

MINORS' ADOPTION IN RUSSIA: INTERNACIONAL ADOPTION OR TRANSACTIONING CHILDREN?

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Abstract

The number of international adoptions is on the rise in Europe, in general, and in Spain, in particular. Russia is the second choice among adoptive families in Catalonia and Spain. Despite of this fact there is a lack of ethnographies devoted to it and the Russian context, like the contexts of many other "giving" countries, remains unknown. The common image of an adopted child is predominantly a Chinese girl (Marre, D. & Bestard, J., 2004). It seems that children adopted in Russia are "invisible" because of their European looks. Besides, the popularity of "Russian" children might sometimes be explained by the "racial" choice of adopted parents. With the rise of transnational adoption media discourse about transnational adoption in Russia is often framed by rhetoric of "losing genofund", as children in transnational adoption are frequently seen as objects of business and child abuse and commodification.

The international adoptions from Russia are becoming stricter every day and it seems that in Europe there is no clear understanding of these "sudden" changes. Nevertheless, these changes are not "sudden", but a consequence of several "violations" of Russian laws and commodification of children. There have been several cases of child abuse, child "killings", rape, forgery and children trafficking, associated with international adoptions. In some cases "foreign" adoptive parents and representatives of adoption agencies were involved. Because of limited space in this paper I would like to present findings, concerning "giving" country - Russia, and see how a child is circulated in Russia and abroad, how a child is seen in this "transaction", especially in national discourses about adoption. For this reason my work tends to present some discourses about international adoptions in Russia.

It seems that adopted children are often seen as "commodities" in international adoptions practices. The price is often articulated, and it seems that only rich parents can really "afford" children by means of assisted reproduction or international adoption. However, there is a persistent idea to hide the "market" terminology by introducing "gift" rhetoric and usage of salvationist discourse. Several researches successfully applied Mauss theory of "gift" to international adoption context (Modell, Fonseca, Leifsen). Along with adoptive parents discourses, framed by "market terminology", national discourses about children also use rhetoric of "selling national treasures" (Yngvesson, 2004). Nevertheless, in Russia there is a resistance to market terminology, as "imposed" by the West, and children in transnational adoption are frequently seen as objects of business and child abuse.

Already in 90s the market terms in Russian media were set for international adoptions. The title of the earliest article is "Deti na eksport" ("Children for export"), where Nikolaeva uses market terms "export", "import" and identifies a minimum price 4,000 dollars that cost adoption for the USA citizen (Nikolaeva, 1999). However, it seems she means by this price taking care of sick children, paying for their operations, because many of the adopted children might be in need of some medical operation and therefore, relinquished. In later debates chapters about international adoptions are sometimes called "Children for export" (Bonich, 2003, May 15). Russian officials seemed to be annoyed by the fact that adoption is becoming a "market" and "profitable business". Adoption "market" is often accompanied by the adjectives "disgusting", "the most unpleasant" market.

Fratti case (Italian-Russian woman, trafficking around 600 children) is presented very widely in Russian media mostly in Criminal sections of media with details of the court and an emphasis on "trafficking" of children. It is presented in media that Italians were quite reluctant about the case and even thought that Fratti had good intentions for orphaned children: "A glimpse into Ms Fratti's world has been given by La Repubblica, the Italian daily, which reported that she was an orphan who was adopted. She is quoted as saying that she knew "in her heart the best thing for abandoned children". (Traynor, 2001, February 24). Why then, is there no glory in this deed, why was Fratti not appreciated? I think that here Radin's theory about "contested commodities" might be applicable: when there is a price "glory" is gone. The price of 2500 for each child is mentioned and then a child is commodified, sold and Fratti is a trafficker. If Fratti would do it without any money value, then maybe her "charitable presents would be more appreciated. Money does contaminate an experience of international adoptions. In Russian media discourse children are presented as objects of illegal deeds.

The gift rhetoric might be seen as a "gift for life" for a few new Italians (born in Russia), for example, two stories are presented in the article "Hunting for orphans" two Russian orphans found their families in Italy. Despite these few "happy" examples, the majority of "children's fates" remain unknown and that is why there are a lot of fantasies around it, including "selling to rich paedophiles in Italy" or "selling for organs" The mystery of fates of children which cannot be traced from other countries and "organ-stealing rumor" is quite strong in Russian media, as in Brazilian context in works by Scheper-Hughes.

Thus, "market terminology" is seen as imposed by the West and therefore, international adoptions practice is seen as "contaminated" by market. It is claimed everywhere that it is precisely international adoptions that put a price on adoptions since Russian law on adoptions precisely forbid any profitable aims of adoptions and even prohibit taking any taxes for adoption. Therefore, adoption according to Russian law is "for free", which is often not known by adoptive parents from abroad. As Butrin argues "that Russian parents deprived of their rights to be the first in adoption of Russian born kids and have to wait in waiting lists, whether those who can buy –buy. However, adoption in Russia is "free of charge: the state doesn't sell parentless children; you only have to pay the necessary charges defined by the law" (Butrin, 2005, April 18). On the contrary, national stories about adoptions do not build around price, they try to tell a story of each child, their skills, characters, expectations, their biological parents, but not a price.