts –or that the state as a paternal entity has unquestioned moral duties and responsibilities that guide its technical interventions–, in this chapter I focus on how the moralization of motherhood emerges as an effect of particular deployments of bureaucratic expertise. As Han has argued, "care is a problem more than a given" (2012:24). As such, through the cases of women whose children have been adopted or

institutionalized, I focus on how forms of expert knowledge deployed in the context of child adoption sanction unequal distributions of care for children and their mothers, through the production of particular (moralized) truths about subjects and relationships. Particularly, I focus on how the technical languages of social workers and psychologists produce the image of the subject as immoral by dissecting it into detailed technical labels that then can be reconstituted into an abstract picture of the bad mother.

In this regard, my intention is not to argue that bureaucracies and governments merely reproduce indifference towards the poor or that neoliberal policies have meant the retreat of the state from the lives of the most disadvantaged. As Han (2012:23) has argued, images of abandonment, suffering and exclusion create representations and mobilize moral sentiments that call for the reintegration of the poor into recognizable forms of life (2012:23). These moral sentiments are politically charged and allow specific forms of interventions in the lives of the poor and redefine the limits of inclusion and exclusion (Fassin 2012, Han 2012). Humanitarian politics of life operate selectively, by mediating which bodies can be considered morally legitimate recipients of compassion and care (Fassin 2012). As in the rest of the chapters, I pay special attention to the technical production of knowledge and the creation of commensurability with particular moral and racial languages. Both morality and expert knowledge are constituted through everyday governmental practices, and as such have specific histories in the termination of relationships and the formation of adoptive families. By locating adoption as a governmental technology, I explore how despite its formal claims to neutrality expert knowledge is closely imbricated in the production of moral subjects. As the stories of Consuelo and Fabiola in the next pages will show, to assume that the family and the state

share moral objectives and work in tandem in the expulsion of members into abandonment obscures the kinds of technical and material mechanisms through which the state takes children out of some families, even despite of them.

In the following pages, I focus on how differentiated forms of alliance and distance between family and state are produced in the extraction of children from their natal families. Here, particular associations arise between truth, bureaucratic authority, and technical expertise that have the ability to both moralize and depoliticize governmental practices (Rose 1993:294). These moralized narratives about good and bad mothers have the capacity to instantiate both forms of protection and disregard towards mothers and their children. As I will argue, psychological and social worker's talk about women's capacity to mother their children can sustain contradictory legal outcomes depending on external factors such as women's ability to instantiate a domestic voice in the eyes of government workers and the media. I focus on the stories of Consuelo and Fabiola, in order to think of the moralizing "deployments of voice" (Das and Addlakha 2001) that emerge as effects of particular expert discourses of maternity and personhood, and the forms of intervention that they sanction. Through Consuelo's story, which contrary to Blanca Rocio's did burst into publicity, I explore how contending legal, social and expert languages are invoked to both contest and authorize children's removal from birth families. I pay special attention to how female bodies become the sites in which these battles about children's and national futures can take place.

Consuelo's Story

As I mentioned at the beginning of chapter two, late in 2010 newspapers with headings such as: “[Barrancas], possible child traffic”, or “Young indigenous girl narrates the adoption of her children,” presented the case of a young indigenous woman whose children were illegally placed in adoption by the DIF. This mother, who I call Consuelo, was supported by a local congressman of the opposition party, together with feminist NGOs, who were keen on exposing the forms of illegality and abandonment behind the right-wing government’s “life-saving” policies. Yet, as I will argue, NGOs and left-wing party members defending poor mothers were also responsible for forming other knowledges and “politics of truth” (Briggs 2007), that reinstated dominant ideas about race and family in Mexico.

Contending narratives with contradictory information about Consuelo’s case were presented as follows: On a Sunday of April 2009, Consuelo’s children’s paternal grandmother, Juana, took her three girls to a near-by private catholic orphanage (given that the DIF offices were closed that day). The following morning, a DIF representative went to the *Ministerio Público* to file a legal complaint against Consuelo for the crime of “Family Violence”⁹⁹ against her children. The statement was based on the orphanage’s lawyer’s reconstruction of Juana’s narrative, which said that she had “found the children in a situation of abandonment and omission of care [*omisión de cuidado*] by the children’s mother, since she does not take care of them and works as a prostitute, the children are neglected, tied up [*amarrados*] and left without food, *Señora* [Juana] found them in the street [...]” That day, the *Ministerio Público* opened a legal file (*expediente*) against Consuelo, and the children were placed under the provisional custody of the DIF,

⁹⁹ Literally “*Violencia Familiar y lo que Resulta*”

while their familial situation was investigated. The on-site medical examiner of the two girls did not record any signs of old or new physical or sexual abuse lesions, neglect or malnutrition. However, the director of the private catholic orphanage stated in her declaration that: “the minors came in poor conditions [*malas condiciones*] of personal hygiene, without shoes, and dirty clothes [...] *Señora* [Juana] manifested that they were in the street already several days and that [Consuelo] mistreats them, leaving them alone the whole day while going to work with men [...] leaving the minors alone and leaving one minor sleeping in a laundry sink [*lavadero*].”

That same day, Consuelo also went to the *Ministerio Público* to file her own legal complaint against Juana, for the “abduction” (*sustracción de menores*) of her children. Yet, this file was set aside and not further investigated until Consuelo’s children’s adoption was disputed. In it, Consuelo argued that she got pregnant when she was 15, 17 and 19 years old, and that each of her children had a different father. She had separated from her first child’s father, but she did not know who the fathers of the other ones were, because Sra. Juana had been forcing her to have sex with different men to settle land debts. Juana was a powerful woman with many connections in the municipality, who bought and sold land and owned several small businesses in the locality. Consuelo stated that she had been working as a live-in domestic for *Señora* Juana –who also owned a local grocery store– since she was 14 years old, given that her family was extremely poor and she had only studied four years of elementary school. Consuelo refused to have sex with one of Juana’s clients and left with her children to her mother’s house. In retaliation, Juana tricked her children out the house and brought them to the orphanage. Juana’s son, Rene, gave his own statement some months later, in which he claimed to be the

children's biological father, and to have two more children with another woman with whom he lived.

These different and often contradictory statements were supplemented with reports from psychologists and social workers. In these narratives, the voice of the expert had “an effect of power, a demonstrative value, greater than other evidence and independently of its own rational structure” (Foucault 2003:10). As Foucault (2003:18) has argued, expert opinion has as its essential function to legitimize, through scientific knowledge, the extension of punitive power. These encounters between women, psychologists and social workers, might be what Foucault called “local centers” of power-knowledge, in which different forms of discourse, such as questionings, interpretations or interviews can become a vehicle for the interplay between “forms of subjugation and schemas of knowledge” through which women's reproduction and intimate relations can be constituted as an area of investigation (Foucault 1990:98).

The first of these reports in Consuelo's *expediente* was a preliminary report in “forensic psychology” (*informe pericial preliminar en psicología forense*) issued by the *Ministerio Público* to determine if she was capable of parenting her children. Writing in paragraphs without any period marks, the medical practitioner created a picture of Consuelo through “expert” labels such as: “regression”, “tendencies of emotional immaturity”, “weak libido or sublimation of instinctive impulses, vital impulse deficient” and “lack of imagination that hinders her spiritual and psychic growth”. However, in this case he considered that regardless of Consuelo's “dependent personality”, “submission” and “emotional immaturity”, she was “apt” (*apta*) to parent her children:

[Consuelo] expresses affliction and shyness, indicators of being crushed [*indicadores de aplastamiento*], impairment, insecurities, fears, retreat, anxiety,

feelings of inferiority, of guilt and unfitness, repressed aggressiveness, vulnerability, helplessness, dependency, regression, low self-esteem, related to tendencies of emotional immaturity. [...] There is a past conflict that is unresolved, sensation of emptiness and immobility; this can indicate repressed sexual desires, shyness, weak libido or sublimation of instinctive impulses, vital impulse deficient. The subject shows a lack of imagination that hinders her spiritual and psychic growth; loss of contact with reality that can be related to depression or emotional immaturity, and the lack of stimulation of her sociocultural environment.

[...] In accordance with the data obtained, this expert [*esta pericia*] established that the [subject] evaluated presents characteristics of a DEPENDENT PERSONALITY, in which the person is characterized by a desire of finding support in the decisions of another, by the submission to these decisions and fear of separation from this dependency, this is why it is hard for her to express disagreement, for the fear of the anger and distancing of the significant person, the fear is exaggerated and forces her into greater submission. [...] It is considered that the C. [Citizen Consuelo] is APT to take care of her minor children named [...] For which psychological treatment for an undetermined time is suggested, but at least while the lawsuit takes place. [Emphasis in original]

In subsequent DIF documents that made up her file, however, other psychologists and social workers determined that she was not fit (*no apta*) to parent her children, presenting her as an immoral and irresponsible woman who drank alcohol, went out to party with different men with whom she had sex—sometimes also for money— and lived with a married man, who was the father of her children. Cast as outside of the system of marriage and alliance, which maintained the reproduction and “homeostasis of the social body,” Consuelo’s body was subject to forms of control through a “deployment of sexuality” (Foucault 1990:106-107). As Foucault (1990:127) has argued, the techniques and deployments of sexuality are not symmetrical across social classes, and do not have the same effects: Consuelo’s body was made available for scrutiny in very specific ways, which marked her as indigenous and poor. While the documents did not make any explicit mention of Consuelo’s indigenous background, her hometown was referred to as governed by *usos y costumbres* (indigenous customary law) while her lifestyle and habits

were presented as abject, immoral and backward. Through these figurations, her sexuality was made visible as a way to discredit her claims to good motherhood. In this regard, the DIF's efforts to regulate and normalize families had the effect of moralizing kinship relations in order to assign blame to women like Consuelo, for their inability to "care" properly for their children (see Han 2012:234).

