

ADOPTÉES AND MIGRANT'S ROUTES TO THE ROOTS. A COMPARISON

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Abstract

Introduction

Is the search for roots, the property of a set of persons? Are there people for whom this practice proves to be more justified than for others? These questions lead us to consider the search for roots in a comparative way that is to say to examine the paths of people who investigate the field of their familial and personal histories. In this paper, I would like to consider two categories of persons in particular: Adopted people on the one hand and migrants or descendants of migrants on the other. My aim is to examine what search of roots respectively means to these sets of persons, and to identify what hides behind their investigations. In the end, I hope that it will work then towards "anthropology of genealogical practices".

ANTHROPOLOGISTS AND GENEALOGY

Beyond ethnographical splits

Anthropologists first referred to genealogy as a means to collect kinship terminologies and familial narratives. Even though this process has undergone some criticism in last decades, genealogy has still been viewed as an investigation method above all. Things changed by the end of the 1970s when scientists realized that genealogy could not only be used as an instrument of research but as the subject of their studies, like Hareven did (1979). She placed the popularisation of genealogy at the core of her research, trying to understand the reason why so many Americans have recently been digging their roots. Following Hareven's study, similar enquiries have been launched in France (Segalen & Michelat 1981, Sagnes 1995), Ireland (Hood 2002, Nash 2002, Legrand 2006), Canada (Harvey 2005, Caron 2002). All these papers are devoted to the research for roots. Yet, most of them do not take adoptee' stories into accounts. All occurs indeed as if adoptees' search for origins has nothing to do with the genealogical fever which expands worldwide.

The whole question adoption have always been conferred a specific attention in the Humanities too. It has been referred to, to illustrate the diversity of familial groups and the shifting trends in parenthood patterns (Goody 1976, Fine 1998, Leblic 2006). Of major concerns too, the evolution of adoption's legal and ethic framework and tensions between social and biological kinship (Carsten 2000, Volkman ed. 2005). A striking point relies in the fact that adoptees' genealogical quest is often viewed as something without any equal: it is viewed as an identity process, while the search for roots is said to be a hobby in all other cases. Conversely, I consider the search for roots and origins to be explored globally in order to provide an anthropological analysis of genealogical practices and I suggest to put adoptees' investigation face to face with migrants ones.

Anthropology of genealogical activity

Genealogy is a kind of empirical knowledge that has to do with kinship, place and history. People say that it is about *roots* generally, that is to say about the ways

one's familial ties, one's sense of belonging have been drawn up through the ages. As regards *blood* and *land* rhetoric, genealogy is bi-oriented including the search of biological relationships and the search of a place people once call *home*. As a kind of knowledge, genealogy is something that could be inherited from the past or received from a third party. This knowledge is devoted to be passed on even though different facts as geographical and familial uprootedness could stand in the way of this transmission. Adoptees and migrants are often viewed as the main victims of these disturbs. The blood and the land these groups have been separated from made them archetypal representatives of so-called *roots detectives*. That is enough to suggest a more detailed comparison.

Genealogical also appears as something that one could complete or transform. Open to personal interpretations and to contestations, it is also prone to expertise valuations and institutional controls. Therefore I also suggest looking at the main authorities that regulate the production of genealogical data and knowledge, assuming that it might reveal cultural trends in the shaping and the passing of individual and collective memories. By doing so, I wish to emphasize the fact that genealogy does not only concern to the person who trace his family tree, his origin, but the whole community he belongs to. Hence my call for comparing what routes to the roots represent for countries or institutions which gave children to adoption or say people to migration.

Genealogy and routes to the roots cross-ethnographies

Let me provide some concrete examples about genealogy and routes to the roots projects.

A complex and sensitive search

Adoptee and migrant meet on the way of viewing genealogy, assimilating the tracing of roots to a *visceral* need. All occurs as if an internal part of their body urges them to identify parents, siblings, ancestors. Genealogy is also frequently described as a complex activity whereby every kind of documents or memories should be mobilised and criticized. Words such as *Jigsaw* or *puzzle* are of common used. Both adoptees and migrants share the idea genealogical knowledge is a *right*, something you should *fight* for.

Interconnectedness sounds as another key word among *roots-hunters* whom mostly claim a membership to adoptee societies or genealogical networks. These groups offer them a kind of platform for publicly claiming reforms (Modell 2002, Howell 2003, Volkman 2005). Acting as intermediaries between one people, his culture, his past, his birth-place, his relatives, these societies also provides a space whereby individuals could exchange some information about the ways to proceed in genealogy. No matter why you want to trace your family, it requires *patience*, *time* and *organization*, specific *knowledge* that is to say things that you could learn while joining people who have come through similar search before.

Origins Trails: Whose research, whose benefits?

Even though advantages people take in tracing their own roots are real – the improving of a so-called “self-knowledge”, the looking for social recognition and the claiming of civil rights or properties –, I consider restrictive to analyse genealogical issues according to these individuals only. It is noteworthy indeed that the tracing of one's origins do not only benefit the one who suffer dislocation.

In the case of adoption, for instance, adoptive parents could show a bigger expectation in the tracing of their child's roots than the child himself. Countries who

gave children to adoption or people to migration might also consider the search for roots as a suitable business (Kim in Volkman ed.; Legrand 2006). Besides economical profits, they could also expect changing the way they are viewed from the outside by fostering and sponsoring routes to the roots projects.

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