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EDITORIAL

Prejudices and cultural discrimination in adoption: Are they adequately addressed and talked about?

Whilst cultural prejudices and discrimination in adoption remain sensitive, complex and taboo aspects of the process, what is their impact on adoptees, biological and adoptive families, as well as other actors involved?

Intercountry adoption is an environment in which multi-culturalism and differing backgrounds are present. On the one hand, adoption professionals must address these aspects, for example, when assessing prospective adoptive parents (PAPs) through matching, and even when accrediting and/or authorising an adoption body (see p.4). Such activities are important to avoid any attitude or behaviour that may ultimately jeopardise the adoptees' wellbeing. On the other hand, we are all – as members of our societies – responsible for ensuring that adoptees do not suffer from any of these. Cultural issues are therefore inherent and cross-cutting aspects of intercountry adoption that deserve the attention of all.

Inter-cultural perspectives at the heart of intercountry adoption?

Historically, intercountry adoption has been prevalent in countries of origin facing poverty and socio-economic difficulties, conflicts and other development obstacles. Indeed, in these environments, intercountry adoption has been presented as a viable option for the protection of children. However, these countries often also have weak child protection frameworks including questionable adoption systems, with potential for irregular procedures and a general lack of respect for children's rights and adoption ethics.

Despite the latter, mostly well-intentioned PAPs – with the tacit agreement of some competent authorities, agencies, professionals and media in receiving countries – would generally ignore these concerns and remain convinced that this was always the best option for the child irrespective of their family's situation and potential care options within the country, such as children's reintegration (see p.9).

These prejudices continue to play a crucial role in several stages of the intercountry adoption process and existing cultural tensions such as insufficient protection and care offered to unaccompanied and separated children (see Monthly Review No. 202 of May-June 2016) and the constant search for countries of origin for potential intercountry adoptions. Thus, these multi-cultural countries should benefit from the availability of awareness-raising tools and materials to respond to potential discriminatory situations/attitudes that may

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affect adoptees.

This approach may be similar in some countries of origin, where domestic PAPs would rather adopt abroad than a child from their country, from a particular ethnic or socio-economic background, in order to avoid any common prejudices within their society. This was the case, for instance, following the earthquake in Haiti, as some PAPs, reluctant to adopt a child of indigenous origins or with a disability within their country, rather sought to adopt a Haitian child, believing they were 'saving' them¹.

Breaking the taboo of cultural discrimination: May it be identified or addressed in the pre-adoptive phase?

Cultural prejudices are often not addressed at any stage of the adoption process, as there remains a certain taboo about even raising this issue. However, if one wants to avoid or at least reduce any future impact on the adoptees' wellbeing, then should this not be addressed from the beginning of the proceedings, in particular in receiving countries? For example, when assessing PAPs, these are generally not explicitly asked about their potential prejudices with regards to some cultures, or the child's origins. However, if one wishes to undertake a meaningful and proper matching, should one not have such information in order to ensure that the latter truly responds to the child's needs, rights and characteristics and that the prospective adopters are indeed suitable potential parents? In this regard, in October 2015, in Belgium, the *Conseil supérieur de l'adoption* issued an opinion on the legitimacy of meeting the wishes of PAPs as to the child's ethnic origin or skin colour, and recommended that, when searching for a potential adoptive family, the child cannot be the object of discrimination based on his or her race, skin colour, descent or national or ethnic origin².

When not addressed in the assessment as such, should it not be focused on as part of the preparation process? For example, in Finland, the available preparation course includes specific sessions on racism and prejudices (see p. 5). Whilst not specifically excluding PAPs due to their views, it has the merit of offering a forum of discussion and a process of reflection on one's own prejudices, their impact on the adoption and their potential implications for the adoptee.

Awareness-raising in the process of integration of the child: Are adoptees sufficiently protected against discriminatory situations?

Whilst cultural prejudices and discrimination must be prevented prior to the adoption, there is no doubt that discriminatory actions, words and other cultural prejudices must also be avoided once in the receiving country, including at school, extended family and in society. This is, amongst others, a matter of providing specific support to adoptees faced with these situations (see p. 7) and train the psycho-social professionals who may be involved, in order to prepare and support all in responding to these (see p. 12).

Thus, at the ISS/IRC, we truly believe that the issue of cultural prejudices and discrimination should be explicitly addressed by all the actors prior to and after the child's adoption, *i.e.* when advocating for intercountry adoption in the media or by adoption agencies, when training professionals, when assessing and preparing PAPs, and when raising awareness and supporting adoptees during their integration in the adoptive – extended – family and receiving society. Whilst it remains a complex, sensitive and sometimes taboo subject, the adoptees are entitled to their protection and respect for their rights, which includes their psycho-social wellbeing and non-discrimination.

