TRANSNATIONAL ADOPTIONS AND MIGRATION: INTERSECTIONS AND CHALLENGES. THE SLOVENIAN CASE

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ABSTRACT

Transnational Adoptions and Migration: Intersections and Challenges. The Slovenian Case

The paper addresses the topic of the situation of transnationally adopted children in their receiving country. Exploring the ways in which a person becomes a part of a national group and/or culture and drawing on research in the area of transnational adoptions and ethnicization, as well as possible coping strategies, I contend that there is much more to belonging than citizenship or legal kinship.
KEYWORDS: transnational adoptions, kinship, migrants, nationality, identity

Izvleček

Mednarodne posvojitve in migracije: Presečišča in izzivi. Primer Slovenije

Avtorica v prispevku raziskuje položaj mednarodno posvojenih otrok v državi, v katero so bili posvojeni. Z raziskovanjem načinov, na katere posamezenik postane del določene nacionalne skupnosti in/ali kulture, s povzemanjem raziskav na področju mednarodnih posvojitev in etnizacije kot tudi možnih strategij za ravnanje dokazuje, da pripisana pripadnost zahteva več kot le državljanski status ali pravno legalizirane sorodstvene vezi.
KLJUČNE BESEDE: mednarodne posvojitve, sorodstvene vezi, migranti, nacionalnost, identiteta

INTRODUCTION

Migration is one of the constants of human societies. In this paper I will not attempt to refer to the vast body of theory and research that now exists on this topic, but will focus on a specific combination of migration, identity (formation) and transnational[1] adoptions of children. This paper opens this debate

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1 In this paper, transnational adoption signifies adoptions of children in the international arena: a type of adoption in which an adult or a couple become the legal and permanent parents of a child who is not of the same nationality/from the same country as the parents. In the literature on this topic, adoptions of children from other countries than their parents' are labelled with different terms: transnational, international, and intercountry are the most frequent. Additionally, terms like transracial, interracial or interethnic are used to mark situations where the parents are for example white and the children are not. I am aware that terms such as ethnicity, race etc. are highly contested, but here they will be mostly used to mark otherness, differentness etc. (i.e. also with respect to: who 'has ethnicity', who 'is racialized'). The word interracial is also used occasionally in this paper, in

in the Slovenian sphere,[2] posing the questions which I propose should be answered in future research and presenting issues that need to be considered, by referring to selected research on transnational adoptions and analysis of excerpts of narratives on adoption, collected through interviews with adoptive parents during Slovenian research of social parenthood (Rezar and Klun, in: Zaviršek et al. 2008) and Slovenian research on the procedures, organization and standards of adoption (Sobočan, in: Zaviršek et al. 2009). I will use research material which was not collected principally for the purposes of this paper, but has nevertheless not been yet used (except for an interview by Rezar), and moreover has not been analysed through the perspective which I will pursue in this paper.

The interest in bringing all three themes (migration, identity, transnational adoptions) together was inspired by the question: what makes a person a migrant in the social-symbolic sense? This question has undoubtedly been answered many times (perhaps also in conflicting ways) by many theorists and researchers, but, even more importantly, has been experienced in different ways by millions of persons worldwide (according the World Migration Report of the International Organization for Migration, the number of international migrants in 2010 reached 214 million). Does citizenship make a person also a part of a nation? Does legal kinship make a person also symbolically part of a family's and community's genealogy? Transnational adoption of children is a site where, through the experiences and social identities of parents and children, we can observe, study and address the intersections and divisions which are tied to and created by kinship and national belonging. One of the central issues which comes to the fore is in what ways and to what extent are social identities and with that also social inclusion/exclusion, racism, nationalism etc. generated, reproduced and challenged. Put more simply, what is at play is how the divisions into 'us/them' are constructed and maintained in society and how they are questioned and reworked. Through the perspective of these challenging and multifaceted questions, too broad and complex to be answered in this short paper, I will discuss and present the narratives of parents in Slovenia who have adopted children from other countries. This paper will try to answer, through an analysis of these narratives, what the strategies of creating kinship and belonging of adoptive parents entail, what kinds of ideologies and matrixes the narratives on adoption reflect, and what are the implications of the anticipated social identities of their transnationally adopted children. These insights are crucial in building understandings about (social) identity formation in adopted children, migrant identities and adoption across national borders.

In 2009, I conducted seven interviews with parents from seven families with the experience of transnational adoption. Six families were two-parent families, and one family was a single-parent family; the interviews were conducted exclusively with women (which was not the objective, but was the agreement between the partners in the families which were being interviewed). At the time of the interview, the adopted children were between 11 months and 6.5 years old (6 children); one family was still in the adoption process. The interviews were from 70 to 180 minutes long, were taped, transcribed and anonymized. Despite the fact that I am quoting only excerpts in this paper, the analytical insights I want to present relate to the entire interview with each interviewee. The interview method used was a narrative interview, as a form of unstructured, in-depth interview with specific features; the respondents were informed that I am interested in their experience of adopting, but they could choose to stress those issues which they themselves found important inside this experience. I chose this method, which is based on sharing of 'power' in constructing the interview between interviewer and interviewee, because I wanted to leave an open space for the development of respondent-relevant topics (this was an explora-

cases when I am referring to or quoting authors who have used it in their research.