In May 2009, a social worker from the state's *albergue* filed the report of her "socio-economical" investigation, in which the fact that Consuelo did not have the support from her neighbors and family members was used as a strong proof of her lack of moral standing. As I learned during my fieldwork, these investigations are carried out during a one-day visit that only lasts a couple of hours, since social workers have to secure a DIF driver to get to their visits, and this is a lengthy and bureaucratic process. Contrary to adoptive couples who (as described in chapter one) have to show that they have strong ties in the community and with their extended families, Consuelo was presented as an outcast in her own family and community. The report starts with an interview to Consuelo:

Sra. [Consuelo] comments that her family is very humble, but very hard working, she says that her parents gave her the chance to study according to their possibilities, however she says that not even she can explain why her siblings are so different from her, since they are hard working and very respectful with everybody, however she was never able to be like that, as she says that since she was small she was very rebellious, she always liked to be in the street and meet with older people. She comments that her rebelliousness was such that the moment came when she decided to definitively leave her household, first she went to live with several friends, she went to the parties [*balies*] and came home drunk late at night [*a altas horas de la madrugada*] and she admits that in one occasion she even took drugs, and despite her parent's efforts to talk her into returning home, she never did. Time went by and one day she met a man in a party and they started to date and after that they went to live in a civil union [*union libre*] and after this she got pregnant of her first child and then of the [next ones]. She comments that since the start she suffered abuse, however she never wanted to leave him, but after a while she found out that he was married and this

is when she left the house definitively with her children. First she went to live with her parents, but after this she met [Juana's son] and his wife [...] and they became friends, and they suggested her to live with them, and then [Consuelo] accepted and since then she has been living with this couple.

As "Collateral Information" the report states that before talking to Consuelo, the social worker visited Juana –the woman who had placed her children in the orphanage. *Señora* Juana stated again that " [Consuelo] was always in the street¹⁰⁰ and left her children tied up and without food, even in one occasion when she arrived to the domicile she realized that one of the children was eating [her] own poop." The study continues citing the informal conversations the social worker had with other neighbors in the street, to support her conclusion that Consuelo is not capable of parenting her children:

Later I found a man named [Ricardo], who is an uncle from Sra. [Consuelo], this man comments that his niece, since she was a young girl, has always been a very aggressive, irresponsible person with bad manners [*mal educada*] and that even though her parents are very humble they always gave her a good education; however, she always disobeyed them to the point that approximately 6 years ago she left her parents house and started to live in the street, of course only to have a free life [*para tener una vida libre*] and above all to go from one man to another, and this had repercussions in the fact that she is a [mother of three] at such an early age, who for her today are only a hindrance [*un estorbo*]; he concluded telling me that today [Consuelo] has lost all contact with the family and given her behavior nobody wants to support her, not even her parents.

The report cites a conversation with Consuelo's father in which he claims that " [the DIF] should think very well before returning the children to his daughter since she *will never change*, and that this pained him a lot but neither him nor his wife could take care of the children since they both work." The study ends with a section of "suggestions" in which the social worker concludes:

¹⁰⁰ The fact that Consuelo did not have a proper home and that her children were found in the street goes against the notion that "The place for childhood to take place is inside– inside society, inside a family, inside a private dwelling" (Panter-Brick 2000:5).

For all the aforementioned, and in view that the collateral investigation came out totally negative, and this coupled with the fact that Sra. [Consuelo], mother of the minors [...] has been an unstable, alcoholic person, who does not have her own house to live in, has led a life without limits, without having any kind of care towards her children, since they have been mistreated by her to the point that they left the house because they were hungry, and they were found in the street in appalling conditions [*pésimas condiciones*] of health and hygiene, for all this situation it is not considered pertinent that the minors are re-integrated with her mother, since if this were to happen *their life and integrity would be put at risk*. [Emphasis added]

The social worker's signature stands below the DIF's logo "Hands working for Love to your Family." Under her name, is the number of her *cédula profesional*, which accredits her as having a professional degree. In this report, it is interesting to note how forms of innuendo, gossip, and perhaps even rumor, throw Consuelo's intimate kinship relations into a public voice that strip her from any claims to the domestic (see Das Addlakha 2001). By presenting her as lacking the protection of primordial family loyalties, Consuelo's life is made consistent with a normative moral imaginary of her as a bad mother, who cannot raise children as proper citizens.

Two months later, the state *Albergue*'s psychologist issued a News Brief (*Nota Informativa*) regarding her assessment of Consuelo's capacity to take care of the siblings. In it, she describes Consuelo as an anguished person, who is rubbing frequently her hands and constantly changing position in her seat during the session, and who has "a judgment and reasoning that on occasions does not correspond to her chronological age." She notes that Consuelo comes from a family with "very low economic resources and low cultural level", yet, the report concentrates on her lack of "moral limits." The main example of this is that she had accepted to live with the children's father, even though he is married and physically abuses her "at the slightest provocation." The psychologist concluded by

stating that Consuelo was made aware of the risks she faces with the children's father, after which Consuelo requested that her children be sent to a permanent orphanage while she solved her domestic situation.

As in the majority of adoption cases I witnessed, Consuelo's children had no birth certificate, and neither did she. When Consuelo came to the *Albergue* 10 days after their initial admission, she was not allowed to see the girls because she could not show proof of filiation. After three months without recorded visits, Consuelo's children were declared "exposed" –with unknown parents–and as such, legally "liberated" for adoption.¹⁰¹ The orphanage lawyers registered the children with administrative last names that did not correspond to Consuelo's last names. What backed up these legal actions, were mainly the aforementioned statements of professional experts who determined that her children were better off without her. The DIF's President and wife of the Governor, officially delivered them to new adoptive parents at the start of 2010, after a judge had granted the adopting couple provisional custody of the children. In March 2010, when Consuelo went to see her children again, she was finally told that they had been adopted.

Consuelo sat for days in the offices of both the *Ministerio Público* and local Congress, asking for legal support to appeal the adoption. When the left-wing congressman took the case, his lawyers insisted that there were several omissions and violations to her human rights visible in her file. Among other things, they argued that since Consuelo was never legally found guilty of a crime, and the *Ministerio Público* had considered her an "apt" mother, the DIF had no right to further intervene in her case, and

¹⁰¹ As Cardarelli (2009:147) has argued, the fact that parental rights are only legally recognized for biological parents–and, as we saw in Consuelo's story, even then only for those who have the proper paperwork to prove it–shows the break that exists between the law and kinship practices among the poor, who often engage in extended and multi-parental forms of care.

should have returned the children back to her before carrying out all the following psychological and social investigations. Consuelo's children's adoption was suspended until a new investigation took place and a new psychologist evaluated Consuelo's aptitude to parent her children.

Barbara, (the psychologist in the Adoption Department—who very clearly was not “neutral” in the dispute since she had also helped to choose her children's new adoptive parents—) was put in charge of her new evaluation. Consuelo attended a few scattered appointments from March to September 2010, when Barbara issued her final evaluation. In the report, Barbara produces a very similar narrative as the previous psychologists, yet what varies is her conclusion, as she does not consider it possible for Consuelo to parent her children. The report mentions that Consuelo is “anxious, anguished and troubled” and that it is not possible to trust her words, arguing that “Even though she is disposed [to provide] the information [...], it is possible to observe that this information is confused, brief, and a lot of it is contradictory, while it also gives the impression that she selects the information that she is asked for.” Her “Mental Exam” description states that: “Her judgment and reasoning do not correspond to her chronological age, which could speak of an emotional immaturity, given to situations of lack [*situaciones carenciadas*] especially during childhood.” Her “conclusions” are as follows:

[Consuelo] is a young woman with a limited capacity and with cultural and educational deprivation (characteristic of large families). She is perceived as withdrawn, avoids situations of tension and decision, lacks confidence in herself, with incapacity to find satisfiers in her environment. [...] Devalued to herself. There is a blockage and insecurity to consider expectations towards the future. Not finding belonging and facing economic and affective deficiencies within her familiar nucleus, made [Consuelo] try to cover certain “deficiencies” in the home of Sra. [Juana]; however [Consuelo] could have felt the aggression and being used (she did everything that they asked her to do) as “affection”, which therefore provokes her to accept a relationship in which there is no law (in that anything

goes and is accepted) [...] [Consuelo] shows important affective deficiencies that would possibly hinder her attachment [*vinculación*] to her children. [G]iven the deficiencies to which [Consuelo] has been exposed, it is hard, because not even she can delimit barriers for a relation to which she is attached without an interiorized law (the norms and rules that are established within a familiar nucleus from the parental figures), forecasting a future of physical abuse and or family violence, sexual aggression, submission, humiliation, etc.

