

An intimate monograph on post-migratory childcare in Central Europe: New perspectives on mutual dependency in care-giving. Farnham: Ashgate, 2015. ISBN: 9781472456663, 158 pages

There are several matters that make Czech sociologist Adéla Souralová's in-depth study on post-migratory care arrangements in the Czech Republic a unique and remarkable venture. The first and a very important one is her choice of the topic, a previously unconsidered, widespread yet somewhat invisible phenomenon related to Vietnamese migration to East-Central Europe. As it happens, there are generations of Vietnamese migrant children in the Czech Republic who have been raised by Czech women living in the Czech women's homes. This is a rather unique arrangement in the global world of care, as it is Vietnamese migrant entrepreneurs who hire Czech women to care for their children while they work in the same country, quite often in their children's vicinity. The research design that the author applied through the course of her work, her doctoral project in fact, also makes the final outcome exemplary. She studied the triadic relationships between care work demander immigrant mothers, Czech carers she usually refers to as nannies or grandmas, and migrant children. Using purposeful sampling between 2010 and 2012 she handpicked her qualitative data meticulously, interviewing altogether fifty persons involved in these relationships. Finally and very importantly, Adéla's research had a special focus on migrant youth's so far understudied perspectives on childcare arrangements, providing rich insight into experiences of growing up transnationally.

"New Perspectives on Mutual Dependency in Care Giving" is a substantial contribution to the growing body of scholarly literature on the intimate aspects of international migration in East, Southeast and Central Europe. The project Adéla Souralová's monograph is based upon represented one of the earliest attempts to show and understand how migration impacted family life and childcare regimes, too, in the East Central European region.

The seven chapters of the hard cover volume are followed by appended tables with information about the interviewees; a copulent list of references; and an index. Throughout the subsequent chapters Adéla seeks to find the answers to a number of questions, such as why many Vietnamese migrant mothers opt for the delegation of childcare; why it is worth for Czech women to become full time carers of a small migrant child in their own homes; and in what way the specific relationship formed between carers and children serve migrants' integration in local society.

Highlighting the intimate empirical foundation of the book, the first six chapters are titled by quotes from interviewees, and the topics of these chapters are introduced by edited excerpts of the author's many contributors from the field. Chapter one presents the care regime of Vietnamese children in the Czech Republic and outlines the plan of the book. It is here where the author introduces the notion of mutual dependency, a concept borrowed from international migration related care literature and taken as a tool to interpret what happens in the triadic relationships between migrant parents, their children, and local carers. The author also uses the conceptual framework of modern anthropological theory of kinship relying on a performative definition of kinship (as opposed to a biogenetic one) and adopting Signe Howell's concept of 'kinning' to describe the bonding process between Czech carers and Vietnamese children. The introduction explains the research design, its specificities, and the methodology applied.

Chapter two explores why Vietnamese migrant parents delegate the care of their children to local women. This part makes readers familiar with the general Vietnamese migrant context in the Czech Republic. We learn that it was as early as 1956 that the first international agreement enabled a couple of hundred war victims to enter and settle there. Subsequent phases of bilateral cooperation allowed several hundred Vietnamese students to enrol in Czech universities by the 1960s, mostly in technical programmes. In the 1970s further agreements of mutual assistance followed, as a result of which thirty thousand Vietnamese students, apprentices and young workers were present in the early 1980s, only two thirds of whom returned to Vietnam. So when entrepreneurial possibilities opened up in the region after 1990, it became an attractive destination for Vietnamese economic migrants, some of whom were returnees with pre-existent social networks. These new migratory waves made the sixty thousand Vietnamese migrants the third largest immigrant group in the Czech Republic after Slovaks and Ukrainians.