The ISS/IRC team
September 2016

References:

¹ 'México y Haití integran lista de niños para adopción', *El Universal*, 5 February 2010, <http://archivo.eluniversal.com.mx/notas/656584.html>.

² Fédération Wallonie-Bruxelles, Lettre d'information N° 15, December 2015.

ACTORS

- **Ghana:** On 16 September 2016, the country submitted its instrument of accession to the 1993 Hague Convention. The latter will enter into force on 1 January 2017.

Source: Hague Conference on Private International Law,
<https://www.hcch.net/en/latest-updates1>.

BRIEF NEWS

Cambodia: ISS / HCCH assessment mission

At the request of the Cambodian Ministry of Social Affairs, Veterans and Youth Rehabilitation and supported by UNICEF, ISS, together with the Hague Conference on Private International Law (HCCH), conducted a joint needs assessment in Cambodia in collaboration with authorities and key stakeholders. The aim of the mission was to develop a capacity development plan to strengthen foster care, domestic and intercountry adoption in the country.

The mission team met with over 50 stakeholders in Phnom Penh, Battambang and Siem Riep and undertook various remote meetings. The mission ended with a consultative workshop with approximately 100 participants – government, civil society and UN agencies. Preliminary findings and recommendations were shared in small groups creating the possibility to gather early feedback as to feasibility. ISS looks forward to working with the Cambodian government in its earnest endeavors to reform both alternative care and adoption practices according to international standards.

Peru: MIMP's decisions with an impact on intercountry adoption

On 20 September 2016, the Ministry for Women and Vulnerable People (MIMP) published its Ministerial Resolution No. 256-2016-MIMP, which declares the administrative reorganisation of the General Directorate for Adoptions, and the creation of a reorganisation commission. This resolution has been issued in the framework of recent media reports relating to another relevant decision by MIMP as to the restriction of adoptions of Peruvian children abroad.

Indeed, given a recent case, in which several children adopted in Peru had been abused by their adoptive parents in the receiving country, as well as criticisms relating to the lack of follow-up of intercountry adoption cases and other problems in the adoption system in general, MIMP is taking these actions.

The ISS/ICR will monitor these news in order to be able to continue informing as to the legal framework, in which these decisions will be implemented, as well as to the implications of the latter for all the actors involved in Peru and abroad.

For further preliminary information, see: Ministerial Resolution No. 256-2016-MIMP, <http://www.elperuano.com.pe/NormasElperuano/2016/09/20/1430843-1.html>; Ministerio de la Mujer y Poblaciones Vulnerables, "MIMP declara en reorganización la Dirección General de Adopciones", 20 September 2016, <http://www.mimp.gob.pe/salaprensa/notas-prensa.php?codigo=2171>; "Ministra peruana confirma suspensión de adopciones por extranjeros", *Prensa Latina*, 20 September 2016, <http://www.prensa-latina.cu/index.php/component/content/?o=rn&id=27679&SEO=ministra-peruana-confirma-suspension-de-adopciones-por-extranjeros>.

LEGISLATION

Overview of legal and practical tools: Guiding, supporting and harmonising the services provided by accredited adoption bodies

In this article, the ISS/IRC recommends several tools aimed at strengthening the role of accredited adoption bodies and securing the obligations and responsibilities of parties involved in the process of intercountry adoption.

It is crucial to guide and support the activities of accredited adoption bodies (AABs), in the best way possible, so that they can provide appropriate services when working closely with adoptive families. This framework can take several forms: many countries have opted for the adoption of legal measures (laws, decrees, judgements or regulations) offering guidelines for AABs. Furthermore, it is common to supplement these measures with agreements between the AAB and the Central Authority (CA) or/and between the AAB and the prospective adoptive parents. Thus, several initiatives and examples will be presented; these have been developed by some receiving countries, often with the aim of providing responses to current challenges.

Framing the relationship between accredited adoption bodies and Central Authorities: Innovative initiatives

It cannot be emphasised enough that the relationship between the AAB and the CA must exist within professional ethics and a spirit of cooperation and financial transparency (see Monthly Review No. 199 of February 2016). Across its wide network, the ISS/IRC has been able to identify particular tools developed by some countries regarding cooperation and certain types of adoption. The CA of Belgium's French Community has developed a model country factsheet to be completed by the AAB for its authorisation to work in a country of origin. These documents establish the procedure to comply with depending on the country of origin at stake (categorised in Hague and non-Hague Contracting States; process of recognition or obtaining of visas, etc.).

Furthermore, the AABs in Belgium's French Community are required to provide supplementary resources, particularly at medical level, regarding the adoption of children with special needs. In British Columbia (Canada) – given the possibility to undertake open adoptions

in accordance with the law – AABs are obliged to provide pre- and post-adoption services appropriate to this type of adoption¹.