What is interesting about this report, is that even though it describes Consuelo with very similar “expert” words as the previous psychological report from the *Ministerio Público* –which did considered her “apt” as a mother–it arrives at an opposite conclusion, stating that she lacks an “interiorized law”, and therefore cannot shield her children from future risk, and a life of abuse and immorality. As Foucault has argued, expert discourses used in penal cases possess three important principles: They have the power to determine a “decision of justice” that can terminate lives, lifeworlds or relationships; they are capable of producing knowledge about people and relationships, and as such, function as “discourses of truth within the juridical system”; and finally, they are discourses “that make one laugh” (2003:6). The capacity of these discourses to elicit laughter or amusement is, I think, indicative of their ability to invest forms of reported speech, such as gossip and innuendo, with expert authority. At the same time, it is their inherent “silliness” which allows them to support contradictory “truths” and legal outcomes. Here, biographical and kinship elements are braided in with public notions of morality to create forms of “doubling” that repeat the crime and make it analogous to personal traits: “You are given biographical elements that do not in any way explain the actions in question but are kinds of miniature warning signs, little scenes of childhood, little childish scenes that are presented as already analogous to the crime” (Foucault 2003:33). As Foucault has argued, these narratives possess a “supralegality” in the production of juridical truths,

while remaining foreign to basic rules of scientific and legal discourse to the point of being “grotesque” (2003:11). This supralegality joins the medical and the juridical by what Foucault called a reactivation of “elementary categories of morality that are attached to the notion of perversity” (2003:35). That is, expert medico-legal opinion [and its ridiculous character] comes from elsewhere: It derives neither from law nor from medicine, but from forms of morality that define the category of “abnormal individuals” (Foucault 2003:41-42). With the psychologization of kinship relations, Consuelo’s life became molded into the figure of the “dependent”, “deficient”, “indifferent,” “promiscuous” or “self-absorbed” mother that represented “an alliance gone bad and an abnormal sexuality” (Foucault 1990:110).

Consuelo admitted to the Congressman’s team that she had had sex with several men, for both money and pleasure; but that she did not consider herself a prostitute or a bad mother. As her lawyer explained to me, “that was merely the way in which she understood her body and sexuality, and who am I to judge her or stigmatize her. She is happy with her sexuality and I do not see a problem in it, [...] but that is not related to her children’s case.” However, to contest the adoption and give her case “positive” media attention, her defense team also considered that those aspects of her life could not be publicly disclosed. A group of lawyers and NGO members were put in charge of helping her present herself as a “good mother” in the media. In a sense, the publicity generated through the case also helped to produce another “doubling” process that placed Consuelo’s behavior in the sociological domain of the victim. Her public visibility and mediatic power were seen as ways to generate political and social pressures on the juridical system, as well as to undermine the authority of expert opinions and their

documents. Consuelo's story, it was hoped, could change from one of an immoral woman and bad mother, to another one in which she was a victim of the state's power. Here, the process of doubling placed Consuelo's story within a normative grid in which her vulnerability and dependence turned her into a target of abuse. Lawyers and NGO members aimed to construct a linear and transparent narrative that could be decoded as Consuelo's "real story" in the media.

Instead of a prostitute or libertine woman, the defense and the media presented her as a poor and exploited indigenous domestic worker, a "*señora*" (lady) and "*madre de familia*" (housewife) whose voice had been silenced by the backward male customary practices of her community. Here, race became a point of marking both her otherness and her victimhood, while her position as a "domestic worker" marked her social subordination but hardworking spirit. As such, for all her public appearances, Consuelo was advised to wear her hair up, use simple clothes and carry a wooden rosary around her neck. In the production of a legal and mediatic case, both DIF and NGO's created plots and racialized narratives of violence. Yet, the state and the media placed Consuelo and her story within different domains of discourse: While state workers made use of social work and psychological expertise to legitimize the exercise of punitive power, mediatic publicity made use of notions of freedom and constraint to highlight forms of structural violence and patriarchy that subordinated Consuelo despite of herself. To recuperate her children and assure that the law would work in her favor, Consuelo had to enact an indigenous and female identity that mobilized the appropriate racialized affects in the media.

To become a social and legal subject, the “politics of truth” (Briggs 2007; Briggs and Mantini-Briggs 2000) of the state required giving Consuelo an official identity and name. The NGO team processed an official voting card for her to “fight for her rights.” Efforts were made for her to get a low-ranking job in a government office in a neighboring state, farther away from her oppressive indigenous background. Later, Consuelo was also coached to send an open letter to the DIF’s President –which was printed in the media and written “from one mother to another” (*de madre a madre*)–to ask her for support in the return of her children. With strong media coverage, Consuelo and a group of middle-class mothers took over the streets in front of the DIF’s main offices to demand a review of her case. By involving the media and *vox populi*, and organizing events such as a manifestation of *madres de familia*, Consuelo’s story was framed as laying with the people and the common will, as opposed to the private interests of the state, NGO’s and political organizations (Briggs 2007). It was this coverage that motivated Blanca Rocío to seek the help of the same congressman, although not much had been done in her case.

Yet Consuelo’s transformation did not follow the path and pace that her supporters envisioned, and problems started to surface after some time. In June 2011, a female staff member in the congressman’s office, who had housed Consuelo for a few months, told me that Consuelo had “disappointed” her and went back to live in her community. Talking of Consuelo as if she were an ungrateful child, she reflected:

We gave her all the liberties in *tu casa* [our house]. Since we work all day, she stayed alone in the house in charge of cooking and cleaning. But there was really nobody checking in on her or observing her. We gave her all our trust. We even gave her money to buy *el mandado* (groceries). And when we went out, she joined us, like another daughter. Until then all was fine, but then my daughter-in-law and son came to live with us for a while, and the problems started. Consuelo

did not want to obey; she went out to the street all day to talk to the boys of our neighborhood. She didn't come back in until it was already dark, and that was not ok. I had to tell her that she couldn't do that. She even asked me about the men in the neighborhood (*que si fulano de tal*), and I had to tell her: "wait a minute, this is not acceptable! (*oye pérame eso si no!*)."

Consuelo could not embody the restraint and submissiveness expected from her as a "good" or "innocent" indigenous girl. Another female NGO member, Soledad, repeated a similar version explaining why Consuelo "lost interest in her legal case:" She could not handle their attention and help, and had changed a lot: "*Se le subieron los humos a la cabeza* (she got on a high horse). She is nothing of what she once was: that little timid, desperate girl *de pueblo* [town girl] that you met" –Soledad continued–"Now she is another person, she is arrogant, she became a smug, she is vain [*ahora es otra, se siente mucho, esta muy creida y presumida*]. She has not set a foot in the Courthouse anymore; she does not know what she is doing!" For Soledad, Consuelo was not worthy of their help anymore, since she did not show the proper respect and deference expected from her as a poor barely-literate indigenous girl. "She started to tell us that if we did not take her to the court house in a car, she would not go, because according to her, her life was in danger now that she was a 'public figure'—can you believe it!"—Soledad complained— "The woman that housed her took her for a haircut and manicure and all that, and she started to look well groomed [*iba bien arregladita*], and from not having anything to having all, I think she forgot her place [*se desubicó*]. She doesn't want to work anymore, she wants people to serve her and give her everything [*que todo le hagan y le den*]: I don't know, perhaps we gave her too much [...]. There is nothing more we can do for Consuelo."

Her investments in Consuelo's case, which she had so passionately described to me a few months ago, were now gone. Gone as well was her original opinion that Consuelo, as an indigenous girl, was a "victim" of customary practices (*usos y costumbres*) of the "genealogical society" (Povinelli 2011) and traditions in which she grew up. Soledad had no interest anymore in "civilizing" her and giving her the opportunity to become an "autological" subject (Povinelli 2011), a liberated woman who would fight for her children against the chains of her background. The same discourses of liberation that had been employed to imagine her future as a self-sufficient single-mother-of-two, became now part of the narrative of her inability to change. As such, her suffering was now her own fault; "If she doesn't have [her children], it's because she doesn't want them", Soledad said angrily. As Han (2012), has argued discourses of "self-care" and "self-responsibility" presume a self that is sovereign, morally autonomous, and transparent, who is posed against social determinations of "the poor." Perhaps what scandalized Soledad the most was that Consuelo's ability to reject the bonds of both her "community" and the middle-class household where she was residing, made evident Soledad's own gendered submission to family forms based on the restriction of female sexuality.

I was surprised that, while making use of different technologies, both the DIF and NGO's ended up presenting Consuelo in a very similar way, as an immoral woman who was not worthy of being "saved." Consuelo was presented as incapable of giving up her sexuality in exchange for her motherhood, and as such, not a victim but an undeserving autonomous subject. Instead of being the "good" indigenous mother who was a victim of society, she became both a dangerous libertine outside the proper class, gender and racial

structures, and the unredeemable Indian who is unable to embrace change “properly” and give her children a future. Consuelo’s expression of active sexual interests jeopardized her image as a selfless, asexual and suffering “good mother” who only lived for her children. Consuelo, Soledad seemed to imply, was guilty of not showing the proper “sacrifices” of “maternal love”, that were necessary to raise her children as a poor and indigenous woman.

I visited Consuelo in her hometown after she had left the congressman’s team. We talked informally, sitting on the sidewalk with two of her neighbors, as she told me she was “done giving interviews.” Consuelo felt that she had been used for the congressman’s political agendas, and that she would never recuperate her children. One of the neighbors sitting with us, a young man who was studying law at the time, said he had carefully reviewed Consuelo’s file with his professor, and he knew that the case was basically already won by the DIF. Consuelo listened to him silently, with her eyes becoming increasingly moist. The neighbor explained that he considered that several moves on the part of Consuelo’s defense lawyers had been flawed: First, he considered that Consuelo should have never been told to leave her community and her family behind, because that just made her look like a “bad mother” in her own community. Instead of helping her build up her reputation in the community, Consuelo’s lawyers pitted her against them, as the source of her troubles. In part, he was saying that Consuelo’s story had been stripped from the primordial loyalties that could ground her voice in a domestic and familial register. Without the backing of her community and her family, the voice of kinship in her file acquired a lethal quality that was sustained through rumor and gossip.

