Making family and unmaking kin in the Russian media: reproductive technologies and relatedness

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Assisted reproductive technologies (ARTs) cover a wide range of biotechnological procedures, including determining biological fatherhood and the sex of an unborn child. This study deals with perhaps the most well-known application of ARTs: procedures providing treatment, or assistance, for infertile people wishing to have a baby. These technologies not only create new persons, but also new relationships (Franklin 1999: 162), extending or modifying meanings of kinship, parenthood and family that are usually taken for granted. A range of contemporary American and European research examines how assisted reproductive technologies affect concepts, attitudes and practices in the realm of parenthood and kinship, particularly with respect to social and historical contexts (Cussins 1998; Franklin 1999; Ragoné 1996, 2004; Stone 2000, 2001; Strathern 1991, 1992, 1995; Thompson 2005). This chapter investigates the influence of ARTs on conceptions of relatedness as reflected in Russian public discourse, specifically, mainstream newspapers.

The normative model of the Russian family is a nuclear family, consisting of parents, mother and father, with one or two children who have blood ties with their parents. This type of family is actively promoted by contemporary national policy-makers and is, therefore, part of media discourse. Although various types of parenthood and families are widespread in Russia – adoptive parents, single parents, families having many children – ‘new’ family and kinship bonds created by the application of ARTs rarely appear in public discussions. The possibilities and outcomes of new reproductive procedures are still problematic for many Russians. These technologies put even the most basic kinship concepts, such as motherhood, in question: is mother-
hood a genetic relation or one earned through the carrying and delivery of the child? Similarly, fatherhood becomes problematic: is an anonymous sperm-donor a father or just a creator of genetic material?

In this chapter, I analyse conceptions of parenthood, kinship and family as reflected in the texts of two Russian national newspapers with large readerships. I will begin with a description of the research data, method and analytical approach, and then explore how kin, parenthood and family relations are established and disambiguated in the newspapers; and the main strategies actors use to ‘incorporate ‘new data’ into pre-existing procedures and objects’ (Thomson 2005: 80).

**Research data, method and analytical approach**

The sample consisted of approximately seventy articles published between 1996 and 2006 in the Rossiiskaia GAZETA (RG), Russian Newspaper, and Argumenty i Fakty (AiF), Arguments and Facts. Almost all these articles discuss kinship as effected by ARTs and related issues. Applying discourse analysis, I looked for and analysed how actors articulated, explained, evaluated, categorised and interpreted kinship and relatedness as modified by ARTs. These articles are mostly focused interviews with experts in various fields, shedding light on unfamiliar social phenomena related to ARTs, which are sometimes presented in an attempt to shock or astonish readers. Analysis of these articles revealed that experts explaining concepts of family and relatedness are usually journalists, medical doctors, psychologists or lawyers. These are the intermediaries who interpret and explain details related to ARTs, who ‘normalize and domesticate procedures’ (Thomson 2005: 141). To complement these professionals’ weighty opinions, the authors of such articles usually present stories of ordinary people, predominantly couples, of Russian and foreign origin. These examples illustrate the complexity of using ARTs and point out the challenges people face.

People who decide to use ARTs have to involve others in the procedure of conception. Kinship ties become blurred when external genetic material is incorporated in the procreation process. Theoretically, the couple’s relationships with donors can be characterised as dispersed kinship, which includes those who have a desire to have a baby, a couple or a single person; and those who assist, clinicians, donors and surrogate mothers (Strathern 1995: 346-363). This analytical differentiation is possible because motherhood and fatherhood are dispersed due to the involvement of a donor in the procreation process. Anthropologists have suggested that kinship connects two domains: the order of nature, represented by genetic or biological kinship; and the order of law, indicating legal kinship (Schneider 1972: 26; Strathern 1992: 17).

The main themes in the analysed texts, which interact and form a ‘new’ concept of family while problematising it at the same time, are genetic, or biological, and legal relatedness. The actors represented in the articles apply different discursive strategies to legitimise assisted reproduction and dispersed kinship, to normalise these processes and relations. Charis Thompson (2005:81) distinguishes two major means of normalisation: naturalisation and routinisation. Naturalisation refers to how aspects of the situation are rendered as unproblematic or self-evident in the sense of seeming natural, while routinisation refers to how practices and notions are stabilised and fixed in everyday life. How normalisation occurs depends on the stage at which ARTs are applied. Analysis of these texts allows a distinction to be made between two separate steps carried out by a couple: looking for a donor, and preparation for pregnancy; and giving birth and the short period afterwards. Pregnancy is not focused on as a specific stage. Occasionally, it is a topic of discussion with regard to surrogate motherhood. At the first stage, normalisation means making something normal, while at the second stage it means making normative.