Framing the relationship between accredited adoption bodies and prospective adoptive parents: The importance of harmony

In view of the uncertainties in the field of intercountry adoption (see articles on moratoria in Monthly Review No. 202 and 203 of May-June and July 2016), it is particularly important to regulate the obligations and responsibilities of all the parties involved. It is encouraging that an increasing number of countries, such as France and several Canadian provinces and territories, offer model contracts in order to formalise and undertake reports between the AAB and the prospective adoptive parents, and in order to harmonise the practices in this field. Such models could also be a means of raising awareness and motivating the applicants to make cautious choices and use a professional AAB. In the same sense, in Ontario, the prospective adoptive parents are required to sign documents, prepared by the Ministry of Children and Youth Services, which explain to them in detail the process of accreditation of the AAB.

Such a contractual relationship can, not only prevent abuse by indicating key issues such as the fees of an AAB and the estimated costs in the country of origin, but also play a role in the prevention of failure by ensuring the offer of pre- and post-adoption services. To this effect, in Quebec, there is a model of commitment to post-adoption follow-up to be signed by the prospective adoptive parents. Through they latter, they commit, in particular, to providing the post-adoption reports required by the State of origin of the adopted child². In France, a working group composed of the CA, representatives of private and public AABs, departmental boards and associations of adoptive parents, has developed a model contract³, which will serve in

the future as a basis for all French bodies in contact with applicants. Currently, each AAB applies its own model. To ensure transparency, the contract covers important aspects to strengthen minimum standards for a successful intercountry adoption and to face up to some current challenges.

Finding the right balance

A precise framework, in both law and practice, for all the stakeholders in adoption is certainly necessary and builds a strong weapon to fight against illegal practices. As demonstrated above, some countries are far-sighted regarding the framework of AAB activities. However, it should be underlined that these demands on the AABs

The ISS/IRC would like to congratulate the States, who have adopted concrete initiatives to make the adoption process more transparent and better adapted to the present day realities of intercountry adoption. The ISS/IRC, through its commitment to the exchange of promising practices and tools for professionals, remains available to support States in these efforts and to encourage other countries to adopt concrete solutions that contribute to ever more ethical intercountry adoption procedures.

References:

¹ See: British Columbia, Adoption Regulations BC - Schedule 2. For further information, please contact the ISS/IRC.

² See: *Engagement des parents à produire les rapports exigés de l'état d'origine de l'enfant* (Annexe C), http://www.adoptionappel.org/wp-content/uploads/contratfinalsai-01-07-2014_new.pdf.

³ See: France Diplomatie, Le Projet de mise en relation (PMER), <http://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/fr/adopter-a-l-etranger/actualites-de-l-adoption-internationale/les-breves-de-l-adoption-internationale/2016/article/contrat-type-de-projet-de-mise-en-relation>.

⁴ See: Guidelines for Written Service Agreement. For further information, please contact the ISS/IRC.

PRACTICE

Addressing prejudices and racism: Preparation courses for prospective adoptive parents in Finland

Anja Wikstedt, an Adoption Counsellor and Founding Member of Yhteiset Lapsemme - All Our Children¹, shares with us the organisation's practice in addressing prejudices and racism in intercountry adoption through preparation courses for prospective adoptive parents.

The aim of the organisation is to improve the well-being of multicultural children living in Finland. In addition to its central office, two children's homes and a group home for separated asylum-seeking children, the organisation has been involved in intercountry adoption since its inception, by offering preparation courses, educational meetings and a support phone line. *Yhteiset Lapsemme* is also represented on Finland's Adoption Board.

must also be accompanied by appropriate resources, both financial and human. With regards to the use of model contracts, it is important that the AABs are able to benefit from a certain flexibility whilst maintaining the involvement of the CA. Thus, in Quebec, ministerial guidelines⁴ regulate the reports between AABs and prospective adoptive parents, whilst each AAB remains free to develop and work under their own service agreements. Nevertheless, before the model chosen by the AAB is implemented, it should be analysed and approved by the CA, in accordance with the criteria set by the ministerial guidelines.

What is it like to be adopted from abroad and to live in Finland?

In Finland, intercountry adoption became more common in the 1980s. Having first increased and subsequently decreased, 93 children were adopted internationally in 2015, and there are currently approximately 4,700 adoptees from abroad in Finland.

Knowledge and facts are important, but we know now that it is not sufficient. Children and young people do experience racist behaviour,

and many different methods are needed to stand up against it, *e.g.* from art and music to experiential learning and first-hand experiences, and the voice of those, who have faced racism, must be heard. Issues relating to immigration, refuge, multiculturalism and ethnic minorities are important and must be included in the education of children and adults.