Consuelo was not able to instantiate a domestic voice that could position her as a good mother to her children and a valuable member of her community.

Second, the neighbor considered that another thing that really affected Consuelo's case was her presentation as an indigenous woman. "*Eso la vino a afectar mucho* [That affected her case very much]"—he explained—"We know that that isn't true. It's true that in the past here [in the town] some people were indigenous, but now not anymore, here we have professionals; people are not so ignorant, we do not even speak another language anymore!" I then asked Consuelo if she thought she was indigenous, to which she responded no, and her neighbor said he did not think he was indigenous either. For them, being indigenous—contrary to a redeeming trait—was a marker of ignorance and backwardness. Consuelo's mediatic depiction as an indigenous woman, which presented her publicly as a victim, was against her own understanding of herself. Yet, Consuelo quickly learned that she had to produce a certain kind of self in order to "receive help." For this, she agreed to what she now sees as "lies"—she explained—"because that way I was going to get my children back faster."

Right before returning to Baltimore after 20 months of fieldwork, I talked to one of the lawyers who had been handling Consuelo's case. He confirmed that her case was basically lost. Even though I think he later regretted telling me this, he suggested that the congressman's recent lack of interest was related to the fact that the campaign budgets had been finally distributed. Like other members of the team, the lawyer now thought that Consuelo's loss was actually her children's gain. "*Por algo pasan las cosas*"—he reflected, emphasizing that at least her children had found a stable and loving family. Consuelo, thus, was made to bear the suffering necessary to save her children from a life like her

own. While men and other relatives were rarely scrutinized or held accountable for the lives of children, it was the bodies of poor unmarried mothers, like Consuelo, who carried with them the burdens of having to prove honor and morality.

Das (1995) has shown how in the context of the partition of India in 1947, women's bodies became the site through which men and politicians communicated with each other (1995:202). Women were given visibility only to bear testimony to the state's power to define the correct site for them within the family, and an emphasis was placed in their rehabilitation (Das 1995: 231-32). In Blanca Rocío's and Consuelo's cases, their body also became the site through which the failures of kinship could be read. However, it was their children who represented the future of the nation, and not them as mothers, since their bodies were deemed impossible to rehabilitate. Here, for the correct families to thrive, the maternity of birth mothers had to be socially obscured and legally extinguished.

As mentioned in chapter one, Das (2008:292) has also pointed out how the division of "good" or "bad" women is closely related to their position within the sanctioned structure of marriage. While "good" women are in the custody of men (husbands or fathers), "bad" women are unable to contain sex and live within limits. As we saw in Consuelo's story, these gendered narratives also sanction the moralization of motherhood in legal adoption cases. In Brazil, for example, Cardarello (2012) has shown how the concept of the "disorganized" or "disunited" family "characterized by the absence of the father and in general headed by the mother"(2012: 233), is used to separate children from families for their lack of a correct domestic environment to socialize citizens. Because of this, Cardarello (2012:232) has argued that the position of

government workers and agents in charge of child protection is actually very similar to the one of doctors who advocate for the sterilization of the poor. That is, adoption is seen as a way to protect the child from poverty but also protect society from a potential future criminal.

In her analysis of the trials of poor women accused of killing their infants in the United States, Gurevich (2008), for example, has shown how legal strategies employ patriarchal and paternalistic discourses to construct narratives of bad and good mothers. On the one hand, patriarchal discourses demand women's dependency either to a husband or, if not, to the state's medical establishment (see Das 2006). Conversely, "bad" women are those who refuse to comply (Gurevich 2008:521). For example, the failure to seek prenatal care and other medical care at birth becomes evidence of criminal intent (2008:524). In Brazil, women who do not comply with family planning programs are stigmatized as irrational patients, irresponsible mothers and bad citizens (De Zordo 2012). On the other hand, paternalist discourses are embedded in the professional medical psychiatric and administrative documents that define motherhood. Once the parenting practices of the poor attain governmental visibility within the state's legal arm, they are subjected to a heightened scrutiny (Gurevich 2008:517). Through the use of professional terminology in the narration of informal conversations, as in the case of Consuelo, reserved and unresponsive demeanors are constructed as pathological. These expert accounts also create a break in the temporality of relations, projecting the past into the future. As Han (2012) has shown, these actions erode the possibility of attending to the fact that relations "might be lived in deep disconnection, but also might be someday recovered" (2012:233).

As such, these “expert” discourses are also grotesque because they license the state to exercise ordinary forms of disregard and punishment toward the poor. Consuelo’s story shows how the state’s and NGO’s “politics of truth” and racial languages of difference, set her up to fail: her “truth” could never show the involvement of public and private organizations in the perpetuation of inequality and violence (Briggs 2007:334). As Briggs (2007:328) writes, “cartographies of communication write issues of poverty, domestic violence and sexual abuse, and the violence of the state out of narratives”, in this case, about adoption of children. The burdens are placed on the bodies of women, who embody the failures of the poor and indigenous to reproduce the nation. As Das has shown, women’s bodies have often been the repositories of violence in the name of “healing” (2007, 2008).

As in the case of Blanca Rocío and Consuelo, those in charge of institutions for the vulnerable produce accounts of women as apt or inept, making use of technical forms of knowledge and expertise to legitimate differential distributions of care across social difference (Povinelli 2011:5,51).¹⁰² In both cases, the termination of maternal relationships was seen as necessary from the vantage point of its ultimate end: to save lives. Durin (2011:95, 98), for example, has shown how pro-life organizations such as the one that “assisted” Blanca during her pregnancy, are interested mainly in saving the babies and not the women themselves. As Herzfeld (1992) has noted, places of

¹⁰² Lawrence Cohen’s work on kidney redistribution in South India has shed light on how, in order to remain political subjects of sacrifice and love, the poor are often forced trade in parts of their bodies (2005:82-83). At the same time, women are able to claim inclusion in the state through their “operability” or invasive medical commitments (2005:86). Women who have not undergone sterilization operations, for example, are seen as unworthy pre-modern and pre-capitalistic breeders that cannot be proper subjects of development. In the case of Blanca Rocío, for example, her love toward her child could only be recognized in the form of a sacrifice by the private organization. The fact of her unplanned pregnancy and dissolute sexuality made her available for ordinary forms of punishment. By offering her child the possibility of a new life, in the eyes of the shelter’s director Blanca was partially able to assume the correct social position as a poor woman that the shelter’s authorities envisioned.

“indifference” such as bureaucratic settings –but also other public and private institutions in charge of “assisting” the poor—are sites “where the pettiest of tyrants—protected from inspection by the very banality and triviality of their power— are capable of inflicting a range of suffering no less significant simply because it is less dramatically visible” (1992:32).¹⁰³ Here, indifference is not equal to abandonment or the lack of feeling, but to the infliction of authorized legal punishment—such as the termination of parental rights and the negation of motherhood— in the name of discipline and moral correction for those who are cast as outsiders.

Fabiola’s Story

Libertad, an eight month-old baby girl born in 2007, was adopted in 2008 without a legal process to strip her mother from her parental rights, on the grounds of her mother’s madness. Her *expediente* partially reveals the story of her mother, Fabiola, and her extended family. The earliest document in the file, dated May 2007, is a legal complaint from Fabiola’s older brother, Fabian, in which he requested the institutionalization of two of his nine siblings. Fabian—a 22 year-old married peasant, who only studied three years of elementary school—presented the following account:

I want to declare that my father [...] passed away about three years ago, but my mother [...] since my father died sold my sisters [VICKY] and [FABIOLA] to men of the colonia [neighborhood]; from these relationships my sister [VICKY] had one daughter, who now is seven months old, but my mother continues to use them to get money, and what she gets are ONE HUNDRED OE TWO HUNDRED PESOS, from the men to which she sells them, and now my sister [FABIOLA] who has also suffered a lot from this, is eight months pregnant and she is a thirteen year-old girl [...] and I also know that sometimes these men do

¹⁰³ Looking at the “governance of children” under apartheid in South Africa, Reynolds (2013), for example, sees the power to punish as embodied in institutions, but also in the works of bureaucrats, social workers, doctors, magistrates, police offices, business leaders and farmers.

not give money to my mother, but pay her with a kilo of meat, or with rice and corn. I have tried to impede this but my mother gets angry and tells me to stay out of this; I also want to mention that my paternal grandmother [...] gave my sisters to her sons so they could have sexual relations with them, I only found out about this a year ago but I know that this has happened for several years before, and in this moment I want my sisters to be institutionalized [*albergadas*], because I do not want them to continue being sexually used by these men. [Emphasis in original]

That day, a DIF lawyer had accompanied Fabian and his two sisters to the *Ministerio Público*. As part of the ministerial investigation (*Averiguación Previa*), the girls were also asked to give a declaration. In her statement, Vicky, 15 years old, mentioned that she only studied until second-grade and that she was now living with his brother Fabian, his wife, their children and two other siblings. Her sister Fabiola, 13-years old, and her younger siblings were still living with their mother. She explained that she had a seven-month-old daughter with a man who moved in with her at Fabian's house two months ago. She narrated how the first time she had sex it was with a man that her mother brought home. She knew this man from before because he had also had sex with her mother in the same bed. He paid 200 pesos each time. After this man, the father of her child (and current partner) asked her mother to have sex with her, for which she got five hundred pesos in return. With detail, the declaration describes how Vicky's sexual encounters developed: how her mother had sex with her cousins while Vicky watched, and how her mother watched while these men had sex with her. Finally, she states that her mother did the same to her sister Fabiola. However, Fabiola's own declaration in the file is left blank, only stating that she "does not cooperate."

