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EDITORIAL

**New challenges in the search for origins...**

*As a recurrent issue in adoption, and one that is continually changing in accordance with modern developments, the search for origins must today face new challenges, which the ISS/IRC is reflecting on, in particular, the growing role of social networks in this process.*

**T**he ISS/IRC has looked into recent developments in the search for origins, both legally and practically. This research, which is now available on its website<sup>1</sup>, shows that this right is increasingly recognised and established nationally and internationally. However, its implementation does cause difficulties for all actors concerned (adoptees, biological and adoptive parents, States, professionals directly or indirectly in charge of this issue). The ISS/IRC offers to identify these delicate situations and to examine possible ways to overcome them.

**The risks of searching directly through social networks**

As shown in the account on page 6 of this Monthly Review, searching for one's origins through social networks, like Facebook, is not without risks given the total lack of professional guidance, prior preparation of those concerned, or even of protection of privacy and confidentiality of personal information. When an adopted person makes direct contact with his biological parents through Facebook, he is at risk, in particular, of violating the law, going against the ways and customs of the country of origin and, sometimes, seriously compromising the safety and physical integrity of the biological mother. This may be the case when a child is born out of wedlock or to a single mother, in cases of incest or adultery, or when the adoption remains secret in the country of origin.

As it is impossible to exercise any control over the use of Facebook, States must urgently consider other solutions, such as raising awareness, training and prevention. To this effect, various initiatives are

to be encouraged, like raising awareness as to the risks of using social networks among adoptive parents during their preparation, or even among adoptees during interviews prior to their search for origins. In addition, some countries have published recommendations on their websites in this respect. The fact remains that States have adopted neither regulations nor guidelines in this area thus far. Professionals and people involved are now trying to put together their own strategy to deal with this phenomenon, which is beyond them. To address this issue, the British professional training body British Association for Adoption and Fostering (BAAF) has published some tools aimed at educating and supporting them (see p. 6).

**Adapting professional support in delicate situations**

Concerning more traditional searches for origins, in the majority of countries some form of support is offered to adoptees. That said, its quality and extent can vary greatly. Furthermore, it becomes more difficult and must be able to be adapted when adoptees find themselves confronted with delicate situations, such as a biological parent refusing to make contact, the discovery of fraudulent elements in the adoption, or even when their file has gone missing or been destroyed.

Faced with these situations, specific measures must be put in place by the States. Some are already offering adapted psychological support and family mediation services (see Monthly Review N°12/2011). In the total absence of any information on the family of origin, the qualified professional will be able— at least — to pass on to the adoptee information relating to the circumstances of his

adoption and the most likely pieces of his background, based on his knowledge of the specific characteristics of abandonment in the country of origin in question. If the adoptee does not have access to his origins, he will have to be creative and build them. If you believe the films directed by some adoptees, using your imagination can be of great help when building one's identity and piecing together the puzzle that is one's life.

### **The challenges related to new forms of assisted reproduction**

Beyond adoption, the search for origins also creates considerable challenges under other circumstances. For example, what right does a person conceived by in vitro fertilisation or artificial insemination of an anonymous donor have to his origins? While in some countries, legislation has ruled on the matter, like in Portugal (art.15 of Law N° 32/2006 of 26 July and Regulatory Decree N° 5/2008 of 11 February), Sweden or Austria, in some other States, such as Denmark, the matter remains in a legal limbo. These situations are the subject of debate and are already being studied, for example by the Evan B. Donaldson Adoption Institute<sup>2</sup>, according to which, 80% of children born by in vitro fertilisation or artificial insemination from an

anonymous donor would like to know the identity of the donor and, to some extent, meet him.

These numerous questions call for countries and professionals to rethink the matter of identity and to adapt the responses to the needs of all concerned. The ongoing search for a balance between the right to know and the right to preserve anonymity is central to these debates that promise to still feature prominently throughout this new year.

The ISS/IRC team  
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(1) Summary/Analysis and appendices available in French and English at the following address: <http://iss-ssi.org/2009/assets/files/country-situation/synthesis%20and%20analysis%20access%20origins%20eng.pdf>.

(2) Survey *Offspring searching for their sperm donors: how family type shapes the process*, <http://bit.ly/mRHEUI>; see also *Old lessons for a new world: Applying adoption research and experience to assisted reproductive technology*, [http://www.adoptioninstitute.org/policy/2009\\_02\\_oldlessons.php](http://www.adoptioninstitute.org/policy/2009_02_oldlessons.php). See also stories on greater openness for donor assisted reproduction, National Public Radio, 17 September 2011: <http://n.pr/nliqYa> and <http://n.pr/qmypos>.