**Recruiting donors: married couples as key actors**

Use of ARTs is represented in Russian newspapers as a project, a deliberate choice made by a heterosexual married couple of reproductive...
age who have severe fertility problems. A childless couple is seen as a deprived, defective family that hopes to obtain a child. Reproductive technologies are normalised and approved as a welcome remedy for infertility, as a way to solve an individual’s or a couple’s problems, while also solving the national problem of population decline. The main alternative to ARTs considered in these texts is adoption. Couples featured in these articles view the adoption process as a resource that is unable to provide them with a biological child, genetically linked to at least one of the parents. Moreover, adoption is seen as being available at any time, since it does not strictly depend on the ages of prospective parents.

In order to succeed in conceiving a baby and giving birth, a childless couple must stretch the boundaries of family and kinship at short notice by selecting and recruiting donors. Donors can be anonymous or, alternatively, acquaintances or relatives. Donation of biomaterials can be mapped in complicated cases that involve egg donation by a friend, intergenerational or intrafamilial egg donation, and family-member or commercial surrogates. The most widespread programs described in the texts are artificial insemination (AI), in vitro fertilisation (IVF), egg donation and surrogate motherhood. Each kind of donation creates its own debates about kinship, requiring new ways to re-define, disambiguate and prove parenthood. There are several cases encompassing the most prominent variants of donation programs which reflect different patterns of justifying motherhood and fatherhood as constructed in public discourse.

The ‘invisible third’: sperm donation and fatherhood
According to the Russian Ministry of Health’s decree ‘On the use of ARTs in the treatment of female and male infertility’ (26.02.2003), a husband’s or a donor’s sperm can be used in IVF procedure. Stories about anonymous sperm-donors predominate in the newspaper texts. Sperm donation divides fatherhood not only into two separate aspects, but into two personalities. In kinship debates, they do not overlap or even compete with each other. On the one hand, a child has a ‘real’ genetic father, though the father is absent, as the child will never find and see him; on the other hand, his social father is not ‘real’. ‘Real’ fatherhood is defined as genetic, whereas a social (adoptive) father is second-rate, since he is infertile. Stories about social fatherhood resulting from failed masculinity depict social fathers as indifferent or even malicious. Sometimes a social father abuses a child, or tries to compensate for his inferiority. Therefore, genetic links entail positive and negative emotional bonds between children and parents. It seems that such a child does not have a father at all, either genetic or social.

There are a variety of means used to achieve naturalisation, including and excluding both absent genetic fathers and present social fathers. In the newspaper articles I distinguished at least six strategies of normalisation, in the sense of the naturalisation of an absent father, meaning an anonymous genetic donor.

The first strategy is illustrated in the choosing of a donor who is described in the newspaper as looking physically similar to the potential adoptive father, who is usually the female patient’s husband. This selection approach demonstrates a genetic priority in determining fatherhood. Thus, social and genetic fatherhood merge. Social fatherhood is symbolically turned into genetic fatherhood.

The second strategy describes a donor who, although never seen, is expected to feel his engagement in the process of making a baby. He is pictured not as an anonymous donor, producing sperm for money, but as someone responsible for his socially useful activity, thinking of his genetic kids, missing them and being spiritually connected to them:

Besides psychological preparation, it would be better to give a male donor the following piece of advice: when you pass by a boy in the street, pat him on the head. What if he is your son? (RG 16.12.2003)

Although a donor is imagined as a father, he is freed from real responsibility by his anonymity.

The third strategy for normalising absent genetic fathers is found in stories about girls and boys who suddenly discover the circumstances of their conception and attempt to look for their ‘real’ fathers, though in vain. The genetic father is again regarded as the primary father, the
one who is somewhere close. This fantasy supports the idea of blood ties as predominant in defining fatherhood. However, sometimes these stories are interpreted as typical and normal for any teenagers who might seek their genetic identities or personalities.