These documents are followed by the paperwork from Libertad's admission into the state's *albergue*. Fabiola had been sent to a state shelter for women who suffer

domestic violence, where Libertad was born in June 2007. Vicky, who stated to be living with her brother Fabian, was allowed to remain with her family. Once born, baby Libertad was “secretly” sent to the state’s *albergue* by the shelter’s workers (that is, without notifying the *Ministerio Público* of the baby’s removal from her mother’s side), because Fabiola was considered to be mentally insane. It was five months later, in November 2007 –once Fabiola was sent to a permanent private institution–, that Libertad’s admission to the state’s *albergue* was finally formalized. The report of a DIF lawyer, written after her transfer, stated that there was no information about her provenance or the whereabouts of her family. Discursively removing her from her kinship network, the report only stated that she “did not answer my questions, being visibly noticeable that she has a mental deficiency, informing that in moments of lucidity she mentions that she has relatives in [a nearby city], however she does not provide precise data.” In February 2008, baby Libertad was officially declared “abandoned” by the DIF’s Attorney, since her family had not visited her for three months in the *Albergue*.

To complete the file for her legal adoption, a social work investigation was included in May 2008. Since Fabiola was institutionalized, the investigation consisted of informal talks with the shelter’s staff, and with her mother’s neighbors. Her brother Fabian and her other sisters were never interviewed and hardly even mentioned in the remaining papers of the file. The social worker’s conclusion, which aimed to prevent Libertad’s reintegration with Fabiola’s mother (her brother and other siblings were not even mentioned or considered), stated that:

[...] almost all the neighbors know that [Fabiola’s mother] sold her daughters for two hundred pesos, or for a kilo of rice or beans, and really the *señora* is still young and strong to start working decently, she is a very problematic and promiscuous person. Another *señora*, a close by neighbor, comments that it’s a

really disintegrated family since the *señor* [Fabiola's father] passed away, [...] almost all her children are distributed [*los tiene regados*] among her family, they do not live with her, and as such have *malas mañas* [bad habits], almost all the time they spend from house to house, it is really a disintegrated family.

This is followed by Fabiola's psychiatric examination in April 2008, which was used to support Libertad's adoption. The document began with the following statement: "The undersigned surgeon, master in geriatrics and with a diploma in psychiatry, with number of *cedula profesional* [...], certify that I have examined [Fabiola] from the medical psychiatric point of view, of approximately fourteen years old." Instead of mentioning her family history and her brother's involvement in her admission, the doctor mentioned that the patient "was sent to a private shelter by the DIF after being found wandering in the streets being mentally disordered and apparently pregnant [*estando muy mal de sus facultades mentales y al parecer en estado de gravidez*]." The doctor diagnosed her with an "Incipient schizoid syndrome", and prescribed her a mild antipsychotic and a cerebral oxygenator, and recommended sending her to a special school "since I think she is rescuable since she has never studied." The examination statement read as follows:

The patient in question was interrogated by me and when I asked her what weighed more: a box with fifty kilos of nails or another box with fifty kilos of cotton, she answered that the box with nails weighed more, she also showed certain ingenuity and candor in her answers and general attitude, almost during the whole interview she was very distracted, did not put much attention and smiled about everything, I was told by her caregivers that she is docile in her handling [*dócil en su manejo*], but not very obedient, she only wants to play, she accepts that before she used to hear voices in her mind and that she talked to them, but that she does not hear them anymore. Her anterograde memory is a bit deficient and the retrograde one is totally blocked, she does not remember anything and does not provide any data to know where she comes from, her capacity of abstraction and judgment are very deficient. She is illiterate and the Bender test (tree, house, person) was applied and also came out very deficient. She possesses a very low IQ, it was sixty and the normal standard is seventy, for

which we think she has a moderate mental deficiency since birth, the drawings she made correspond to those of a normal five-year-old child [...] The patient in question is not in a state of being able to take care of a minor, given that she is easily influenced and highly candid, and she can put at risk the life of the minor or lend herself to being influenced in an act that can harm the aforementioned minor in the prejudice of the physical and mental integrity of the minor.

For Foucault, the category of the “grotesque” or “Ubu-esque” is a process inherent to bureaucracy that maximizes “effects of power on the basis of the disqualification of the one who produces them” (2003:12). That is, in a sense, by separating the narrative from the actual relations that sustain it. In the case of Fabiola, “the failure of the domestic is enacted through the voice of madness” (Das and Addlakha 2001:514). The story of Consuelo and Fabiola allow us to think of how “the success or failure of natality for women” (Das and Addlakha 2001:526) inflect their ability to maintain custody of their children.

Poor women who were able to recuperate their children had to make a claim to certain primordial loyalties both at home and at work that could place them back in the domain of the domestic as good mothers, wives and/or workers. Take, for example, the case of Eulalia, and her two daughters: Rosario y Daniela, two sisters of 12 and eight years old respectively, who entered the DIF’s *albergue* while the *Ministerio Público* investigated a case of “familial violence” against their father. Their mother Eulalia was a domestic worker from the neighboring state. In their case, a DIF’s lawyer received an anonymous phone call denouncing that their father was beating the children with a belt. When a DIF social worker arrived to their home she noticed that the girls’ father was drunk and filed a legal complaint against him in the *Ministerio Público* so that the girls could be sent to the state’s *albergue*. It appeared that Rosario and Daniela’s father, a

private security guard, was alcoholic and had also been beating their mother in the past. The girls' mother, Eulalia, went to the *albergue* five days later with her sister Laura to recuperate her children. That day she brought with her the birth certificates of the girls and two hand written letters signed by her employers, which endorsed her qualities as a "good" mother. In one of the two letters, which were appended to the *expediente*, it is possible to read in calligraphy:

To whom it might concern: I hereby want to attest that Sra. [Eulalia] is a person that helps me with domestic work. She is a serious, decent, honest and punctual person; she has a family that, like her, is serious, decent, honest and educated with *buenas costumbres* [good manners], obliging. And that when she is done with her duties [in my house] she goes right back to her own house to take care of her family. She treats [her daughters] well and when they do not have classes she brings them with her, to take care of them and feed them. [...] She is an exemplary mother, since she is always looking after her home [*al pendiente de su casa*] and gives them a lot of love and care, I recommend her as a mom. Sincerely [Signature follows]

Señora Eulalia was a 32-years-old Catholic woman from a neighboring state, who had only studied two years of elementary school and worked as a domestic servant. Her sister Laura, was 46 years old, single and illiterate, but was an "*ama de casa*"—that is, she did not have to work because her daughter supported her. Since Eulalia knew that she could not proceed with her daughter's "reintegration" process while her husband—whom the DIF considered the aggressor—lived with her, Eulalia asked her sister Laura to petition for their reintegration. As such, Laura had to undergo both psychological and socio-economical tests to prove that even though she also used to work as a domestic before, now her only daughter—who was married to a taxi driver and worked in a *refresquería* (a store selling chilled soft drinks)—was able to maintain her. Rosario and Daniela were placed under the custody of Laura two months after their initial admission.

In this case, Eulalia was able to channel the voice of her wealthier employer to locate herself within a domestic register and present herself as a good mother. At the same time, she was able to show her alliance with the state in the registration of her children as a married woman—even if her husband was abusive. Her ability to show support from her sister also gave her a chance to present herself as maintaining “domestic citizenship” (Das and Addlakha 2001) and therefore in line with the state’s expectation of the family. On the contrary, as Consuelo’s legal case progressed, it became more and more difficult for her to “make her voice count” (Das and Addlakha 2001:521), and written forms of gossip and reported speech in the accounts of state experts authorized the termination of her maternal ties.

In the story of Fabiola, her brother was able to affiliate himself with the state, against their own mother, in order to take Fabiola out of her familial relationships and into the domain of the state. Here, the poisonous qualities of her own kinship ties became the point of entry for the state in her life and that of her newborn daughter. While her sister was sent back to her natal family after the investigation was over, Fabiola’s madness transformed her and her daughter into wards of the state and terminated their relationships with her natal family. However, Fabiola’s daughter was given a new family, while Fabiola remained in a private shelter for the mentally impaired. In the shelter, Fabiola was free from the lethal aspects of her natal kinship, but her voice remained unheard.

Final Remarks

Through the stories of Blanca Rocío, Fabiola and Consuelo, it is possible to observe how the state and social assistance institutions intervene in the maintenance of differential accesses to maternity, when they take part in the circulation and adoption of their children. This finds support largely in the paradoxes that emerge between legal languages of equality—regarding children’s rights and the superior interest of the minor—and the exclusion and legal and labor marginalization of their mothers. While adoption technologies follow modern discourses of “improvement” of the population (Li 2007), these forms of improvement and expert diagnosis are differentiated across social, racial and economic domains. Yet, these histories of inequality are rendered inoperable through technical processes that allow equating the life histories of the poor with present and future criminal and immoral activities and personalities. In this regard, the intersection of technical expertise, truth-claims, and juridical power have the effect of both de-politicizing bureaucratic state practices and their role in the moralization of relationships and subjects (Rose 1993).