2 To my knowledge, until now, no one has done research on children adopted from other countries in Slovenia, exploring thoroughly the psychological, social and other implications of their adoptive status, in a longitudinal, standardised study. Researchers have interviewed adopted individuals and their parents (Zaviršek et al. 2008, Zaviršek et al. 2009) and such research is a source of understanding and exploring questions, issues and themes which require further investigation.

tive study), and also because the narrative interview works well with sensitive, contested themes. The sample available to me (I reached respondents with the help of the snowball method) is very small and unrepresentative,[3] but it can nevertheless offer insights into the experiences of adoptive parents and families.

FAMILIES AND NATIONS

Transnational adoption is a site of intersection of (among others, such as race, class, (dis)ability – health etc.) systems: family and nationality. An adopted child becomes part of a (new) family and a (new) nationality not through birth, but through legal instruments and choice (of the adoptive parents). This means that sites of transnational adoption can be used to consider the (re)construction of family and nation. Both systems are closely interlinked: as shown by Balibar (1988) a nation is imagined as a family; and on the other hand families are sites of national reproduction, and the family plays a key role in the process of creating individual and national identities. Luke and Luke also see positive sides of this – a potential in families that are formed across racial and ethnic divides, and also unequal borders of nation and wealth, to become "key sites where new forms of cultural, social class, and gender identity are reconstructed" (ibid. 1998, cited in Dorow 2006: 360). Still, it is questionable to what extent positive outcomes contributing to more equality in our society can be achieved in the current structural (economic, societal etc.) reality. The opportunities and promises of families, which carry their potential in the fact that they create the most intimate (but also legally recognized) relationships across barriers of blood ties (and all that those imply and convey), are not necessarily or automatically radical and revolutionary, as they may just as well be seen through the lens of the child as both an object and subject that is, as Eng (2003, cited in Dorow 2006: 363) claims, "performing the ideological labour of reproducing the white heterosexual nuclear family." As the flow of adopted children is from the East and South to the West and North, from 'third' countries to the USA, Europe and Australia, etc. the white heterosexual nuclear family, challenged by this arrival, is also functioning as a site of reproduction of specific cultures, nationalities and ideologies, through their daily practices and family histories. In discussing adoptions from China to the United States, Dorow (2006) demonstrates to what extent actually the racial stratifications are reproduced and how ongoing encounters with "intimate relations of difference push at the boundaries of white privilege and weak multiculturalism" (ibid: 357). She sees transnational adoption as a site for examining racialized relationships, for it forms intimate family units across nations, and it is actually through the medium of race that ideas about a cohesive nation, normative citizenship and desirable kinship formation are exchanged and mobilized (Dorow 2006).

Zerubavel (1997) identifies the family as the main mnemonic community, and listening to family members telling past experiences also "implicitly teaches one what is considered memorable and what one can actually forget" (ibid: 87). Remembering and identifying with collective past is also part of attaining and sustaining a required social identity. This is also how nations are characterized, by "the possession in common of a rich legacy of memories" (Renan 1990, cited in Misztal 2010: 28). Misztal, who analyses the importance of both forgetting and remembering in nation-building, identifies on the one hand the drive to preserve and share personal memory (which we can observe in the growth of blogs, family history websites etc.) and on the other side also for the construction of a global civil society, a cosmopolitan citizenship (ibid. 2010: 26): in the first case, the preservation of personal histories also means selective remembering; in the second, the selective remembering is a necessary tool in the project of

3 However, the number of families in Slovenia which have adopted transnationally is also not very high. Since 2005, 33 children have been adopted from abroad (11 from Russia, 8 from Macedonia, 5 from Ukraine, 3 from Serbia and Montenegro, 2 from Romania, 2 from Bosnia and Herzegovina, 1 from Croatia and 1 from the USA (data from the Civil Register, 2010).

a diversified and inclusive co-existence of histories. Nevertheless, this is not a risk-free endeavour; as Berking (2003: 257) points out, what is deliberately forgotten is always in danger of being remembered by third parties. Thus creating new genealogies through transnational adoptions also carries all these elements: in a precarious psychosocial situation, remembering proves to be both 'risky' but also necessary in the creation of an identity, which will most likely be ethnicized from the outside, with the person being 'reminded' of their otherness, of their history.

What are the roles of remembering and forgetting in the situation of a transnational adoption? As Eng (2003, cited in Dorow 2006: 376) claims, restoring a collective history is crucial in the process of social and psychic development of persons who have been transnationally adopted (envisaged also as creating an ethical multiculturalism). On the other hand, it is questionable to what extent this can be accepted in a particular society, and I refer here to the differentiation between formal and moral citizenship (terms coined by Schinkel), in the times when citizenship has become, as identified by Schinkel (2010: 270; also referring to Bjornson 2007 and Van Huis and De Regt 2005), a thoroughly cultural matter. Citizenship is no longer a consequence of a particular legal status, with its entitlements, but it foremost burdens the individual with "the duty of cultural allegiance and national loyalty." (Schinkel 2010: 279). Nevertheless, would even cultural allegiance and national loyalty be enough for a person to be completely accepted in a society in which s/he is considered a foreigner, or are these just false promises and demands, which are even more ready to exclude? Can and when do migrants really actually belong to the group of non-migrants?

