

BOOK REVIEWS

THE IDENTITY FOR INTERNATIONAL CHILDREN – ADOPTEES, LEFT HOME AND MIGRANTS' CHILDREN

Some reflections on the book: *Leinaweaver, Jessaca, B., Adoptive Migration. Raising Latinos in Spain*, Duke University Press, Durnham and London, 2013.

Review by Lia POP

The moving people from Latin America to Spain was the mass phenomenon at the beginning of the twenty first century, with many challenges and adverse effects as “*children left home*”. Many scholars dedicated studies to it.

Among them, a complex one is signed by *Jessaca Leinaweaver* and is issued on the title, ***Adoptive Migration. Raising Latinos in Spain (2013)***. The book is connecting the two types of foreigners in the Spanish society: the adopted children Peruvian children with the immigrants. They faced the same problems in the host society and in their own lives. The problems of matching in the new culture – as their own transformations the learning of the rules of the building process of the multicultural, multi-ethnic and society in Spain are not the single ones. They faced problems back home, and such kind of difficulties are the engines of their decision to resist.

The Peruvian children adopted in Spain and the Peruvian children left home by the immigrants mothers are the subjects of a research project conducted by the author, for approximately 10 years.

The novelty of the perspective proposed by the author, is to connect the two most prominent social phenomena of our times, migration with the international adoption and to explore its anthropological outcomes.

"Addressing the adoption and migration within the same analytical frame can lead to a richer understanding of belonging."¹

The book is geometrically structured in five chapters.

Introduction. Comparing Adoptions and Migrations

Waiting for Baby: Separating families or displaced children

The best interest of the Migrant's Children: Migrants and Adoptions

Mixed Marriages: Adopting the children of immigrants

Undomesticated Adoption: Post-adoptive overture

Solidarity: Becoming and Unbecoming Peruvian: Culture, Ethnicity and Race

Conclusions: What adoptive migrations might mean?

The theme -Theoretically, the theme of the book is about understanding international adoption. The author embraced the idea, that "the international adoption is a form migration"².

Practically, the text is a picture created to capture the reality of the Peruvians in Spain³, as persons internationally adopted - the ideal immigrant⁴- and as migrant persons. The eyes of the researcher are bearing the lens of an US ethnographer, extremely careful with the fieldwork, but also the ease of perceiving similarities of a scholar familiar with the literature of the phenomena.

The query of the study is about the identity of a person in a globalizing world, in which the birth context – familial, cultural and geographical – is dramatically changed; about its voluntary and involuntary disjuncture by its natural roots.

It is completely of interest to have in mind that only in Spain in the last 15 years, 40 000 of children, coming from 35 different countries have been adopted⁵ and 4 million arrived there as children of the immigrants⁶.

The resources of the books

The methods used are the contingent method in the fieldwork⁷ – a participatory observation in the intimate everyday life of the people with the similar roots and problems – which allows comparisons and the non-mediated ones

¹Leinaweaver, Jessaca, B., - **Adoptive Migration. Raising Latinos in Spain (2013)** p.149

²Leinaweaver, Jessaca, B., - **Op. cit.** p. 2.

³Leinaweaver, J, B., - **Adoptive Migration...**, p. 2.

⁴Leinaweaver, Jessaca, B., - **Op. Cit.**, p.11.and pp. 25-45.

⁵Leinaweaver, Jessaca, B., - **Op. Cit.**, p.15

⁶Leinaweaver, Jessaca, B., - **Op. Cit.**, p. 16

⁷ She conducted field researches in Peru 2000-2007 and in Spain in the communities with Latinos migrants and Roma people 2007-2010.

capture of the reality. She used, also, the kit of the methods of the interaction with the people involved in the phenomenon.

In the theoretical framework, the methods⁸ used are the large and updated documentations of the topics; the exploratory readings around the issues, together with a creative approach in interpretation. It is a readiness to cross the traditional schemes and to pay attention to the reality. Reading critically the established discourse on the problem, she saw the differences among the Spanish and Peruvians, in the scientific discourse... The author is also aware, that she could sound contradictory to many others with much more authority, but she insists: the international adoption is to be seen as a migration, because the adoptee is a migrant, expected and received, as the ideal migrant. The adoptee is the migrant more exposed to the un-expected and tardive rejections than a traditional migrant. In the adoptive environment, he/she encounters risks and challenges that he/she did not choose. That is why, the rebellions of the youngsters – *Latinos Bandas* - are to be seen as phenomena of the difficulties in adjusting – experienced by the natives and the new comers. From the perspective of an European reader, the discourse on the *Latinos Bandas*, does not seem to be totally unbiased.

The content

In the first chapter, *Waiting for Baby: Separating families or displaced children*, JessacaLeinaweaverexplored the Spanish parents' long way to an international adoption. She describes how the presumptive parents are invited to quit, in the official sessions of guiding through the labyrinth of the adoption.

They are largely instructed, on the legislative and social context of any country where the children come from. There they learn the virtue of patience for years, the preparative on parenthood, the best way to choose and the most rapid way to have the child. She described the centrality of the waiting experience. She illustrates the parenthood experience as a waiting experience with the concrete case of Fernanda, with her feelings, hopes, and expectations.

To accept to be directed to the list of the "Waiting Angels" in Peru, where are children over 5, siblings, children with special needs ... it is a short cut in the labyrinth.