In this chapter I have paid attention to how “expert” psychological and social work reports –as well as the media– have the effect of creating moralized narratives about good and bad mothers, which can sustain contradictory “truths” about poor women’s capacities to parent their children. As such, morality and technology are both constituted through governmental practices, and are not already constituted objects, merely being mediated by the state. Particularly, I explored how forms of expert knowledge and technical expertise are deployed to create forms of “doubling” that link the life history of the subject with a particular (future) crime or moral-legal transgression. Thus,

sanctioning specific forms of correction or punishment for those poor mothers who are deemed unfit to parent their children. The technical languages deployed by social workers and psychologists, albeit different –the first based mostly on reported speech and informal conversation to establish the relation of the individual to the group; the second based on the dissection of the individual into particular forms of behavior and traits– generate an overall picture of mothers as moral persona that determine their possibility to share a joint future with their children.

Social worker's reports, for instance, incorporate forms of informal conversation and gossip into their accounts, throwing women's kinship relations into the public domain and separating their stories from their relationships. This stripping of primordial loyalties makes their lives consistent with moral norms and social imaginaries of them as bad mothers; or women that cannot conjure up a domestic voice and instantiate the domain of the family. At the same time, psychological discourses are grotesque in their constitution of normalizing discourses, precisely because they allow the entanglement of different juridical, technical, and administrative domains in the moralization of subjects and relations. These discourses make one laugh because they let us see how the production of truth claims is arbitrary and does not follow clear rules. The statements of DIF psychologists and social workers, for example, allow picturing a potential future crime before it has even been committed, projecting forms of risk as a reason to terminate paternal ties. As such, scenes of childhood and domesticity can become proofs of a mother's propensities to future forms of child abuse or neglect. Here, the resulting verdict of a mother as "apt" or "inapt" as a parent is mainly projected towards the prevention of future crimes and the predictability of immoral behavior. While the child's future is in

need of protection, poor mothers are evaluated to determine the extent of risk they pose for the moral and physical wellbeing of their children.

Through the story of Consuelo, I focused on how the deployment of contested narratives mobilizes affective responses that have the power to present poor mothers as both victims and perpetrators. In Consuelo's case, racial invocations of motherhood had the power to simultaneously mark her as degenerate and pure, while maintaining her position of difference. However, the languages of racialization through which she was presented both as an abnegated and victimized indigenous mother, and also an immoral woman, could not account for the abandonment that she had endured during her life.

These racialized and expert languages oscillate between what Povinelli (2011) has called narratives of the autological subject and the genealogical society, that allow to place the burdens of the durative present back into the lives of subjects that fail to liberate themselves from their indigeneity or moral and mental degeneration. As such, their voice can only emerge from a temporality of difference—that of madness, immorality or indigeneity—, which is therefore not equal to those working and talking on their behalf. In the case of Consuelo, grammatical figurations that mark the indigenous and poor as living in the past perfect are absorbed into affective attachments that form part of state and NGO racial practices.

While it might be argued that women like Blanca Rocío, Fabiola or Consuelo have been “abandoned” by society or even by their own families, due to forms of structural inequality that discriminate against the poor, this term does not capture the multiple ways in which governmental actions are ordinarily layered in peoples lives. At the same time, it might obscure how different “distributions of the living” (Foucault

1990:144) take place through regulatory and corrective measures. Yet, it is interesting to question how notions of a failed domesticity, for example, come to inhabit narratives of abandonment that circulate in social worker's reports. Women like Fabiola and Consuelo, for example, are presented as abandoned by their families and communities and therefore as not capable of actively raising their own children. Here, a paternalistic model of the state is instantiated, with specific assumptions of what care and protection ought to look like. Those women that do not have the protection of a *pater familias* are stripped from a claim to the domestic, and therefore from the care of their children. This strong moralization of family bonds that emerges as an effect of technical state practices allows assigning blame to women for their inability to "care" properly for their members (Han 2012:234). Women like Blanca Rocío's, Fabiola's or Consuelo's, that are not able to protect the future lives and health of their children or assure their place in the system of state education and training (Foucault 2003:257), are made available for particular forms of governmental discipline and punishment. Moreover, the image of the working class family as incestuous and sexually promiscuous, like Fabiola's, also supports particular governmental techniques of correction and moralization, in the distribution and distancing of bodies or withdrawal of the child from the family (Foucault 2003:272).

CONCLUSION

My first sense of the troubling contradictions inherent to the Mexican state's politics of life came during a "presentation" in which children were introduced to their new adoptive parents. That morning at the DIF's *Albergue*, from 8:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m., I watched as a new couple arrived every hour to meet their assigned children for the very first time. The children, seven little ones, had been especially bathed, combed and dressed for the occasion. It seemed to be a day of celebration for everyone present. The *Albergue's* air was full of expectations and hope, and I felt very moved by the couples' joy and tears. However, for me the families' celebration was also partially overshadowed by events that took place earlier that morning, on my way to the *Albergue*; and I found it hard to concentrate.

It was 7:30 a.m. when the taxi driver that took me to the *Albergue* entered the highway. Just after the entrance he suddenly slowed down; there was unusual traffic. I saw the police in front of us, next to a fancy new hotel chain; several people were standing on the side of the road. I thought it was a checkpoint, there were so many around the city at the time; but I was wrong. The taxi driver said surprised: "*Ah, ya aparecieron nuevos muertitos!* (Ah, new bodies have appeared!)" I looked at the side of the road. Two dead bodies were lying on the grass, still not completely covered up by the police: partially naked, brown skinned, tied down, their heads covered with tape. The taxi driver did not stop. We continued our journey in silence.

As I thought about the contradictory images and feelings that marked that day, I was pushed to ask how the discourses and practices of adoption that I sought to study resonated within a context of entrenched inequalities and increasing state involvement in

a violent war against "organized crime." How did the formation of correct families unfold in this particular historical and socio-political climate, and what forms of rationality, expertise, social relations, and administration were required? I remembered how Taussig (1997:7) had once wondered: "whether it could be that death and the children meet on this very point to constitute the magic of the state?" Writing about an imaginary Latin American country, he had seemed to suggest that the state gained its magical force by extracting holiness, solidity and legitimacy from the inarticulable fear and absurdity that unite "the space of death and the imagination of the child" (Taussig 1997:195). When seen together, these apparently disconnected and paradoxical events, point to the close relationships between violence and the ordering functions of the state (Das and Poole 2004:6). Moreover, they questioned the image of the state as a neatly defined metaphysical entity which is defined by clear borders between internal realms of order and law and the exterior domains of wilderness and uncontrolled violence that surround and threaten it (Das and Poole 2004:7).

These events, and my broader ethnographic work, highlighted for me the contradictory and often illegible practices that conform the work of the Mexican state. They suggested that the state's own "margins" do not merely mark the division between corpses and adoption rituals, but also run across those bureaucratic practices that are at the heart of the state's own politics of life and the protection of vulnerable children (Das and Poole 2004). This dissertation has focused closely on material practices that cut across public and private domains, problematizing the registers of the obvious and the familiar through which bureaucracy, law and inequality constitute socio-political realities and forms of lived experience. In this regard, my ethnography challenges the "magical" solidity of categories such as the state, family and kinship and asks instead how these

domains are mutually constituted and traversed by entrenched forms of racial, class and gender inequality. My aim in the dissertation has not been to uncover hidden or general truths about state power or adoptive relations, but rather to explore the particular moralizing and racializing effects of adoption as a set of technical, documentary, and administrative procedures, rationalities, domains of expertise, and relations of authority.

The seeds of this project grew out of an early interest in questioning how racial, political and social identities were formed and contested through particular governmental projects in Mexico. As a *licenciatura* student, I wrote a thesis based on archival and ethnographic research in an Italian community formed by the nineteenth century Mexican state, in order to modernize the countryside through the “whitening” of the surrounding indigenous population –both physically and culturally, through private land tenure. I realized that race, for instance, became materialized in the agrarian landscape of the region through governmental, communal and familial practices, becoming strongly embedded in notions about property (Reyes Kipp 2005). This brought me to question the relative absence in Mexican anthropology of studies about race and kinship in urban and non-indigenous contexts. Given the historical place of Mexican anthropology as a tool for state formation, the discipline had privileged a focus on indigenous groups and cultures as “others” in the modern mixed-race nation-state while ignoring state practices that produce racial subjects (Dawson 1998, Krotz 1991, Lomnitz 2001). This, of course, reflected a broader trend in the history of anthropology as a discipline, which had traditionally not regarded the state as a proper object or site of ethnographic study, in part due to its original concern with the study of the primitive “Other” (Das and Poole 2004:4).

For this dissertation project, one of my main concerns was to find an approach and a methodology that could allow me to explore the life of practices that have often been coded as unproblematic or self-evident. How could I study race, inequality,

biopolitics or the state, for instance, not only from the perspective of metaphysics, national ideology or Otherness, but in their imminence, as they are materialize in the registers of the quotidian, private, domestic, as well as the public and governmental? How could an ethnographic account –and its detailed and reflexive emphasis on the experiential, relational, minute and mundane–, help me to elucidate questions about state practice, family or kinship without assuming what they are *a priori*? How could an ethnographic account allow me to go beyond the image of order and transcendence that has been associated with the state (Das and Poole 2004:5)?