DISCOURSES ABOUT AND PRACTICES OF TRANSNATIONAL ADOPTION

As one of the most important reasons for migration is, according to Hoffmann-Nowotny (1973, cited in Schuerkens 2005: 535), the uneven economic development of different regions of countries, might the reason for transnational adoptions also lie in global inequalities – the needs of children caught in war, poverty, welfare, reproductive politics etc., and on the other hand the desires of (often childless) parents, who have the means, resources and motivation to take care of a child?

However, children that are placed with (western) families through transnational adoption seem to be a much more welcomed and accepted group of migrants in comparison with adults (and their children) seeking asylum and betterment of their socio-economic situation, or even simply survival (which is not a direct consequence of the migration). Interestingly, Bell (2010) has critically examined the discourse of hospitality towards immigrants, as a complex and power-laden relationship between those 'coming' and those 'welcoming', a relationship "of unequal power in which the host is sovereign." (ibid.: 240). Bell refers to Derrida (2002, in ibid.), who speaks of hospitality as dependant on this sovereignty, enacted within the power to choose one's guests and also to limit the conditions of welcome.

The idea of choosing one's guests can be related to the critical approaches to the policies, ideologies and discourses attached to transnational adoptions. Dorow (2006) for example, in a critical analysis of transnational adoptions in the case of the US, has reflected on the racialized identities of 'desirable' children, where transnationally adopted children are portrayed as resilient and children, who can be adopted domestically in the US (usually children of colour) as 'crack babies' of welfare-supported mothers. Dorow supports her analysis by quoting Patton (2000, in Dorow 2006: 363) who has convincingly argued that the shift towards promoting transnational adoptions, favouring the consumptive choices of white heterosexual families while vilifying single black mothers, actually enacts a nation, which is both safely white and convincingly colour-blind. Moreover, as Ortiz and Briggs (2003 in Dorow 2006: 363) assert, such adoption policies are "consonant with the cultural erasure of race as an explicit category for the consideration of historically structured patterns in inequality." At the same

time, Dorow (2006: 364) argues that children involved in transnational adoption processes are constructed as victims of poor countries, wars, dysfunctional welfare systems and natural catastrophes, and their difference (and exoticism) makes them both "rescuable and valuable." (ibid.) As identified by Dubinsky, adoption agencies trade "on the vulnerability and cuteness of waiting children, always pictured as isolated, alone, devoid of parents, communities, nations, waiting for rescue" (2008: 340), while their own countries are imagined as 'unsuitable for children' (Noonan 2007, cited in ibid.: 341). Bergquist (2009) identifies a long tradition of 'rescuing' children (from the mid-19th century in the US, or the Australian measures resulting in the 'stolen generation'), removing them from unhealthy and uncivilized environments. In examining the responses to war, famine, natural disasters etc. from Vietnam in the mid 1970s to the more recent crisis in Sudan, Bergquist (2009: 642) also comments on actions, portrayed as heroic humanitarian efforts, such as e.g. operation 'Babylift',[4] transporting 2500-3000 children on flights to the USA, Canada, Europe and Australia in a campaign which lasted over three weeks (where it was later revealed that many of the children characterised as 'orphans' had living parents). How the background of such 'actions' can be analysed on many levels is also reflected in what Dorow (2006) found through the narratives of U.S. parents adopting from China: that these children (girls) are especially 'wanted', as they have been abandoned in their country of origin, thus have no known family ties and can be more easily 'remoulded' into new kin and nation. She quotes one adoption agency as advertising: "Adopting a Chinese child is very simple. There will be no birth mother knocking on your door. In China, it is a crime to abandon a child. If a birth mother changes her mind and comes back to a welfare home for the child, she will be put in prison." (ibid. 369). Through such statements a mentality is constructed in which Chinese birth mothers become a racialized medium for 'baggage-free' children (Dorow 2006), and the children become subjects which will be saved and objects who can easily be appropriated. Further critical views would align with international concerns about 'baby selling', 'kidnapping' and forced labour, trafficking of children and violations of their rights (see: Lammerant, Hofstetter 2007), as well as views that transnational adoption is a form of colonialism and cultural imperialism that treats children as economic commodities (Tessler et al. 1999, in Lee 2003: 714). And, in regard to being treated as economic commodities, the question of their 'quality' soon arises, again introducing a set of ideologies and discourses on transnational adoptions. For example, Lee refers to an (American) public opinion survey of 1416 people, of whom 47% believe that international adoptees have more medical and behavioural problems than domestically adopted children (2002, in Lee 2003: 714). The latter result is interesting in contrast with the general idea of the potential adoptive parents in the US who would rather adopt from Asia than domestically (because these children are abandoned due to state reproductive policies, and are thus much healthier than children of teenage drug addicts in the US – cf. Dorow 2006); still, it has to be noted that this survey reflects a general public opinion, and not the expectations and hopes invested in transnational adoption by adoptive parents. The public opinion, which is surely not exclusive to the US, reflects the imagination of people about the unknown, not 'ours', which is pathologized, because it is the 'Other'.[5]

4 Similarly also in the case of the 'evacuation' of 'orphans' from Darfur (L'Arche de Zoé in 2007), or recently Haiti etc.