In this context, the dissertation by Anna Rastas² about racism in the everyday life of children offers a description of various manifestations of racism, and a comparative analysis of the latter in several countries. According to Rastas, racism does not automatically vanish from a society as the society gets more multicultural. In order to fight against racism and to cope with racist experiences, individuals need to have others close to them, with whom they can discuss and share the experiences. It is hard for children and young people to build important safety networks if the people in their environment cannot support them.

What can be done about it if we know that this happens?

Yhteiset Lapsemme's preparation courses are aimed at anyone considering intercountry adoption or already at some stage of the adoption process. These are weekend courses (two sessions) and the number of participants varies from 14 to 18. The course leaders are experienced adoptive parents or adult adoptees, trained by *Yhteiset Lapsemme*. The courses address, amongst other aspects, the child's background and origin as well as prejudices, intolerance and racism. The courses also benefit from guest speakers, such as adoptive families and adult adoptees.

In accordance with Finnish legislation, the courses are voluntary, but many countries of origin require preparation courses. In addition, these courses are recommended by the authorities and accredited adoption bodies. Many different methods are used in the courses. In *Yhteiset Lapsemme*'s preparation courses, the themes and methods are adapted over time, and the course leaders are not only allowed, but also encouraged, to try out new ways and methods. The course leaders – all with long-standing experience – have a common view of the attitudes of the participants in relation to racism. Nowadays, one no longer questions that racism

and prejudices exist in all societies, even though there are people who, personally, have never experienced nor recognised the phenomena.

An example of reflection on prejudices and racism

A session on prejudices and racism was held in Espoo in the spring of 2016. After the first weekend, the participants were asked to think about one racist situation they had witnessed as by-standers or had been somehow involved in. At the second weekend, the session started with a short introduction by the course leaders: racism, prejudices and discrimination are also an adoption issue, and will affect us or affect our children's lives. Thus, we have to face the questions at personal level, now or in the future. Instead of stigmatising the adoptees as victims, children should be protected and their strengths and abilities supported. We have our own prejudices and stereotypes, and we have to work with them. Adoptees have a right to be respected as who they are.

The participants were then shown the short video *Samuel*, All Our Children's 2013 campaign³ – a young boy facing a racist situation and what it means when adults do not interfere. The message is clear: we should all be brave and courageous and dare to care!

The group work was then about time-travelling. Each group had five flipcharts. The first flipchart was the present moment, the next ones were the years 2020, 2025, 2030 and 2035. The groups started with the present moment and talked, as requested, about their experiences with racism, asked questions to each other and to themselves: how did the people involved react, what did they do, was there something else that should have been done, or in a different way? Thereafter, the participants moved forward to the following flipcharts, acting as if it was that year and reflected on the following: what kind of country was Finland now, what might have happened in the years in between, what are our worries, in general, when thinking about our adoptive child, what can we do? When reaching the year 2035, the participants were asked to describe – in words or drawings – the Finland of 2035 as if their dream had become true.

Written true stories were placed on tables: adoptive parents' worries and fears as well as

positive experiences starting from the time before the arrival of the child up until their adulthood. Silly, unthoughtful, prejudiced and racist comments, which prospective parents, parents and children had heard, were also gathered. There was also a checkpoint for one's own prejudices and stereotypes with a short letter written by a known Finnish expert in the field of human rights describing openly his own prejudices. To make the checkpoint more effective, there were also some comic strips about stereotypes.

After time travelling, the participants were shown a video made by All Our Children and the Upper Secondary School of Performing Art of Kallio in Helsinki⁴. A joint discussion was carried

out by moving together from the present moment to the future, sharing experiences and opinions, fears and hopes, whilst focusing on what we can do, each one of us, how the structures may be changed at the same time as we must consider the reality of the individuals. It is important to reflect on what kind of language we use and what words we choose every day with our relatives and friends, at work and with anybody in order to promote tolerance, justice and human rights. Voting and being an active citizen was considered important. It was agreed that additional emphasis should be placed on potential means to change existing social structures.

The ISS/IRC very much welcomes All Our Children's efforts to address prejudices and racism in intercountry adoption and to reflect on the means to prevent and respond to these situations. Furthermore, it believes it is very positive that the preparation courses specifically focus on this issue, which makes it possible for participants and course leaders to share knowledge, experiences, opinions and questions openly, which benefit all and offer ideas and mental support for the challenges of life.

References:

¹ For further information on the organisation, see: <http://www.yhteisetlapsemme.fi/en/>.

² Rastas, A (2007). *Rasismi lasten ja nuorten arjessa. Transnationaalit juuret ja monikulttuuristuva Suomi*. Tampere University Press & Nuorisotutkimusseura/Nuorisotutkimusverkosto.