The fourth strategy refers to ritualisation of an absent, virtual fatherhood by reference to cultural myths rooted in everyday life. Historical determinism or primordialism traces the problem of misidentified fatherhood from ancient times, and marks it as common to all types of societies. According to experts from the groups described above, the issue of the absent, unknown genetic father should not be treated as a tragedy, but as a normal episode that might happen in the life of any family. 

Formerly people had such forms of intimate life that a father was not identified at all. Fatherhood was not so special; it was a rather formal category in many primitive beliefs. Therefore the myth of ‘belonging to an indirect father’ was embedded in our consciousness. From this all the sentimental literature and soap operas follow, where a supposedly lost, abandoned child is looking for his parents. (AiF 3.02.1999)

The fifth strategy of normalising conception using donated sperm involves postponed parenthood, the preservation of one’s own sperm (or eggs) for future use. This message pretends to solve the problem of the donor’s anonymity, and it supports the overlapping of genetic and social parenthood as a socially expected result of creating a nuclear family. The genetic materials obtained from future parents are represented as independent actors, potential successors of the family. Genetic kinship is also important in this situation: eggs and sperm donated by relatives and then preserved become significant actors in the system of relatedness.  

People having dangerous jobs – firefighters, military, and policemen – should think of preserving their sperm. Women also have something to freeze – ovum. So when they have problems with ovulation, necessary biomaterial (their own, not donated!) is on hand. (AiF 31.05.2006)

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The sixth strategy is targeted at normalisation of assisted genetic fatherhood, by comparing AI and IVF with adoption, and arguing in favour of the former. Unlike adoption, AI and IVF, especially with the sperm of a husband, entail genetic inheritance and reproduce an existing relative. Therefore, such results are more predictable.

For childless married couples, an ampoule with sperm is a great alternative – indefinitely better than the marathon of adoption. Test tube children are always desired. Moreover, they are half one’s own. As doctors say, these children are completely genetically healthy, since only healthy men are selected as donors based on all medical requirements, and all ancestors, including grandparents, are examined. Mental health is given extremely close attention when choosing a donor. (RG 27.09.2002)

Justification of the use of donated sperm to create a complete family with a child derives from a genetic view of the world. The genetic approach reflects the simple idea that one person passes on certain characteristics to another person, like a piece of property. In general, genetic fatherhood is perceived as the basic type of fatherhood. Therefore, the figure of a sperm donor is the key to defining kinship. Genetic fatherhood becomes visible where the donor is an acquaintance or a relative. This can be a husband donating for IVF or a dead relative who has donated in advance. By contrast, if a donor is anonymous, social and genetic fatherhood merge. In this case, the anonymous donor is not marked as a member of the family, but necessarily linked directly to the child. The donor looks like a potential social father, and is considered to think about his kids anyway. By and large, a genetic fatherhood does not disappear, but is re-formatted into social fatherhood, and symbolically coexists with it.

Surrogacy and egg donation: the importance of birth

Surrogacy marks a revolution in the meaning of motherhood. Prior to the emergence of reproductive technologies, the ‘figure of the mother provided a natural model for the social construction of the ‘natural’ facts’ (Strathern 1991 quoted by Ragoné 2004: 348). In the past, motherhood was always understood as a unified experi-
ence, combining social and biological aspects into one, unlike fatherhood which principally exists with a double identity. Surrogate motherhood ‘separates motherhood from pregnancy’ (Ragoné 2000: 343), and thereby fragments it (2000: 111). The following section examines two variants of surrogacy and understandings of relatedness shown in the analysed texts.

According to the Russian Ministry of Health’s decree, ‘On the use of ARTs in the treatment of female and male infertility’ (26.02.2003), oocytes can be donated by relatives, friends and anonymous donors (RG 6.05.2003).

The future mother takes an egg from another woman, which is then fertilised by her husband’s sperm. Although genetically this baby is not her own, she will be carrying it for nine months by herself. (AIF 19.03.1997)

In this case, the process of carrying a baby normalises the odd situation of using a donated egg. In egg donation, the genetic mother has no rights. Motherhood is not defined in genetic terms, rather in terms of carrying and giving birth.