5 Surely, this view is fuelled by some countries' decision to allow only un-healthy and thus un-wanted children to be adopted outside their countries, which on the other hand speaks of the other side of the equation: the policies of countries of origin, which are recently under growing scrutiny. Nevertheless, the focus of this paper is the policies and ethics of receiving countries.

NOTES FROM THE FIELD: EXPERIENCES OF TRANSNATIONAL ADOPTIONS IN SLOVENIA

In a very generalized way, a common belief about transnational adoptions could be identified as follows: receiving countries are engaged in humanitarian acts by 'saving' the 'needy' children from countries of origin which don't want them (because they are not healthy or, in some countries, female), can't afford to take care of them and are sometimes also ready to sell them. This view is also very interesting through the perspective of nationalities and nationalisms, because it gives an image on the one hand of nations that are ready to give up their members to other nations, and on the other hand of nations that are ready to accept them and give them their own 'nationality'. Nevertheless, there is no linear and 'problem-free' way between becoming a legal citizen and a legal member of a family within a certain national context and actually becoming an 'authentic' member of a nation. The situation has to be considered from at least two perspectives: internal and external.[6] The external would entail the attitude, relationships etc. towards a person who might have unfamiliar (that is not similar to the dominant ones) facial characteristics, skin or hair type etc.[7] and might consequently symbolically and socially not be accepted as being 'one of us'. The internal would entail how one feels in his/her situation, reflecting on the external attitudes, exploring one's own relationship with the birth origin, etc., i.e. thinking about one's nationality.

Let me use an example from an interview with a parent who adopted a Roma child (interview conducted by I. Rezar, see: Zaviršek et al. 2008).

> Well, as I said we did not have any particular problems, despite the fact that the child is much darker. If I was seen with him, they would ask: where is the mother from; if they saw him with his mum, they would ask: where is the father from? Some react in a very normal way, others don't – mostly strangers. One of such examples is: "this one is not yours!" but this might be just some kind of a saying, something that people say when they are aware that a child is biologically not from both of the parents. Well, to such comments we respond: "Yes, this one is ours!"

This excerpt reflects many important issues, but I would especially like to stress the following: as this parent has learned from experience, darker skin (skin that is darker than 'our' skin, actually) is a prerequisite for inconvenient questions, especially from strangers (who don't feel affiliated to this family, and who also don't see any obstacles, such as consideration of the feelings of those involved, to asking the

6 I use these terms because I don't attempt to speak about concepts such as individual / social identity. Identity formation is too complex to be presented here, where I only refer to different levels of experiencing one's otherness. Moreover, to speak of identity would entail studying the whole of a person's conception and expression of their individuality or group affiliations. Furthermore, the attempt to discuss the formation of the social identity of adopted persons would necessitate a (longitudinal) focused study with adopted children themselves, which has to date not been carried out in Slovenia.

7 I am aware of the essentialism and the difficulty to map out what is in this sense familiar and what not; but in my paper, the point of reference is Slovenian society, which is extremely (ethnically, not to mention racially) homogeneous; a society in which people are confident enough to say that they can 'recognize' foreigners by their physical appearance (even if they mostly do not know how to explain that). So, by this delineation I am referring to practices that are the consequence of such 'recognizing'. I understand the term 'ethnic' in this paper as one with which I mark the divide in our society between persons based on their perceived 'otherness', 'being different' (usually the trigger for that are their physical characteristics). The 'ethnicity' of the parents in these examples is the ethnicity of the dominant group in our society (I don't problematize this from the perspective of how they themselves perceive it, but from the way in which they are recognized as being part of the majority). Nevertheless, much of the literature on transnational adoption does not problematize the concept of ethnicity, and 'assigns' it uncritically to the adopted children whom they are speaking about.

questions that are firing their imagination). He also finds such reactions understandable (and probably as such also justifiable) to some extent, because we are all socialized into appreciating and promoting the superiority and importance of blood ties (cf. Zaviršek 2009). At the same time, as a parent who actually does not have biological ties to his child, he also feels that he has to at least symbolically win this battle for his son and himself. The experiences of these and other parents whose children are visibly physically (ethnically) different from their parents, thus actually show that legal kinship and national belonging through citizenship are not enough for the child to be recognized as 'really' being of his/her parents and of the dominant (ethnic) group, if the parents are part of it.

Let us now look at another example, on the other side of this very same coin, in an excerpt from an interview with a parent of a transnationally adopted child (conducted by the author, see: Zaviršek et al. 2009): "She looks very much like me. I don't know if this is why the people at the children's home matched us, but she really looks a lot like me."