³ All Our Children, *Samuel* (2013), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yK5zSTNpDUA> (Finnish) and <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jNjWpU41CZ8> (Swedish).

⁴ All Our Children and Upper Secondary School of Performing Art of Kallio, Helsinki, *I had a teacher correct me* (2013) (Finnish and English at 11.11 minutes), available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rBZBsa3ILA>.

Results speak for themselves: Research on the satisfaction of adult Dutch intercountry adoptees

Now that many adoptees are adults, it is worth knowing their views on adoption. Thus, Gera ter Meulen, at ADOC¹, assessed, through a survey on satisfaction², how adult intercountry adoptees feel about their life, their background and their adoption.

The research on the satisfaction of adult Dutch intercountry adoptees was undertaken through a web-based survey, developed upon a request by three Dutch EurAdopt members, and to be presented at the 2016 EurAdopt Conference.

Methodology

To find an unbiased sample of adult intercountry adoptees is a challenge. Thus, we approached adoptive parents with adult adopted children in order for them to send their children a link to the survey. In this way, many adoptees

could be reached, including the ones not interested in adoption. Another link to the same survey was disseminated through the two largest Dutch adoptee organisations, social media, etc.

The concept survey was discussed with both *United Adoptees International* (mostly critical towards intercountry adoption) and *Foundation Intercountry Adoptees* (mostly pleased with adoption), to be sure that the most important issues were covered in a compact survey.

The main question in the survey was whether the adoptees were satisfied with their life, in

relation to their feelings relating to relinquishment and adoption. Other questions were about personal characteristics, the adoptive family, social relationships and searches for origins.

Satisfaction

The survey was responded to by 1,203 Dutch adult intercountry adoptees. They originated from about 25 countries, mostly from China, Colombia and South Korea. Ages ranged between 18 and 55 years.

The adoptees scored high on satisfaction with life. When using the Cantril scale – a general instrument for measuring satisfaction with life – the adoptees were even more satisfied than the average Dutch population. Other satisfaction instruments showed similar results.

A small group scored low, in the range of suffering. This was also reflected in the open questions. The youngest group was most satisfied, and the 40+ group the least. This could not be explained by age, given that for almost 50% of those, whose feelings about relinquishment and adoption had changed, the change was more often positive. Changes were the results of growing up, root travelling, having children, experiencing severe problems and psychological suffering from themselves or from others.

The higher satisfaction of the younger adoptees could be explained by the improvement of domestic and international regulations, better knowledge about what is important, better preparation of adoptive parents, and more specialised adoption services.

Relinquishment and adoption

Positive feelings about relinquishment and adoption were correlated with higher satisfaction with life and negative feelings with lower satisfaction. However, the results showed that adoptees could be negative or ambivalent about relinquishment, but positive about adoption. Less positive feelings about relinquishment could go hand in hand with high satisfaction with life.

The adoptive family

Most adoptees looked back on their adoptive home in a (very) positive way and most adoptees had good contact with their adoptive family. However, though the majority saw their adoptive parents as their real parents, about 1/12 had no or very bad contact with their adoptive parents.

Identity and discrimination

When asked about identity, ‘one’s character’ turned out to be the most important factor, while ‘being adopted’ was mentioned by only one fifth of the respondents.

It may be noted that adoptees, who described their adoption as important for their identity, scored lower on satisfaction. Most adoptees did not often think about adoption; it would pop up during periods in their lives and be unimportant at other times.

As one adoptee stated:
‘In my opinion, adoption is the best plaster on the major wound relinquishment has caused in my life’.

Regarding discrimination, most adoptees had experienced discrimination and over half of them had

suffered a bit or a lot, mainly during childhood and adolescence. Suffering from discrimination was correlated to less satisfaction with life.

Roots

Over half of the adoptees had gone back to their country of origin, mostly to spend holidays, but also to find more information or their parents of origin. About one fourth of this group had looked for information about their adoption and one third of them found information that was inconsistent with the original information. However, the degree of incorrect information differed for the different countries of origin, and after 1992, the percentage of incorrect information drastically decreased. The adoptees, who searched for information in their country of origin, were less satisfied with life, and less positive about relinquishment and adoption than the ones who did not.

Most respondents never/hardly ever wished they had lived with their parents of origin, about one tenth often or always did. Finally, most respondents declared that adoption made them feel good. For about one tenth, that never or hardly ever happened.

By way of conclusion, the results of the survey demonstrated that adoption gave most Dutch intercountry adoptees the opportunity for a life with a lot of satisfaction. That does not mean that it cannot cause unhappiness and pain, and does not reject the fact that there are issues that can be difficult and should be dealt with. The most important adoption-related factors for satisfaction with life were the feelings about relinquishment and adoption, the relationship with the adoptive family and being affected by discrimination.