Inability to conceive a baby is dealt with by searching among relatives or acquaintances for a genetic mother. As a rule, egg donation draws on the resources of the multigenerational family. Through recruiting relatives from different generations as donors, kinship is rearranged and intergenerational hierarchies and boundaries are mixed up:

Olga is 48. This is her second marriage. Olga’s husband is much younger, than she. They both want a baby. But the mother’s age... (…) Olga’s twenty year old daughter agreed to be a donor. The process of artificial insemination passed successfully. Now Olga is pregnant. But how will the family manage to identify kinship relations: who is the mother, who is the sister of this baby? Maybe it doesn’t matter? The most important thing is that a child was born. (RG 9.01.1998)

The author of this quotation is disoriented by shifts in generational hierarchies and obligations, and does not even want to figure out the configurations of kinship in this entangled case. Surrogacy is represented as assistance or help, and is described using language catego-

rised as appropriate for intimate and friendly relationships. The donation of an egg is not problematised with regard to kinship in these newspaper texts, and the motherhood rights accruing to the donating woman are not negotiated. The donor simply helps her close friend or relative by providing genetic material as a gift, which is then privatised through the process of giving birth. The means of naturalisation of egg donation is biologisation: it does not matter who is genetically linked to the child, it only matters who gives birth.

Secondary or alien moms? Between commodification and altruistic help

The boundary between help and paid service is regarded as more prominent in the case of surrogate motherhood – an official program under Russian Family Law. According to this legislation, only married couples with severe fertility problems can apply to hire a surrogate mother. It is strictly prohibited for healthy and fertile couples ‘to avoid pregnancy and the painful process of giving birth’. Only the medical aspects of the procedure are regulated. The rest of the problems, such as legalisation of a baby by genetic parents or financial and emotional relationships between both parties, are not dealt with by the law and are negotiated by the genetic parents and the surrogate mother personally. Verbal agreements between surrogate mothers and couples prevail, although written contracts are also sometimes made.

With regard to the United States in the 1960s, David Schneider (1968 as quoted by Ragoné 2004: 343) points out that ‘the social mother is similar to an adoptive mother in that her relationship to the child exists not in nature, but in law alone’. I assume that in the case of surrogate motherhood, this link is not evident. At first glance, as in the case of the other procedures, it is the couple that chooses surrogate motherhood. However, surrogacy may become completely a project of the social mother, in which she makes a last effort at producing a baby. Prior to adoption, the social mother has an arduous journey, including looking for a surrogate mother, negotiating with her the rules of behaviour, creating healthy conditions for her to bear the baby and managing emotional tensions. This program bonds a surrogate mother
with a future social mother rather than a future father. It merges the adoptive mother and the surrogate mother into one in order to maintain the unity of experience. It erases their boundaries (Ragoné 2004: 353).

Women performing the role of a surrogate mother are usually depicted in these newspaper articles as single mothers or mothers from a family with financial problems. The candidates are strongly required to be between 25 and 35 years of age and to have their own healthy children. The surrogate mother’s personal characteristics are restricted by the couples to her ability to bear a child. She should be touched by the parents’ situation, but not in touch with a baby which, by agreement, is not hers. In many cases, parents prefer not to delegate the selection of donors to the medical system or other professionals. One patient shares her experience of searching for a surrogate mother:

My husband and I were engaged in choosing a mother for our children for a long period of time. We met some of them at the Institute [the renowned D.I. Otto Institute of Genealogy in St.Petersburg], but we didn’t trust them at all. They asked for extremely large sums of money for their services, and it seemed to us that they would rather take care of their pockets than of our babies. Olga is not from the Institute at all. I knew her for a long time, though not very well. She has two children, and I’ve seen how she treats them. Therefore, I had no doubt that she will also conscientiously bear my babies. By the way, her cost for the ‘service’ suited us. (RG 8.06.2002)

Recent literature on surrogate motherhood often divides the strategies of surrogates into two groups. For instance, Melissa Lane makes a distinction between ‘contract’ surrogacy in which a formal contract for some consideration is involved, and ‘gift’ surrogacy where relatives, friends or acquaintances arrange surrogacy as non-financial and non-contractual relationship among themselves’ (Lane 2003: 121; Ragoné 2003; Blyth and Potter 2003). ‘The ‘natural’ can be linked to kinship and gift as contrasted with the contractual – for example, familial surrogacy versus contractual surrogacy’ (Lane 2003: 125). This division is also confirmed by the data analysed here. However, willingness to help and commercial interest are deeply interrelated and overlap in the practice of surrogacy. Therefore, the terms second mom, revealing the perspective of altruistic help, versus alien mom, proving an idea of a calculating market actor, describe the two faces of a surrogate mother which alternate in the texts.