The conclusion of the chapter is that an ideal migrant is in the minds of the parents, not a child with an identity, that is why " the ideal migrants are not

⁸ As they implicitly result from the text, because the researcher did not consider them as methods – as it usually happens when a fieldwork report is issued.

necessarily those who will adapt easily to a new context, but rather those to whom citizens of the receiving country can most easily adopt. ”⁹

In the second chapter, *The best interest of the Migrant’s Children: Migrants and Adoptions*, she focused on the dilemma what it is on the best interest of the child to be displaced – to be a migrant – or to be left behind. The migrant parents wait with anxiety for their children and, as well as, the same do the adoptive parents. They hope to shape an ideal migrant, as reborn person.

Chapter three is devoted to the mixed marriages and to their children with a fifty/fifty identity and with their “national substance” (a concept coined by Janet Carsten). The author also takes into account the condition of being registered in a different country than the country where the parents were born and hold the citizenship.

The adoption of the children of the migrants – documented and undocumented – is the subjects of chapter four. The conclusion of the author is that domestic adoption of migrant child is – a de facto – an international adoption, a short cut to an adoption.

Chapter five is on the adoptee children and their co-nationals the Peruvian immigrants, about the kinship among them.

Chapter six, is on the challenges that the adoptees have to encounter in Spain, the racial issue of visibility. The researcher quotes a mother who pointed out “We have to raise our children strong!” . The racial features are visible and the reactions to them are not nice all the times. The people could be mistreated, because of their appearances and they look for their roots and national substance, as did Lucas a Peruvian born in Spain, which, at 18, applied for its Peruvian citizenship¹⁰. Others are very little interested in their Peruvian identity, as Tina, who have a limited knowledge on the fact.

Conclusions

The conclusions are about the interpretations.

What the author assumes as outcomes of her researches, is that the adoptive migration is a social phenomenon, which refers to the belonging to. It is about the context where an adoptee and migrant lives and about its national and racial roots. The national order of the things is crucial in the Spanish identity, and in

⁹Leinaweaver, Jessaca, B., - *Op. Cit.*, p.46

¹⁰Leinaweaver, Jessaca, B., - *Op. Cit.*, p. 134

the Peruvian too. It is the national substance there, as well as, it seems to be everywhere.

On the style

The style of writing the book is appealing. It mixed the case studies' presentations as a pretext of exploring an issue. It adds in the inquiry a deep scientific framing and a documented exploration. It displays illustrative stories as arguments in an open debate. It is the debate on what the voluntary displacement means after the Global Economic Crisis.

Some readers could find the text captivating. The others could consider it, even, inspirational for the future inquiries.

The scientists could embrace the idea that the concept of national substance is fruitful.

The large appeal to the scientific literature – more than 350 of titles¹¹ listed – provides credits for the text.

The idea to use images is also to be applauded, except the children images. The children images are under the law protection.

Some critical points

According with the book perspective, the international adoptions and migrations of the uncontended people are both of them, social phenomena which cause, simultaneously, the national and cultural belongings' melting in the receiving place and the nuclear family kinships ruined at the sending regions.

What it is to be seen, in the book's perspective, is a focus on the social phenomena at the arrival point compared with a psychological/ a personal one, at the sending place. It is to doubt whether the comparison of a social phenomenon with a psychological outcomes is the best perspective in approaching the field.

Maybe, a more feasible view on the process, could appeal to a double view at sending and receiving site. From sociological point of view, in the sending countries, the process of sending appears as the established communities' social decapitation and destabilization (through the migration of the active part of the population). At the arrival points, reversely, it occurs the agglomerations of the isolated and scared human beings with different cultural backgrounds and different resources to fight for a position of personal development, in the countries of destination.

¹¹ The author is proving a large *Bibliography*. (pp. 177-192)

In personal - psychological terms, at home - it occurs a process of disruption – trauma - of a migrant and of its family coined as dependent parents or children left home on the ironic base of their wellbeing. At arrival point, personal problems blow up , for the natives and for the new comers. The natives see their cultural comfort ruined; the unexpected issues pressing to be solved; large demands for new contributions to integrate the new population and they see their personal security in danger, with no chance to be re-establish..., anymore. The natives look to the new comers as invaders. The new comers see the promise land and the advertised angels inhabiting them, as barricaded behind their cultures and expressing their hostility to the new competitors.

Both phenomena share the similar roots: poverty and no alternatives in the sending places and the ageing society in the arrival ones. For each part the exchange seems to be for the moment a win-win game. Will it continue to be win – win in the near future?

In the last 15 years, there are the Peruvians and others new comers together with the natives which are remaking Spain's face¹² for the new century. Their cooperation and conflicts are to provoke new social meditations, new policies and to inspire more researches.

Briefly, it is to see the book as a scientific approach on the construction and reconstruction of the personal identity in a globalized world, which involves international adoptions and migrations.

As consequence, much more globalization means more and more people in moving, guided by the logic of the material profit. Some of them – maybe the best equipped – win. Some others lose, sometimes because of the limited openness of the receivers. The implicit lesson could be: Let's move the equipped, and only them; let's move to the areas prepared to adopt and to adjust themselves.

¹²Leinaweaver, Jessaca, B., - *Op. Cit.*, p. 201