References:

¹ ADOC – Knowledge Centre on Adoption and Foster Care gives access to adoption and foster care research and uses scientific information to answer questions from the field. For further information, see: www.adoptionresearch.nl

² The Survey on satisfaction was funded by the Dutch Oranje Fonds, the Central Authority and the Chair for Adoption Studies, and was organised with help of Leiden University and the three Dutch EurAdopt accredited bodies.

INTERDISCIPLINARY RESOURCES

Guidelines on children's reintegration: A new international framework to ensure adequate care for children within their family

These guidelines¹, launched in September 2016 and developed by an inter-agency group of 14 members, provide promising practices with regards to children's reintegration. They aim to enhance the international framework ensuring the effective implementation of the right of each child to grow up in their family and better equipping professionals.

Throughout the world, millions of children are separated from their families. They live in residential care or other institutions, detention facilities or on the streets. They may have been victims of trafficking, of displacements due to conflicts or used as soldiers. The guidelines support the reunification of children with their families by providing principles of good practice and guidance for professionals working with families and communities through practical examples. However, they do neither cover alternative care arrangements when reintegration is not in the child's best interests, nor do they explore cross-border reintegration.

Reintegration principles in accordance with international legal and policy frameworks

Despite the existing international framework covering reintegration (UNCRC, Guidelines for the Alternative Care of Children, Inter-Agency Guiding Principles on Unaccompanied and Separated Children, etc.), a clear need for a more detailed guidance has been identified.

Support for reintegration must be a part of each child protection system through clear legislation

and allocated funds in order to adequately train the child welfare workforce (governmental actors, families, communities, religious leaders, actors from the social, health and justice sectors). In Cambodia, for instance, importance is given to the training of staff of residential care facilities to make them understand the benefits of reintegration. Indeed, the strong bonds they have established with the children, as well as their fear to lose their job, may be significant barriers to reintegration.

However, the guidelines recall that, despite their right to the preservation of family unit, reintegration should never harm children. Thus, a full risk assessment aimed at protecting children from abuse or violence should always be carried out. In this process, the cooperation of all stakeholders is essential to identify the strengths and gaps of each situation. This is, for example, undertaken by a Brazilian network of governmental agencies, NGOs and UN agencies working towards the prevention of family separation and promoting reintegration. Their success is due to three factors: bringing together stakeholders with authorities to implement

changes; sharing successful programmes through national seminars; and developing locally appropriate policies and guidance.

Detailed stages of the reintegration process

Reintegration is a long and participative process involving the child and their family, schools and communities. Each family should be assigned a case worker to support them through the whole process and children should be listened to at every stage.

Reintegration is '[t]he process of a separated child making what is anticipated to be a permanent transition back to his/her family and community – usually of origin- in order to receive protection and care and to find a sense of belonging and purpose in all sphere of lives'.

Extract of the Introduction of the Guidelines on children's reintegration

- Comprehensive assessment of the child, family and community and development of a plan: After a **tracing** period, such an **assessment** should determine whether reintegration is in the best interests of the child and identify potential risks. Once the decision to reunite the child with their family is made, a **plan** must be established and accepted by the family. The guidelines provide specific examples in this regards.

- Child and family preparation: This stage requires time, as many issues, such as a situation of abuse, neglect and violence in the family, must be addressed to ensure the child's safety. Access to education and material support are also essential issues to consider. A Mexican NGO working for many years in the field of reintegration of children living on the streets has trained staff to give individual support and make sure that children receive love and care rather than exclusively material support.

The ISS/IRC welcomes these guidelines that recall the importance of family preservation through a quality and comprehensive reintegration process and its support by all concerned actors: governments should adopt national guidance and policies on children's reintegration, a child welfare workforce should exist to support children, and a casework system should be established to support children and families during the process. It is very important to remember the essential role of the communities and the vital effort that should be made to preserve the family at an initial stage and to eradicate the causes of separation, which are poverty and violence.

- Monitoring and follow-up: Competences in this regard should be clarified.

- Careful child's initial contact with the family: Remote communication is encouraged and should be followed by short supervised visits, and then longer ones.

- Post-reunification support should also be carried out as a key element of the process.

Monitoring and evaluation of the overall process

The guidelines emphasise the need to carefully monitor the reintegration process to ensure quality interventions. Evaluation should take place at three levels: individual cases, agencies' programmes and multi-actor reintegration efforts. Among those efforts, in Moldova, teachers have been trained to help reunified children, after the closing of large institutions, to reintegrate the school system. In Nepal, two NGOs have facilitated the reintegration of trafficked children in their families. Before their return, many visits are undertaken to assess the families and communities. Once they have returned home, reintegration officers have carried out monitoring visits to help these children, who sometimes have forgotten local languages and traditions, and who have experienced violence.