Focusing on the nexus between family formation and bureaucratic state practices seemed like an extremely promising site to think of how forms of race –and kinship, and the state itself–which are often thought of as separate and self-evident domains, acquire solidity at the local level. Moreover, it offered rich avenues to think of how a state’s politics of life unfold in a context of entrenched inequality and war. By paying attention at how various regulatory regimes colonize the law and allow the functioning of the state, this approach opened up new possibilities to think of how forms of kinship and family become sites through which the state is continually formed and redefined. Adoption and bureaucratic practices thus become entry points to think of how broader domains of the state, family and kinship are mutually constituted and traversed by entrenched forms of racial, class and gender inequality. What I think makes this dissertation novel is precisely that it addresses its main topics sideways, indirectly or transversally –that is, as cutting across domains that are often thought of as separate and discrete.

Drawing on twenty consecutive months of ethnographic and archival research carried out between 2009 and 2011, my dissertation offers a critical understanding of law, kinship, race and racialization. Through detailed ethnographic observations and by sharing in the work tasks and daily rhythms of the bureaucrats I was studying, I was able

to understand how everyday bureaucratic, legal and domestic processes come to shape relations and juridical-moral subjects in the context of child adoption policies and practices in Mexico. My long-term fieldwork gave me the opportunity to generate close relationships within the DIF's Adoption Department and *Albergue* staff, and to gain intimate insights into the documentary, administrative and legal practices that "produce" the state and adoptive families. Moreover, through my work with adoptive families and birth mothers, I was able to highlight the procedures and apparatuses through which different bureaucratic technologies intervene in families and the future of relationships. In this sense, rather than approaching kinship and family as natural domains on which the state merely intervenes, the dissertation explored the particular configurations that "kinship" acquires as it inhabits public, political and domestic relationships and domains.

In this regard, I see this dissertation making some novel contributions to adoption studies, by looking at it from the point of view of state and bureaucratic practices. While anthropological studies of kinship and adoption in non-Western societies are well established (Brady 1979; Carroll 1970; Carsten 1991; Goody 1969; Schrauwes 1999; Silk 1980; Verhoef 2005), the anthropological literature on families with adopted children in Western societies has emerged more recently, focusing mostly on the experiences of families in so-called "receiving" countries of internationally adopted children (Bowie 2004; Howell 2006; Leinaweaver 2013a; Modell 1994; Terrell and Modell 1994; Yngvesson 2010). Scholars have paid attention to such aspects as identity processes (Yngvesson 2005; 2007); experiences of temporality and memory (Carsten 2000; Dorow 2006); disclosure and secrecy in adoptive families secrecy (Modell 2001, 2002; Wegar 1997; Yngvesson 1997); and the moral discourses that support legal

frameworks of children's rights in the context of international adoption (Marre and Briggs 2009; Yngvesson 2002).

In Latin America, informal adoption and fostering have been studied in the context of rural/indigenous communities (Matos Viegas 2003; Halbmayer 2004; Weismantel 1995), illustrating culturally specific forms of creating relatedness that challenge normative understandings of the nuclear family and are outside the purview of the state. A smaller number of studies in South America have focused on "child circulation" and informal adoption in modern urban contexts in which state conceptions of kinship intersect and repress local practices (Cardoso 1984; Cardarelli 2009; Fonseca 2004; Leifsen 2013; Leinaweaver 2007; Walmsley 2008). These authors have shown how child circulation both reproduces forms of relatedness and relations of inequality (Leinaweaver and Seligmann 2009). However, many of these projects have looked at local cultural kinship practices as opposed to state practices, and have foregrounded these domains as clearly bounded, separate or antagonistic. In my research, I have focused on understanding how bureaucratic spaces are constantly brought into contact with forms of knowledge and normative domains that sanction different valuations of life for children and birth mothers. My argument is that these domains are central to governmental work and the implementation of law. In this respect, my work moves away from metaphysical conceptions of the state and makes its normalizing practices an object of ethnographic investigation.

Rather than approaching kinship and family as natural domains on which the state merely intervenes, the dissertation explores the particular configurations that "kinship" acquires as it inhabits public, political and domestic relationships and domains. I depart from this understanding to think of how both family and kinship are produced in

coordination with bureaucratic practices. I focus on both the multiple arrangements and practices that create the effect of the state as a separate and coherent actor; and the techniques that produce kinship as an autonomous, fundamental and natural domain upon which the state merely acts. Instead of trying to produce a general account of adoptive kinship in Mexico, I offer a detailed exploration of those practices of truth-making that tell us something about the limits in delineating family, relationships, authority and care. While my research draws fruitful insights and inspiration from recent adoption studies that focus on issues of identity and parenting (Carsten 2000; Howell 2009; Yngvesson 2010), I do not try to make a case for the existence of a separate domain of adoptive kinship—as a special kind of kinship relationship. I instead hope to show how truths about kinship are created and the force they have to produce and terminate relationships. That is why I foreground adoption programs as technologies of government, focusing not merely in the application of abstract laws and their intrusion in families, but in the acts of a complex bureaucratic apparatus and its multiple modalities of expertise and knowledge production.

Another central motivation for this research project has been to think of the place of race as it traverses governmental and familial domains. While scholars have shown how race-making is a foundational part of the modern state and its rule of law (Fitzpatrick 1992; Foucault 1992; Goldberg 2002; Harris 1996; Starr and Collier 1989), the study of race in Latin America has been strongly concerned with understanding the national project of *mestizaje* as an “inclusive ideology of exclusion” that is based on ideals of whiteness (Alonso 1994; Miller 2004; Knight 1990; Stutzman 1981; Wade 2004), or an empowering tool used by subaltern groups to make alternative claims of

inclusion (De la Cadena 2000; Hale 2007; Mallon 1996). Fieldwork-based studies of race and racism in Mexico are scarce, and have focused mostly on indigenous and some black communities (Friedlander 1975; Gall 2007; Lewis 2000; Safa 2005). Recent studies in Mexico and Latin America have begun to look at the spatial, affective and experiential aspects of race and *mestizaje* (Alonso 2007; Moreno Figueroa 2008; Poole 2004, 2005, 2009; Wade 2005, 2012).

The study of race in the context of the family has been partly addressed in research on female domestic servants (Gill 1994; Goldstein 2003; Rubbo and Taussig 1983), and more recently in a growing body of work devoted to international cross-racial adoptions in the first world (Dorow 2006; Marre and Briggs 2009; Yngvesson 2000, 2010). However, in the Mexican case, the ethnographic study of race in urban, domestic, governmental, and “mixed-race” contexts is a novel area of study. Through my research, I provide insight into how race becomes a language through which affects and relations can be described, moralized, rendered technical and operable; as well as how different forms of intervention and inequality can be naturalized in governmental and familial domains. Rather than taking race as a starting point for the research, it acquires materiality as part of a technological apparatus that models how some groups are made visible and others invisible to the state (such as vulnerable minors and their birth families). A detailed focus on how unequal understandings of reproduction filter into the production of adoption documents, for example, provides a novel window to think of how bureaucratic work interlaces with forms of normalization and race-making. By looking at the link between bureaucratic practices, temporality and race in bureaucratic and familial settings, the dissertation offers an approach to “race” that goes well beyond

the notion of an abstract ideology or imposed label that "structures" how families and individuals are perceived. This approach, I think, allows me to show the slippery, elusive and paradoxical quality of race, and its capacity to occupy different meanings and valences as it moves across domains and contexts (Poole 1997). For example, the same "racial" emphasis on resemblance or similarity that is seen as solidifying adoptive kinship also becomes the greatest source of uncertainty regarding how relationships unfold in the lives of some adoptive families. Families have to deal on a daily basis with those aspects of children's pasts that are formally left out of the plenary adoption model.

By framing adoption as a specific moral technology that helps to produce both the family and the state through everyday bureaucratic practices, techniques and pedagogies that are "at once internal and external to the state" (Mitchell 2006), my research also points towards ways of rethinking the Mexican state and its relation to law. Instead of approaching the state as a transcendental unit of bureaucratic and legal order clearly separated from the "private" domains of kinship and family (Weber 1978), my ethnography points towards mundane processes in which the law is colonized by the norm as it produces categories of subjects through "tactics that are parasitical on the law even as they draw repertoires of action from it" (Das and Poole 2004:10). Thus, the dissertation does not approach the state "directly" through its official "face" –as a finished object with neat margins that simply imposes authority and the rule of law. Instead I focus on the ordinary bureaucratic work through which technical knowledges, imaginaries about the state and family, and norms, are put to practice, ignored, circumvented or redefined in particular cases. In this respect, it shows how bureaucracy works as a field of normalization that channels and produces morality through forms of expert knowledge. It questions the view of bureaucrats as agents who mediate between

already constituted objects, and it calls into question paternalist images of the state as the bearer of predetermined moral duties and responsibilities; highlighting instead the complex imperatives that motivate bureaucratic work—shifting between requirements to produce sound legal outcomes following standardized procedures, and honor personal relations and moral worldviews.

Instead of framing bureaucratic state practices in Mexico through the lens of corruption, weakness or inefficiency, my dissertation questions moralizing pictures of what the borders of the state and its law are and ought to be; and how things like personal styles and resourcefulness allow forms of action to take place, documents to move, carry and define the law; and bureaucratic power to expand and strengthen. Workers do not merely implement the law; they also create the conditions under which certain documents can acquire legal standing, and thereby move smoothly across administrative and juridical state domains. My dissertation moves away from the sense that these governmental practices are exceptional or opposed to “normal” forms of legal rule and state power. It points to how these spaces of action at the crossroads between the legal and extra-legal constitute the vitality of the law, rather than a “lack” or failing in the workings of the state. Thus, by exploring law from the “peripheral” angle of bureaucratic and administrative state practices, my ethnography questions what the law is and where it is located by showing how its boundaries are constituted in specific cases. It shows how practices residing both inside and outside the law are central to the very constitution of the law as Law. Here, those “margins” that seemed to clearly separate the work of the state from illegality in the case of the dead bodies that I saw at the side of the road, turn out to be an integral part of the state's everyday (Das and Poole 2004: 14).