This is a very short excerpt, but it is nevertheless indicative of a very common narrative: the desire to have children of one's own, the desire to protect the child (from being labelled as different, as not a "real" child of her/his parents) and the desire to protect oneself (from the stigma of not being able to reproduce and have biological children). Moreover, it also indicates the 'selective' choices of professionals involved in the process of adoption, who are, supposedly, also trying to 'protect' the child by 'matching' him or her with the adoptive parents.[8] This cautiousness speaks of the existing 'dangers': stigma on the basis of being recognized as not being blood-related and the consequent fear that the child will be less integrated, less included and less belonging to the family, the community and the nation.

The policies of countries of origin which give up children to adoption go as far as the following (interview with a parent adopting transnationally, conducted by the author, see: Zaviršek et al. 2009): "Actually, you can change everything. Name, date and place of birth. Completely new history."

The parents can choose to completely 'adapt' their adopted child to their own history, appropriating him or her to some extent to the records of their own lives, de-naming (as the name might carry ethnic markers) and re-naming her or him (as the new name might fit the new ethnic group and family history better, and would also carry the symbolic weight of the act of naming a child, just like a newborn).

Nevertheless, some parents recognize the importance of the child's own history (interview with a parent adopting transnationally, conducted by the author, see: Zaviršek et al. 2009):

> We would need support from a psychological perspective, which takes into the account the inter-ethnic and inter-racial view, for example how to make easier for the child the fact that in one day her whole world has changed – in the morning she was still in her institution, where she knew all the scents, tastes, people. In the evening she was in another country… I asked the people at the children's home to give me her blanket, so we could take it with us, so she would have something of her own.

This short reflection involves recognizing some of the very important elements of the child's (future) identity building and the stress associated with completely changing a known environment. The parent expresses the need for a structured, accessible and professional post-adoption support, missing in many, if not most of the countries and identifies the difficulties that are inherent in the process of adoption (both for the child and the parent), that is, not ignoring them as a consequence of parental desires and fantasies. Moreover, this parent recognizes the importance of creating space and building, gathering what is important and available for the child to have a chance to recreate his/her own history.

Such considerations actually take into account the human rights of the child. Lammerant and Hofstetter (2007) have written extensively on the rights and realities of adoptable children around the

8 A similar kind of selection is also present in fertility clinics (across Europe, but possibly also elsewhere), where the prospective mothers applying for donated sperm have only a limited range of donors available for their choice: this sample is selected by the professional workers to fit the physical characteristics of the woman.

world in their policy paper and report, in which they also investigate six European receiving countries and their policies, standards and practices in transnational adoption. "All countries, whether they are receiving or of origin, have the obligation to take proactive measures in order to guarantee each child the respect of the double subsidiarity" (ibid.: 4), with which they stress the children's right to respect for their family life. This includes searching for all possibilities and measures for the child to be able to remain with his/her family, then be adopted in her/his country, and thirdly, be adopted transnationally. More importantly, they also call for a just, transparent and ethical adoption process, as well as the post-adoption follow-up (Lammerant and Hofstetter 2006).

CONTESTED IDENTITIES

Adoption as a just and ethical process cannot happen without taking into account the myriad of interplaying structural and social contexts. Reduction of stress and negative psychological impacts lies on the one side in the hands of adoptive parents, but more importantly, also in the professional and social responses and support to this unique situation, that so tightly connects the private and the public, the intimate and the state. Looking at children that have been adopted as migrant persons, whose troubles don't end when they legally became a part of a family in the dominant society, might be helpful in envisaging the support they might need.

This is to say that adoption opens core psychological themes for everyone involved in this process – the birth parent(s), adoptive parent(s) and the child (such as: "loss and grief, rejection, guilt and shame, identity confusion, and relationship and intimacy challenges") and is seen as influencing the ways in which developmental tasks are approached and resolved (Silverstein and Kaplan, 1988 in: Zamostny et al. 2003: 660-661). In their review of research on adoption and adopted persons, Zamostny et al. (2003) also refer to authors reporting on various forms of psychological distress in adults who had been adopted (levels of depression, obsessive-compulsive symptoms, lower self-esteem, a higher level of employment problems in comparison to non-adopted adults). Nevertheless, it is extremely hard to measure or even identify the complex factors influencing such outcomes: not only the mere fact of being adopted, but the various structural and interpersonal issues have an impact on a person's development and identity formation. One of such factors is for example the already mentioned discrimination and stigma connected to non-biological ties of the newly created kinship (cf. Zaviršek 2009), racial and ethnic issues etc. Moreover, it is interesting, as Zamostny et al. (2003) also note, how persistent is research on adopted persons as a homogenous group, but at the same time also a failure to produce reliable understandings of the complex psychological processes involved in being adopted. In Sweden, Hjern, Lindblad and Vinnerljung (2002) conducted a vast study on the outcomes of transracial international adoptees (by using the Swedish national registry data for 11,320 adopted persons, 2343 Swedish-born siblings, 4006 immigrant children and a general population of 853,419 Swedish-born residents), from which it can be concluded that race and discrimination may have played a role in the overall adjustment of adopted persons (that is, similar to other immigrants, and not connected by the mere fact of being adopted). In Denmark, Laubjerg, Christensen and Petersson (2009) conducted a similar research, including 13,534 adopted persons (international and domestic) and 839,989 non-adopted persons; one of the conclusions of their study is that "openness and respect of the initial identity, family and cultural history are indicators for healthy identity creation and development during a lifetime" (ibid.: 611).