Reference:

¹ Delap, D and Wedge, J (2016). *Guidelines on children's reintegration*. Inter-Agency Group on Children Reintegration. Available in English at: <http://www.bettercarenetwork.org/sites/default/files/Guidelines%20on%20Children%27s%20Reintegration%20DIGITAL%20.pdf>.

Listen to me growing up: Giving a voice to babies

Although initially aimed at young parents, this new book¹ by French Psychologist and Psychoanalyst Sophie Marinopoulos – and presented by Catherine Lelièvre² – is highly recommended for all professionals in contact with families to help them in their counselling with parents.

‘*Écoutez-moi grandir*’ [Listen to me growing up] is based on a wonderful premise: it says to parents ‘trust yourselves, you have extraordinary resources within you’. This short and very accessible book is funny and moving, and facilitates an understanding of many issues relating to the young child and the relationship with their parents and their environment.

The voice of babies

It is Elisabeth who is talking. She is the main character, discussing her life and explaining how she feels. She is, in a way, speaking for all babies. Obviously, Elisabeth is rather smart and already very keen on psychology. We meet her *in utero* during the first ultrasound, which ‘they [her parents] needed’ Elisabeth tells us; an ultrasound, which was going to reassure her mother about her existence and allow her father ‘to see her’.

Elisabeth has an opinion on everything, which she expresses with a great deal of common sense and even wisdom, quite a bit of humour and sometimes irreverently. She is even a little

This book condenses the essential. It does not moralise, blame or try to be pedantic because it gives a voice directly to the baby, playing down straight away words and situations. We smile a lot, sometimes laugh, express opinions and above all reflect! This little work should have a place in every professional’s library! Because the author is right: ‘This book is about prevention. It talks about mental health and education’. As we all know, this is just as important and essential as physical health.

References:

¹ Marinopoulos, S (2016). *Écoutez-moi grandir*. Ed. Les liens qui libèrent.

² Article written by Catherine Lelièvre; available at: *Les pros de la petite enfance*, <https://lesprosdela petiteenfance.fr/vie-professionnelle/biblio-pro/ecoutez-moi-grandir>.

condescending and sententious when she explains life to her parents. She discusses her first year with us: her early existence in her mother’s womb, her birth, her child minder, her opinion about her ‘baby colleagues’, her first steps. Both, enchanting when she tries to explain her initial wonderment, and touching when she talks about her mother and her wish to be with her whilst at the same time more independent.

Key messages for parents and professionals

Through the story of Elisabeth, S Marinopoulos shares messages close to her heart: we must allow the child time and space, to let them have their own experiences, not over stimulate the child, etc. Each snapshot featuring Elisabeth and her parents is a pretext to learn something about the child, particularly how each progress made by the baby is a mini separation from their mother. Each of them gives Elisabeth the opportunity to announce some basic truths with much confidence: ‘I love doing things on my own’ or ‘I walk because I am allowed to walk’.

Multiculturalism in adoption or the dialogue of multiple identities: Reflection and support offered by the Belgian organisation Octoscope

Jacqueline Spitz, a Psychologist and member of the Belgian association Octoscope, which offers support to professionals working in the psychosocial field and to adoptive families, shares her analysis on the issue of multiculturalism and identity-building among adoptees.

To strive towards building a coherent and positive psychosocial identity is undoubtedly a challenge that every human being faces in their personal development. Explaining the fact of belonging to one or several social groups and articulating possible differences between these groups are challenges that must be specifically addressed in the process of identity-building, such is the situation for an adopted person as an individual with multiple affiliations, who can thrive in a context of multiple references. Cultural diversity is made up of both riches and difficulties and should not be idealised any more than disparaged.

Multiculturalism at the heart of identity-building

In the field of migration and exile, as well as adoption, which is a special migration due to the early rupture of cultural immersion, the issue of multiculturalism is at the heart of identity-building. This is based on two dimensions: personal identity ('*who am I?*'), all the characteristics that the individual attributes to themselves, and secondly, a collective identity, referring to the links maintained with the members of a social and cultural category. The aim is not for the fusion of cultural diversities into one unity, but rather a continuous exchange that not only joins together but also transforms each other. Each person retains their own identity while reclaiming a common heritage. How do the elements of personal history and collective history contribute to this identity-building? How does the social perspective also form this identity? Making adoptive parents and psychosocial stakeholders aware of these sensitive questions probably forms an antidote to misunderstandings and misperceptions and thereby provides a tool to prevent identity tensions.