The first aspect of surrogate motherhood is friendly support, or help, provided by a hired woman. A surrogate mother is depicted as giving birth to a baby ‘for a sister’, ‘for a friend’, generally for another woman, but not for a couple or a family. Doctors actively support this idea. ‘The patients are basically relatives or friends of genetic parents. They run risks of surrogacy being inspired by pure altruism, not by money.’ (AiF 15.11.2000)

The mother gave birth to the babies for her childless sister. Officially she became a surrogate mother to help her relative and also to cope with her own financial troubles, since she is a single mother with two children. The sister and her husband are wealthy people, but they do not have children. Close relatives are extremely welcome in surrogate motherhood programs. […] According to the rules of surrogate motherhood, both women are going to the maternity hospital, and then the genetic mother leaves it with a baby. (RG 21.02.2006)

Although surrogacy by acquaintances is sometimes preferred by couples, there are few narratives about it in these newspaper articles. The prevalence of stories about non-relative surrogate mothers might be considered as a way to normalise breaks with the social order. The level of emotional closeness between social and biological moms normalises the artificial fragmentation of motherhood. In the stories presented in these articles, surrogate mothers are expected to have certain moral qualities, besides their physical state. The surrogate is basically moved by the misfortune of unsuccessful parents, while the only obligation of a sperm-donor, is to be invisible and stay away from the family that uses his donated genetic material.

Individuals identified in the newspaper articles as experts on ARTs, predominantly doctors, attempt to refute the substitution of emotional and biological closeness between the two moms and, correspondently, of a surrogate mother and child. They prove that a baby does not in-
herit any genetic traits from a surrogate mother. The only way a surro-
gate can influence a fetus is through improper behaviour during the
child-bearing period. Therefore, the rules of a surrogate mother’s be-

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with legs? (. . .) if you want a baby (. . .) adopt an orphan, even better, adopt a
couple of them, form an orphanage, then raise and educate the children for
these twenty thousand dollars! (AiF 25.02.2004) 18

Surrogate motherhood actualises the priority of genetic motherhood:
Blood relatedness to a child is represented as more important than a
biological relationship. By contrast, egg donation emphasises biologi-
cal motherhood – that is the carrying of a child. A couple gives prior-
ity to a domain of kinship that is likely to link a child to a social
mother, consuming a service of surrogacy. Surrogate children are
normalised via adoption. However, prior to it, surrogacy is routinis-
ted by defining it as an act of help, emotional involvement and sympa-
thies, qualities that are widespread within families. Surrogacy is viewed as
comparable with organ or blood donation by relatives. In the case of
commercial surrogacy, it is normalised by the idea of mutual help (fi-
nancial support of a woman living in poverty) and the genetic bond of
adoptive mother, father and child.

After giving birth: the agenda of Russian Family Law

Assisted reproductive technologies entail the natural facts of procrea-
tion being doubly assisted on an institutional level: by technological
and medical advances and by legislation (Strathern 1992: 20). After
the child is born, Family Law comes into play. It introduces normative
boundaries for relations between a newborn child and the parents that
have gone through assisted reproductive programs. Agreement to the
procedures from both spouses is a legal requirement. The last stage of
constructing a new family is adoption. Russian Health Law and Fam-
ily Law are here the main frameworks for legitimating, regulating and
structuring kinship ties created by ARTs. At this stage, donors have
disappeared and the relationships between couples and children are
reinforced.

Numerous stories about the complex procedure of legalising par-

The second aspect of surrogate motherhood is its role as an expensive
commercial service. It is described as an informal, even shadow, mar-
ket which has hidden dangers. Predominantly, genetic parents are
represented as potential victims of a surrogate mother’s greediness, which
at the same time implicitly competes with her sympathy for a childless
couple. In general, the behaviour of surrogates is depicted as unpre-
dictable and uncertain. Stories about surrogate mothers blackmailing
couples during pregnancy or afterwards are frequently alluded to in
the texts.

The commercial component of surrogate motherhood provokes op-
ponents of surrogacy to criticise this practice, giving a moral priority
to adoption. They argue that surrogate children are anyway not the
parents’ own, they are purchased with money.