For this reason it is important to study and moreover develop support and education for parents, teachers and other significant persons in a child's environment that relates to how adopted persons negotiate their identities and sense of place in society. The formation of identity is a complex process fraught with many different aspects, such as uncertainties, conflicts, ambivalences etc. Jenkins (2000: 8) for example speaks about internal and external moments of the 'dialectic of identification', where how we identify ourselves and how others identify us are constantly interwoven in an ongoing interplay of

these processes. Jenkins (ibid.) also identifies two ideal models of identification: self or group identification (which is internally oriented) and categorization by others (externally oriented). According to some researchers, ethnic identity begins to form at around age six (Bernal et al. 1990; Cole 1992, in Huh and Reid 2000: 76-77). The study by Huh and Reid (2000) attempted to answer the question of what kind of ethnic identities are developed by children who have experienced transracial adoptions. They developed levels of ethnic identity formation, with the first stage identified as recognizing and rejecting differences, where children (mostly when they entered a new environment, i.e. kindergarten) would be faced with being of different ethnicity, but would not understand what that means, and would sometimes also reject being different (not wanting to continue contacts with the ethnic group of their origin for example). Huh and Reid explained the second level as the beginning of ethnic identification: sometimes also developed by attitudes towards the child's appearance or prescribed ethnicity (i.e. teasing at school), where the role of the parents is crucial in helping him/her to develop a positive attitude towards her/his ethnicity. At the age of 9-11, Huh and Reid identified acceptance of difference vs. ethnic dissonance, marked by either a positive attitude towards the difference and being proud of one's origins which one is learning about and getting to know; or by confusion regarding how to indicate one's own ethnicity, downplaying the difference, believing that one is seen by other people just as a human being, not ethically marked (which is usually supported by a low level of parents' interest in the child's ethnic history or emphasising their sameness). The next level the authors describe is integrating ethnic heritage and dominant culture, which comes with cognitive ability of abstract thinking (age 12-14); at this stage, young adults are able to articulate their attitude towards their ethnic origin, they learn about the stereotypes attached to it etc. All in all, in Huh and Reid's study (ibid.) it becomes clear that parental involvement in cultural learning and encouragement in interest in the ethnic background of children was crucial in their development of ethnic identity. The work of Huh and Reid does not seem to problematize ethnicity or the concept of ethnic identity itself, nevertheless, I present their research as an insight into the processes of othering.

Importantly, the works on othered, ethnicised identities that I have come across speak of the ethnicized identity as one that is also a minority identity, in contrast to the dominant or mainstream identity. The latter is not assigned any ethnic connotation, it is, therefore ethnicity-free. This common view of who "has" ethnicity and who doesn't is especially poignant in the case of transnationally adopted children, as usually their parents are ethnicity-free, and they themselves have to deal with being recognized by the environment (but not also necessarily by their parents) as having ethnicity, i.e., they are being 'othered' by their environment. According to Huh and Reid (2000), some parents reject the differences between themselves and their adopted child, seeing no colour, race or nationality in their children. Knowing who we are develops through a complex interplay between what has been told to us by the closest persons (parents, family, carers) in the earliest age, what has been told to us by our wider environment (school, community etc.), our own perceptions and reflections on this, simultaneously as we are also being socialized, that is, in a process in which we learn the values, attitudes and behaviour of a certain culture – skills and competences to function in this culture. Many transnationally adopted children find themselves in a conflicting situation: they are socialized or almost exclusively socialized into one culture, but not addressed or socially recognized solely as members of one culture, one ethnicity, one nationality. As Friedlander et al. (2000) and Lee (2003) have shown, children who can be racially differentiated from their (adoptive) parents, and are living in the community which is predominantly racially close to their parents and not themselves, my develop weaker ethnic identity as well as some confusion about their race and ethnicity. Transnationally adopted children sometimes struggle with 'the transracial adoption paradox' – a term coined by Lee (2003), who claims that these children experience being a racial minority but at the same time being identified as part of the dominant culture (by being part of a family which is part of the dominant group), which are two conflicting levels. How is it dealt with? Early studies on transracial adoption in the US found that adoptive parents would likely downplay the unique racial and ethnic experiences of their adopted children of different race (Lee 2003:

721), where the children would become culturally assimilated or acculturated into the majority culture (Gordon 1964, cited in Lee 2003: 721). What can probably be claimed to be one of the fairly realistic consequences of that was identified by adoptive parents in a relatively old study: they described their children as being apathetic, embarrassed or confused about their racial background (Chartrand 1987, cited in Huh and Reid 2000: 76). According to Lee (2003: 722), there is a lack of empirical research on how transracial adoptive parents teach children coping skills for dealing with racism and discrimination. Citing a number of authors, Lee (ibid.) lists the following: downplaying of racist comments, making derogatory comments about racists, and in fewer cases, taking a more active role in the community to promote social justice. Moreover, studies show a positive correlation between active promotion of their children's races and ethnicity and positive adjustment and racial/ethnic development (Yoon 2001; DeBerry et al. 1996, cited in Lee 2003: 722).