Identity and otherness in adoption

In adoption, identity and otherness are truly intertwined and accompany the child through out their identity development. The adopted child, coming from another cultural origin than that of their adoptive parents, is faced with a real dilemma: they are not one or the other but they are one and the other. For example, a child of Asian origin adopted in Belgium is Belgian but has physical characteristics that cannot refute his Asian origin. Additionally, this child cannot define himself as fully Asian because he lives in Belgium, is a Belgian national and has a filial relationship with Belgian parents. It is the same with a child of African origin adopted in Belgium. Above and beyond any racist considerations, the colour of the skin is undoubtedly one of the most visible exterior signs of otherness. This is a singular experience for those, who live through it. This element is a dimension that has seen very little investigation and is rarely elucidated by the adopted parents. Yet, it cannot be regarded as insignificant because, not only is it one of the most visible signs of the otherness of the adopted child but also, above all, it embodies the biological filiation. In order to develop harmoniously, the child must learn to function with two identities. When the child feels the need to belong to one or other family or cultural reference, they should feel they are allowed to make a free choice. Here or elsewhere, they are both, the child of adoptive parents and the child of another origin.

Adoption puts the child at the heart of multiple affinities, plunging him into a multitude of feelings of belonging and perhaps also of loyalty. In fact, the otherness of the adopted child is a veritable knot where personal histories and shared backgrounds meet and where these also combine with the parental experience. Furthermore, the relationship between the adopted child and their adoptive parents is

played out under the gaze of a third party, that of society. As such, the otherness of the adopted child has to confront conscious and unconscious memories, imprints that the memory retains from ancestors and history. Adoption is the multiculturalism of at least two and often several histories.

Awareness and support for professionals and adoptive parents

In this respect, the association Octoscope offers specific time to think about the issue of multiple belongings and multiple identities: time for professional psychosocial involvement and time for adoptive parents.

As this subject reaches across the concerns of each one, the specifics relating to their respective places leads us to using different media to address it. In 2016, two study days for professionals and two discussion evenings for adoptive parents were organised in Brussels. Psychosocial participants were encouraged to visit and revisit the process of identity-construction along with the issue of belonging in

the light of multiculturalism with its historical, anthropological, social and psychological aspects. Speakers from different disciplines encouraged reflection, while workshops invited participants to 'connect to' their own experience of this process.

For adoptive parents, it is the colour of the skin that is the entry to reflection and the sharing of experiences. The Laurence Petit Jouvét film (*La ligne de couleur*) and Stéphanie Clavier's book (*Une famille en noir et blanc*) generated discussion between the writers and the adoptive parents. Exchanges entail taking into account the family in their unique experience and the social perspective from its stigmatised aspects. Each person is not a blank stereotype, in which personal history and collective history have built up over time and act in the unconscious. Without over-dramatising, it is important not to lose oneself in a type of other worldliness in respect of the realities that adoption and the colour of the skin have to confront.

Adoptive parents and professionals in the psychosocial field have all raised the challenge to legitimise the emergence of the constituent elements of human complexity and thereby engage in dialogue about multiple belongings in identity-building.

FORTHCOMING CONFERENCES AND TRAININGS

- **Belgium:** *Enfant intérieur et blessures d'abandon*, Conference by Geneviève Bartoli, Asbl Octoscope, Brussels, 21 October 2016. Two seminars are organised on the same topic: the first one aimed at adoptive parents, Brussels, 3 December 2016, 28 January, 18 February, 18-19 March 2017; the second one is aimed at professionals, Brussels, 1-2 December 2016, 26-27 January and 16-17 February 2017. Deadline for registration for both seminars: 25 November 2016. For further information, see: <http://www.octoscope.be/>.
- **Colombia:** *1st Latin-American Congress on adoptions*, RelacAdop, Bogota, 27-28 October 2016. For further information, see: infocongreso@cran.org.co.
- **France:** **a)** *De la dépendance à l'autonomie: la théorie de l'attachement*, enfances&PSY, Paris, 2 December 2016. For further information, see: <http://enfancesetpsy.fr/colloque/la-theorie-de-lattachement/>; **b)** *Enfant porteur de handicap et approche piklérienne*, Pikler Loczy, Paris, 23 November 2016. For further information, see: <http://pikler.fr/Formation>; **c)** *L'adoption d'enfants à besoins spécifiques: approfondissement*, EFA, Paris, 24 November 2016. For further information, see: <http://adoptionefa.org/les-formations>.
- **Switzerland:** *Comment penser son projet d'adoption dans le contexte national et international*, Espace A, Geneva, 23 November 2016 and 17 May 2017. For further information, see: <http://www.espace-a.org/>.

- **United Kingdom:** *The neuroscience of adoption and fostering*, Dr Margot Sunderland, CoramBAAF, Birmingham, 30 November 2016. For further information, see: <http://www.corambaaf.org.uk/training>.

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