Surrogate motherhood is a caprice of rich people, rolling in money. (. . .) Does
an ordinary family really have such enormous money to buy an ‘incubator

(...) the surrogate mother is a container. For instance, if you take a duck’s
egg and put it in a hen’s nest, the egg will not hatch a chicken, but a duck.
(AiF 25.02.2004)

RG 8.06.2002

‘What are you talking about? There are definitely created from my cells!’

Olga is carrying twins for Tatiana. ‘Aren’t you embarrassed, these babies are
not yours?’ I [the journalist] ask Tatiana.

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to accommodate in Russia’s incomplete and inflexible legislation. Basically, children born thanks to ARTs are legalised through adoption, including proof that all operations were legally provided by specialists in the hospital. Legal registration of children born by means of AI and IVF does not significantly differ from usual practices. Russian legislation maintains that a child born within a marriage following the use of AI or embryo implantation on the basis of a written agreement is to be regarded as the child of the mother and her husband. The most challenging cases in this respect are surrogate motherhood and posthumous conception. The surrogate child is linked to the mother legally, in the same way as to a father. A child born within a marriage after the use of surrogacy on the basis of a written agreement is to be regarded as the child of the mother and her husband only if the biological surrogate mother does not recognise the child as hers. The surrogate mother simply makes an official statement that the spouses who hired her are the parents of a child. In the event of the mother wants to keep the baby, Russian Family Law protects her rights as the legal mother. Current legislation does not cover other variants of surrogacy, except implantation of an embryo conceived from an egg of a future social mother and sperm of a social father. In all other cases, legal registration of the child can present a range of problems.

A special case raising a host of complex ethical and social issues is posthumous conception, or the use of a deceased man’s sperm to become pregnant. In the case of posthumous conception, the problem is that the genetic father is truly absent, but biologically present through the use of his gametes. His social presence, as a father and husband, must be actively constructed through the creation of contexts and connections (Strathern 1993 quoted by Simpson 2001: 3). Although cases of posthumous conception are not very common in this data, they tend to be discussed from a legal rather than ethical perspective. The disrupted order of inheritance, as a result of conceiving a child long after the father has died, complicates the legalisation of parenthood. The following quotation illustrates the problem of legalisation of a baby born by a surrogate mother who was hired by the baby’s grandma.

The latter managed to preserve her 19 year-old son’s sperm since the time before he dies from cancer:

Ekaterina Germanovna [the grandmother] was greatly surprised when she was told that, according to the law, her baby cannot exist. If his father is dead, he cannot be entered on a birth certificate. The law does not envisage babies of a long deceased parent being born. Neither does it envisage the baby being carried by an absolutely alien woman. They say she who gave birth is the mother. Officials do not care whether she was a surrogate or not. Here Gosha [the new born child] appears to be an alien: he has neither a legal surname, nor a legal father, nor a legal grandmother. (RG 27.01.2006)

Bob Simpson (2001: 10) argues that the prior existence of marriage legitimises subsequent attempts to use posthumous conception which, in turn, forms the basis of a claim to legitimate the issue, justifying kinship ties and inscribing them somehow into existing legislation. Ekaterina Germanovna’s son was not married. Lacking a formal basis to justify the newborn child, the grandmother actively insisted on the right of a mother to use her son’s cells to conceive a baby. The posthumously conceived child is both the realisation of the father’s intent and a repository for the memory of him. Furthermore, with the increasing tendency to stress genetics in the description of relationships, the child will be marked with its father’s death in ways which suggest substitution and replication (Simpson 2001: 3). This unique story was reprinted several times and represented as shocking for the audience and challenging for the grandmother. Another description of Gosha’s situation was as follows:

The child was born in a non-standard way and was not covered by the current Russian legislation on the registration of children. He was required to take the surname of the surrogate mother; and registry officials did not want to hear anything about his a long-deceased father. (RG 24.03.2006)

Finally, the grandmother applied for guardianship, so she would be able to adopt the child, Gosha, who was genetically linked to her. Though it could be argued that posthumous conception creates novel or even post-modern kinship; such a position ignores the ways that
these innovations are pressed into the service of making and affirming conventional family structures and roles. In the absence of formal statements, reproductive intent can be seen to derive from the strength of conjugal sentiment (Simpson 2001: 3).