Finally, this dissertation provides an ethnographic approach to the overarching – but also often elusive– bureaucratic, legal and administrative practices of the Mexican neoliberal state in its recent attempts to regulate and create families. It shows how the state acquires legitimacy through documentary practices and regimens of expertise that unfold in a context of entrenched and growing inequalities; and how moral and racial idioms emerge and materialize across governmental and familial domains. Yet, it also shows the fragilities, instabilities and ambiguities of state projects that continue to pose questions about the future of social assistance projects directed at the family and children, and their capacity to respond to increasing poverty and destitution.

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McKinnon, Susan

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McKinnon, Susan and Fenella Cannell

2013 The Difference Kinship Makes. In *Vital Relations: Modernity and the Persistent Life of Kinship*, edited by S. McKinnon and F. Cannell, pp. 3-38. Santa Fe, NM: School for Advanced Research Press.

Melhuus, Marit and Singe Howell

2009 Adoption and Assisted Conception: One Universe of Unnatural Procreation. An examination of Norwegian Legislation. In *European Kinship in the Age of Biotechnology*, edited by J. Edwards and C. Salazar, pp. 144-161: Berghahn Books.

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2004 *Rise and Fall of the Cosmic Race: The Cult of Mestizaje in Latin America*. Austin, TX: University of Texas Press.

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- 2003 "Going Home": Adoption, Loss of Bearings, and the Mythology of Roots. *Social Text* 21(1): 7-27.

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- 2007 Global Kinship: Reconfiguring Kinship in the Space of Adoption. *Anthropological Quarterly* 80: 561-579.
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- Zamora, Stephen, José Ramón Cossío, Leonel Pereznieto, José Roldán-Xopa, and David Lopez
- 2004 *Mexican Law*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

CURRICULUM VITAE

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BORN April 23rd, 1980, Michoacán, México

EDUCATION

2009-2014 Ph. D., Department of Anthropology, Johns Hopkins University
2006-2009 M.A. Department of Anthropology, Johns Hopkins University
2000-2005 Licenciatura in Socio-Cultural Anthropology. Universidad de las Américas, Puebla, Mexico

SCHOLARSHIPS

2006-2014 Ph.D. Program Scholarship. Department of Anthropology, Johns Hopkins University
2006-2011 CONACYT (Mexican National Council of Science and Technology) Scholarship. Awarded to pursue graduate studies at Johns Hopkins University
2006-2008 Ford Foundation and Institute of International Education. Complementary Scholarship to pursue graduate studies at Johns Hopkins University
2003-2005 Jenkins Foundation Fellowship. Awarded to pursue Licenciatura studies at Universidad de las Américas, Puebla, Mexico
2002 Public Education Ministry Scholarship (SEP, Secretaría de Educación Pública). Awarded to pursue Licenciatura studies, Mexico
2001-2002 Departmental Scholarship. Universidad de las Américas, Puebla, Mexico

ACADEMIC AWARDS

2014 Spring Program in Latin American Studies Teaching Fellowship. JHU
2013-14 Fall Dean's Prize Freshman Seminar, Johns Hopkins University
2013 Spring The Dean's Teaching Fellowship, Johns Hopkins University
2010-2011 SSRC-International Dissertation Research Fellowship
2009 -2010 NSF- Dissertation Research Grant (Cultural Anthropology and Law and Social Sciences)
2008 Summer fieldwork grant-award. Program in Latin American Studies, JHU
2007 Summer fieldwork grant-awards. Institute of Global Studies; Program for the Study of Women, Gender and sexuality; and Program in Latin American Studies, JHU
2005 Honoric Mention in thesis defense, *Summa cum laude*.
2000-2004 Dean's Fellow. Universidad de las Américas, Puebla (Mexico)
2000-2004 Distinguished Student's Award. Best academic trajectory of the Department of Anthropology. Universidad de las Américas, Puebla (Mexico)

PUBLICATIONS

In Press "New Lives for Children: Adoption Documents and the Law in Central Mexico." In *Living and Dying in the Contemporary World: A Compendium*, edited by Clara Han and Veena Das. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press.

- 2014 “Trayectorias de Maternidad: Empleo doméstico, adopción y circulación de niños.” In *Trabajo doméstico, género y etnicidad. Un estudio comparativo a partir del caso de las empleadas del hogar indígenas en Monterrey*, edited by Séverine Durin, Maria Eugenia de la O and Santiago Bastos. Mexico: CIESAS/EGAP/Tec de Monterrey.

UNPUBLISHED MANUSCRIPTS

- 2005 “Un arroz negro entre los blancos”: Etnicidad, tierra y poder en Chipilo, Puebla. *Licenciatura Thesis*, Department of Anthropology, Universidad de las Américas, Puebla, Cholula (Mexico).

TEACHING EXPERIENCE

- 2014 Spring Instructor. Self-designed and self-taught course: Mestizaje and Race in Latin America, PLAS Teaching Fellowship Award, JHU
- 2013 Fall Instructor. Self-designed and self-taught course: Adoption and Family Making, Dean’s Prize Freshman seminar, JHU
- 2013 Spring Instructor. Self-designed and self-taught course: Adoption and Family Making, Dean’s Teaching Fellowship, JHU
- 2011 Fall Teaching assistant. Course: “Understanding Aid” (Professor Emma Cervone), JHU
- 2008 Spring Teaching assistant. “Alternative Media and Political Imagination in Latin America” (Professor Deborah Poole), Johns Hopkins University
- 2008 Winter Instructor. Self-designed and self-taught Intercession course: “Lives on the Wire: Anthropology, Inequality and Urban Life”. Johns Hopkins University
- 2007 Fall Teaching assistant. “Poverty’s Life: Anthropologies of Health and Economy” (Professor Clara Han), Johns Hopkins University

EMPLOYMENT

- 2012 -2013 Research Assistant. “Scale, Ambiguity and Experimentation: A Collaborative Ethnography of Regional Government in Peru”, supervised by Prof. Deborah Poole, Johns Hopkins University
- 2009 Fall Research Assistant. “Public Numbers: A Research Project,” supervised by Prof. Juan Obarrio, Johns Hopkins University
- 2009 Fall Graduate Student Liaison, Program in Latin American Studies, JHU
- 2008- 2009 Graduate Student Liaison. Program in Latin American Studies, JHU
- 2004- 2005 Assistant translator (Spanish-English). Anthropology book: “*Somos un país de peones*” *Crisis, café y el estado neoliberal en el centro de Veracruz*, written by Dr. Ricardo Macip Ríos and published by ICSyH/BUAP, Puebla (Mexico)
- 2003-2004 Research assistant. Anthropological project: “Agrarian History of the Cholula Valley, Puebla” (Historia Agraria del Valle de Cholula) directed by Dr. Robert D. Shadow
- 2002 Research assistant. FAO project “Culture and Agriculture in Mexico”, supervised by Dr. Isidro Soloaga and Dr. Robert D. Shadow

2000 Field researcher. CRIM/UNAM project: "Violence against pregnant women during labor in public health institutions," directed by Dr. Roberto Castro

SELECTED ACADEMIC PRESENTATIONS AND CONFERENCE ORGANIZATION

2014 Spring "Managing Uncertainty: Adoption Documents, Ambiguity and the Law in Mexico", CASCA, Toronto, Canada

2014 Spring "Undeserving mothers: Adoption, law and racial languages of motherhood in Central Mexico" Law and Society Association, Minneapolis

2013 Fall "The ones that have no part: Birth mothers, adoption and the law in Mexico" American Anthropological Association, Chicago.

2012 Spring "Producing Legalities/Liberating Children: Law, Adoption and the State in Mexico", Program in Latin American Studies Spring Conference, Johns Hopkins University

2012 Spring "Making Families Through Adoption". Colloquium Series, Anthropology Department, Johns Hopkins University

2012 Spring "Producing legalities/'liberating' children: Adoption documents and the law in Central Mexico". Law and Anthropology Workshop, Johns Hopkins University

2011 Spring "Sacando el cobre. Mestizaje, intimidación y trabajo doméstico." Colloquium "Trabajo doméstico, género y etnicidad", Monterrey, Mexico

2010 Fall "An Individualized Life-Project for the Child in Need": Child Circulation, Adoption and the State in Mexico." American Anthropological Association, New Orleans

2009 Fall Organizer. Program in Latin American Studies Conference: "Unsettling Decadence: Crisis and Creativity in Latin America", JHU

2008 Fall Co-organizer and coordinator. Graduate Student Conference "Animalities: Critical Approaches to the Question of the Animal in Anthropology", Johns Hopkins University

2009 Spring "Domestic Mestizaje: Life in a Mexican Apartment Building". Summer Fieldwork Colloquium of the Program in Latin American Studies, JHU

2008 Spring "Sacando en Cobre: Mestizaje, Intimacy and Domestic Work in Mexico". Summer Fieldwork Colloquia from the Program in Latin American Studies, Program for the Study of Women Gender and Sexuality, and Institute for Global Studies, JHU

2008 Spring Co-organizer and coordinator. Multi-disciplinary Discussion Series "On the Empirical", Johns Hopkins University

2008 Spring Co-organizer. Conference "Constituting Places: Movement and Trajectories in Latin America". Program in Latin American Studies, Johns Hopkins University