As research shows, children who are adopted at a very early age may experience very little difficulty acquiring cultural competence in the environment in which they live (cf. Friedlander et al. 2000 for the USA). Nevertheless, cultural competence is not what is in question here: what I want to bring to the foreground is the conflict arising precisely against a background of having such cultural competence, but at the same time being recognized as 'other', as 'from somewhere else'. Thus, not even formal citizenship or legal kinship ties to 'the majority', nor even cultural competence would suffice in preventing a person from being recognized as a 'foreigner'.

What is necessary then is to deal constructively with this situation, not trying to ignore it, but to focus on the best coping strategies and approaches in order to minimize identity conflicts and other psychological distress. For example, Thomas and Tessler (2007) speak of bicultural competence, which has been viewed as advantage for immigrants and other ethnic minorities (in American society), and in their study explore whether bicultural socialization is also an advantage and how it occurs with children in families formed through international and transracial adoption. In their longitudinal survey of parents who adopted children from China in the 1990s, they have tried to explore whether adoptive parents (who are European Americans, raised in the dominant culture), can provide bicultural socialization to their children, who are of an ethnic minority (even when their attitudes toward connecting their children with their birth culture are positive, but this is not quite enough). Thomas and Tessler (2007: 1191) refer to a number of authors who claim that most immigrant and minority families help to transmit their own ethnic identity as a part of bicultural socialization, where this is supported by sharing of race, physical similarities and cultural heritage (these are also strong identification points for the children). Nevertheless, it is less likely that the same happens in families where children have been transnationally adopted, because this involves parents transmitting ethnic identity which is not their own, against the background that they would probably rather transmit only their own. Very little research exists on the bicultural competence in intercultural transracial adopted children (Thomas and Tessler 2007; but see also: Lee 2003; Scroggs and Heitfield 2001). Thomas and Tessler (2007) define bicultural competence as consisting of three elements: knowledge of cultural values, ability to communicate, and a sense of being grounded in the culture (citing LaFramboise et al. 1993). Knowledge of cultural values may be acquired through being exposed to a certain community, learning through cultural artefacts, visits to the culture of origin, celebrating holidays, language learning etc.; communication ability can emerge through language lessons and similar, where language functions as a strong identification point; groundedness is constituted by durable social and support networks and the ability to establish and utilize them in both cultures (Thomas and Tessler 2007: 1193-1194). Bicultural socialization should enable persons with a history of being transnationally adopted to function in both cultures, the dominant one and the one of origin, and also to negotiate between them. Thomas and Tessler (2007) refer to various authors who claim the positive psychological outcomes for children whose parents engage in bicultural socialization (such as higher self-esteem, more positive racial and ethnic identities, higher educational achievements, higher level of adult adjustment). Nevertheless, it is important to remember that bicultural socialization must be supported in many ways: by professionals, educators and others,

as well as by challenging and changing the prevailing images and ideologies (connected to the nation, blood-ties etc.), which is the whole society's task.

CONCLUSION

In this paper, I have touched upon the issues of migration, identity formation and national belonging in the context of transnationally adopted children. Transnational adoption of children is a site where we can observe, study and address the intersections and divisions which are tied to and created by kinship and national belonging, through the experiences and ethnic identities of parents and children. One of the central issues which comes to the fore is in what ways and to what extent are ethnic identities and with that also social inclusion/exclusion, racism, nationalism etc. generated, reproduced and challenged. As I tried to show through the narratives, different expectations enter the site of the situation where a family adopts a child from abroad: expectations about sameness and belonging. These two are questioned by the environment, which is aware of some children's otherness, and fortified by the parents, who, based on their emotional ties, fight for the symbolic status of their children against the rule of the blood relatedness. More simply, what is at play is how the divisions into 'us/them' in society constructed and maintained and how they are questioned and reworked. The parents which I interviewed used various strategies to deal with the processes of the 'othering' of their children: from showing that they really do belong together to trying to think of the child's psychological needs connected to his/her history. These are symptoms of the 'othering' which occur through the dominant systems of kinship creation, where blood ties are seen as the carriers of family reproduction and reproduction of the same ethnicity/nation. Using examples from international research on transnational adoptions, I tried to present some of the many ideas stemming from studies on the outcomes from transnationally adopted children worldwide (but mostly US), as well as possible strategies and coping mechanisms that can equip these children and young people to manage their double-bindedness more successfully. Further research will be needed in exploring how children who have been transnationally adopted experience and deal with belonging to their families, but not also being 'the same' as them in the eyes of the environment. In Slovenia as well, research is needed to investigate how these children and young people are being 'othered', and what are the mechanisms of exclusion they experience and how they deal with them. The effects as well as the responsibilities of the environment in which these children, young people and adults live, should not be ignored. The fact that their belonging is limited is a consequence of their being excluded through social practices and attitudes. As Leinaweaver and Fonseca (2007) claim:

> The psychic and political space occupied by the sacral child is enormous. When children appeared on the international political stage in the early 20th century, our notions of children's rights moved from legal reforms (such as education) to the broader sense that all children had a right to a childhood. Today, nations are increasingly judged by their ability to provide for their citizens a universal (and tightly defined) 'childhood'. Symbolic children – whether they are transnationally adopted, labouring, soldiers or sex workers, to name a few globally significant examples – have come to represent an unequal world, with little consideration of the circumstances – created by adults – which produced them. (ibid.: 342)

What is most important in the adoption process is to focus on the best interest and rights of the children, establishing co-responsibility between the receiving countries and countries of origin, and even more importantly, to try to create an environment with opportunities, in which there is room for more than one-dimensional identities, without racism (whether individual or institutional) and exclusion.

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POVZETEK

MEDNARODNE POSVOJITVE IN MIGRACIJE: PRESEČIŠČA IN IZZIVI. PRIMER SLOVENIJE

Ana M. SOBOČAN

Prispevek se v kontekstu mednarodnih posvojitev otrok dotika tem migracije, identitete in narodne pripadnosti. Mednarodna posvojitev otrok je mesto, kjer skozi izkušnje in etnično identiteto staršev in otrok lahko opazujemo, preučujemo in se lotevamo presečišč in ločnic, s katerimi so povezane in jih ustvarjajo sorodstvene vezi in narodna pripadnost. Ena od osrednjih tematik v ospredju je, na kakšen način in do katere mere se ob tem ustvarjajo, reproducirajo in subvertirajo etnične identitete in s tem tudi družbena vključenost/izključenost, rasizem, nacionalizem, itd. Povedano preprosteje, gre za razumevanje, kako se ustvarja in vzdržuje ločevanje med »mi/oni« in kako se te ločnice prevprašujejo in preoblikujejo. Prispevek podpirajo intervjuji z osebami, ki so v Sloveniji posvojile otroka iz tujine: predstavljeni so izseki iz teh intervjujev in kratke razprave o njih. Tuje raziskave o mednarodnih posvojitvah predstavljajo nekatere od številnih idej, izhajajočih iz študij o položaju otrok, ki so bili v svetu (predvsem v ZDA) mednarodno posvojeni, pa tudi strategije in načine ravnanja, ki so lahko koristni za otroke in mlade pri soočanju s svojim dvojnim položajem (obenem »tujci« in »domači«). Učinkov kot tudi odgovornosti okolja, v katerem ti otroci in mladi živijo, se ne sme zanemariti; dejstvo, da je njihova »pripadnost« omejena, je posledica njihove izključenosti na podlagi družbenih praks in drže.

NARRATING BELONGING IN THE POST-YUGOSLAV CONTEXT

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ABSTRACT

Narrating Belonging in the Post-Yugoslav Context

The article questions the validity of the notion of multiple or shifting migrant identities. I argue that such usages of identity in some transnationalism and migration regime studies and in policymaking may serve to label migrants as different. What is ignored by such accounts is that belonging is not free-floating but is situated and contextually bounded, while making "positive" identitary claims may mask the actual structural inequalities. Alternative conceptualizations are explored in which I use the concept of narration and storytelling that better describes migrants' contextualized realities. The theoretical argument is coupled with empirical research in which various types of belonging in the post-Yugoslav context are explored using biographical interviews with migrants who live in Slovenia.

KEY WORDS: identity, hybrid identity, migrant belonging, narration, former Yugoslavia

IZVLEČEK

Naracije o pripadanju v postjugoslovanskem kontekstu

Članek prevprašuje veljavnost pojma multiplih ali hibridnih identitet, pri čemer je v ospredju argumentacija, da takšna raba v nekaterih študijah transnacionalizma in migracijskih režimov lahko poustvarja migrante kot druge in drugačne. Česar ta raba ne izpostavi, je, da pripadanja niso nekaj abstraknega, ampak so situirane in kontekstualizirane izkušnje, medtem ko stavljenje na »pozitivne« identitete lahko učinkuje kot maskiranje strukturnih neenakosti. Besedilo se posveča alternativnim konceptualizacijam z uporabo naracije in pripovedovanja zgodb, ki bolje kot identitete zaobjamejo kontekstualizirane realnosti migracij. Teoretska argumentacija je podkrepljena z rezultati empirične raziskave, kjer je v ospredju razprava o pripadanju v post-jugoslovanskem kontekstu na podlagi biografskih intervjujev z migrant v Sloveniji.

KLJUČNE BESEDE: identiteta, hibridna identitita, pripadanje migrantov, naracija, nekdanja Jugoslavija

INTRODUCTION

Basing my argument on critical analyses of identity as a concept, mainly taken from the literature of social theory (esp. Brubaker and Cooper 2000; Anthias 2002, 2001; Yuval-Davis 2006; Delanty et al. 2008), I take a sceptical view towards the value of various kinds of postmodernist or poststructuralist "fluid"

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