Within the frame of ARTs, different relationships between genetic, biological, and social kinship are possible. Usually the concept of kinship, especially parenthood, somehow slides between these variants, and one pattern can be converted into another. Moral aspects of this transformation, which are of great importance when choosing a donor, can compete with the legal aspects in the period after giving a birth. Genetic kinship cannot always be inscribed in legal kinship. An implicit message of these stories is the necessity of improving Russian family legislation, making it more flexible and incorporating different ways of conceiving that reflect the development of new technologies.

Conclusions

In an ‘ideal’ family, all modes of kinship should be coherent with each other. However, such coherence is often far from reality, especially if this kinship is being constructed by means of ARTs. Different meanings of relatedness depend on the stage at which the procedures and concrete donorship program are applied. Assisted reproductive technologies highlight biogenetic and social domains of kinship. Depending on what types of donation are used, couples choose the type of kinship that they think bonds them, or one of them, to a common child. They re-define very broadly the priority of genetic or legal principles of kinship if it supports their plan. The analysed texts suggest the conclusion that biogenetic kinship takes priority in the private sphere, for the family itself, while legalised ties with a newborn child have to be proved by the bureaucratic authorities and demonstrated in the public sphere. The genetic relationship that exists is regulated by law and therefore, deproblematised.

A couple is depicted at a crucial stage of their shared biography or history, in their attempts to conceive a baby and to cope with infertil-

ity problems. Use of ARTs cover a rather short period in the life of a family, but these technologies can profoundly rearrange social relations with relatives and those who somehow participate — physically or emotionally — in the procedure. I consider these forms of ‘assisted’ kinship as situational and short-term because, after the successful use of ARTs, their results are inscribed within the framework of the nuclear family by means of private agreements and legislation. Obviously, applying ARTs creates a clear asymmetry in the genetic links of a child to both parents. However, the fact that only one of the parents is genetically linked to the child is finally resolved. Regardless of the variety of ‘natural’ links of a child to a mother and father, this combination is re-arranged into one desirable type of social relations, in particular kin relations of parents and a child. Temporally fragmented fatherhood and motherhood are finally united into general social parenthood. Other participants in the process of conceiving, except social parents, disappear from the texts. From a moral perspective, ARTs are normalised by describing a married couple coping with its fertility problems as socially responsible and successful in reproducing a complete family at all costs. Therefore, the resulting children are extremely desired by the parents, and ‘naturally’ born, not adopted. The final version is inscribed in the ‘ideal’ image of the nuclear family with children. Moreover, this family is represented as exemplary in terms of special atmosphere of closeness between children and their parents, who made a lot of efforts to have a baby.

Assisted reproductive technologies have introduced into regular parlance the distinction between social and biological parenthood (Strathern 1992: 19). The actors in these newspaper articles are trying to get used to these new terms and introduce their own terms. This explains the logic of the procedures to the audience through terms like ‘bio-mother’, ‘bio-father’, ‘second mother’ and ‘alien mother’. In other words, the newspaper articles provide their readers with information about the diversity of opportunities and challenges created by ARTs, including different configurations of relatedness they generate. However, as Strathern (1995: 353) points out:
(... 'more' kinship does not necessarily lead to 'more' relatives. (...) not all biogenetic relationships may be activated as social ones.

In these newspaper articles, ARTs do not disrupt normative ideas about family and kinship. On the contrary, efforts are made to preserve the cultural notions of 'real' biological parenthood and nuclear family. We might expect that ARTs have the potential to liberate family roles and kinship ties; but, in this context, discussion and exploration of these issues reinforces the nuclear family in Russian public discourse, overshadowing the great variability of postmodern family forms that exist in contemporary Russian society, including single-parent families and child-free couples.

Notes


2 In conducting textual analysis, I used the following tools. First, I asked what kinds of repertoires are available, possible, and legitimate in the Russian social context? Second, I examined which issues actors link together or separate; what kinds of distinctions they make and how; their representation of interrelationships between different entities (for example between active kinship and anonymity; artificial and natural fertilisation; surrogacy and adoption; and commodification or assistance in surrogacy). Third, I paid attention to internotionality in the data by exploring how concepts and meanings are circulated, re-coded and transferred to new contexts; how actors draw elements from economic, ethical, juridical or family discourse and embed them in new contexts.

3 The most widespread procedures and techniques used are artificial insemination (AI); in vitro fertilisation (IVF); egg (oocyte) donation; fetus donation; and surrogate motherhood. Male donors contribute sperm; female donors contribute eggs and fetuses.

4 Unlike adoption, which is legally framed and organised, use of ARTs presupposes a complicated combination, or even conflict, between two different orders. Based on the idea of fragmentation of parenthood and the variety of practices people can perform in the process of 'making a baby', Robert Snowden and his colleagues propose up to ten different terms to cover the concepts of 'mother' and 'father', including genetic mother, carrying mother, nurturing mother, complete mother (covering the stages of conception, gestation and care for a child), genetic father, and complete father (Snowden et al. 1983 quoted by Stone 2000: 292).

5 According to Thompson (2005:12), normalisation includes routinisation, primarily in terms of skilled local knowledge exercised by medical personnel and patients in conjunction with medical technologies. Medical personnel possess routinised skills that implicate the enactment of epistemic norms of seeing, feeling, and knowing, according to a certain division of labour, such as reading ultrasound scans or carrying out pelvic exams (see also de Jong, this volume).

6 There are almost no episodes dealing with how children learn about the circumstances of their origins and their ensuing actions. There were several references to foreign newspaper articles about children searching for a genetic father, though these belonged to the first two or three years of the period analysed. The articles do not contain any examples or discussion of long-term social effects. Assisted reproductive technologies are reduced to a very limited activity aimed at conceiving and giving birth. The remaining issues related to bringing up children – their genetic background, the possible influence of inherited diseases, children's right to know the circumstances of their origin, problems with their family identity and possible conflicts – are obscured.

7 Infertility entails not only a medical, but also a social diagnosis, which is described using alarmist language, such as a 'fault', a 'sin' of both spouses, a 'tragedy' for the family, and a 'terrible punishment'.

8 Cases of single women are dealt with very rarely, though such women are officially allowed to use IVF. Lesbian couples applying for such procedures are barely discussed in the texts. The few examples are not represented as 'real stories'. Therefore, singles and lesbians applying for such treatment lack the means of normalisation and grounding in public discourse and, correspondently, in everyday practice.

9 Relationships between spouses are not emphasised, they are seen as unproblematic. Sometimes this unity is only proclaimed, not actively shown, since a woman is shown as a representative of a couple, talking in the name of the partnership.

10 Patients choose a donor voluntary and independently, based on the physical and health descriptions (RG, 6.05.2003).

11 There are no references to persons asked by friends or relatives to donate sperm. I assume this anonymity prevents calling spousal relationship into ques-
tion, allowing a couple to concentrate on conceiving, and avoiding jealousy and suspicion that using an acquaintance as a donor might provoke.

12 Sex-role stereotyping assigns to males the role of initiators, thus defining infertile men as powerless or passive, and as unable to undertake successfully that which is considered "appropriate masculine behaviour" (Ragoné 2004: 346), including fatherhood. Lundin (2001: 151) shows that, through IVF, new expectations about sexual competence and new demands on sperm producers are created. There is hardly any reference to older phallocentric values or to modern equality in this context.

13 Ragoné (2000: 343) distinguishes three categories created by surrogacy: the biological mother, that is the woman who contributes the ovum (the woman formerly assumed to be the 'real mother'); the gestational mother, that is the woman who gestates the embryo but bears no genetic relationship to the child; and the social mother, the women who nurtures and raises the child.

14 Russian Family Law also gives its priority to biological mother as a woman who gave birth to a child (see also Brednikova, Nartova and Tkach, this volume).

15 In this case, biological means 'carrying' of the child (Stone 2001).

16 Unlike sperm donation, egg donation is a more delicate operation, requiring a personal approach to a female donor. The technique of organising oocyte banks is not described, while the details and technique of donating sperm and creating sperm banks are widely discussed.

17 The widespread problem of an institutional credibility gap leads to preference for a personal, reputation-oriented approach in selecting a donor. One might suppose that the lack of formalisation in this sphere contradicts the idea of a donor's anonymity, where the family is safe from the sudden appearance of an acquaintance related to a baby genetically or biologically. Nevertheless, unlike having a child by AI or IVF, surrogacy includes long-term communication. Moreover, the well-being of the bearing mother can directly influence the future child.

18 Interestingly, unlike discussion on sperm donation, in which adoption is not welcomed, opponents of surrogacy uses adoption as an argument for relatedness of a child to the parents.

19 Family Law of Russian Federation, Section 4, Chapter 10, article 51.

20 Family Law of Russian Federation, Section 4, Chapter 10, article 51.

References