The author claims that it is the economic migrants' 'occupational position that requires quantitative changes in work life and leads to its intensification at the expense of private life' (p.27.) Her interviews with mothers reveal that it is common in Vietnam to return to work a couple of months after giving birth while, at the same time, the mothers' choice of Czech carers is also defined by their intention to reproduce kinship networks in the host country and to fulfil the ideal of relatives in family life (p.15.). Adéla's work demonstrates clearly how Vietnamese parenting strategies and childcare models clash with Western 'myths of motherhood' (p.31.) and the ideology of 'intensive mothering' (p.31.). Observations on the

culture specific, non-universal conceptions related to motherhood and good care are very important contributions of her work and they concord with Leslie K. Wang's findings of another case of encounter between persons with Western as opposed to East Asian notions of good care and motherhood (Wang 2016). Adéla shows that Vietnamese mothers' parenting strategy is defined by the intention to provide for a better future for their children, a goal they hope to realise delegating child care and working more in their businesses.

Chapter three focuses on the motivation of Czech women to get involved in the caring relationships and provides rich insights into these personal processes. The author made note of fact that the overwhelming majority of carers in her sample were dependent on the welfare state economically when they became carers. But she developed her line of thought further and argued that the reason lied in these Czech women's subjective motivations that can be understood through what Adéla called their own 'caring biographies' constructed according to local gender norms.

Mothers', children's and carers' reflections on the delegation of childcare, their positions and roles in the care relationship are presented and discussed in the fourth chapter. Vietnamese migrants' mothering strategies (doing post-migratory mothering on the labour market; work more to give children a better life), and Czech carers' perceptions of motherhood and good child care (giving affection, being in physical contact, spending time together, feeling morally superior for providing 'better care') are analysed and contrasted. The third part of this chapter shows paid delegated childcare from children's perspective. It scrutinizes how Vietnamese youth perceive delegated care and how this care arrangement impacts inter-generational family ties and personal identities.

Interconnecting chapters five and six address the topic of kinship from two different perspectives. Chapter five traces the role of child care in creating emotional bonds, and the role these emotions play in the kinning process between Vietnamese migrant children and their Czech carers turned gradually into their Czech grandmothers. Adéla demonstrates convincingly that emotions born in the care relationship are constitutive of the bonds carers develop with migrant children and that they are vital to the understanding of how care relationships affect second generation Vietnamese migrants living in the Czech Republic. Chapter six, on the other hand, puts attitudes towards Vietnamese grandmothers and 'Grandmotherland' in the focus and analyses how being part of a family genealogy influences notions of belonging and bonds with the country of origin.

In chapter seven the author concludes that care giving is ‘a formative activity that establishes ties between mothers, nannies, and children whose subjectivities are mutually shaped in the daily practice of care-giving’ (p.139.) The ties between mothers and carers are based on the employer-employee relation where different conceptions of good motherhood clash regularly. Mothers are biologically connected to their children yet their motherhood is enacted through their providing for the child. Local carers and migrant children develop mutual bonds of emotions that gradually turn into enacted kinship ties of grandchildren and grandmothers. This migrant child care monograph is rich in qualitative data and the author proceeds discussing her empirical findings integrated into international care literature throughout the text. There is a lot to appreciate and think further about Adéla’s book, and finally I would like to comment on a few of the issues in it.

The first one is the fundamental question why this phenomenon is occurring. Why do Vietnamese parents delegate child care this way? And why do Czech women actively participate in it? Why does this care regime operate in the Czech Republic and why not in the US, or in Western Europe in countries that also house Vietnamese migrant populations? Why, on the other hand, do Chinese and Vietnamese migrant entrepreneurs delegate childcare in an almost identical way in Hungary (see Kovács 2018)? As it has already been pointed out, Adéla gives her readers much insight into considerations over the hiring process on the nannies’ side as well as on the migrant families’ side. She makes reference to Nazli Kibrias’s study on Vietnamese families in the US emphasizing that migrants’ decisions and strategies are influenced and explained by their ‘cultural baggage’, their persistent attempt to reconstruct family life after their arrival. She has convincingly shown that the hiring decision is an inherent form of family resettlement (p. 15), nevertheless, this only may not be held responsible for it. The setup in which these care relations occur seems inseparable from the socio-economic historical context of formerly socialist East Central Europe and the entrepreneurial model Vietnamese and Chinese male as well female migrant entrepreneurs have developed there. As far as carers are concerned, their involvement and subjective motivations to become nannies are explained individual biographies in much detail. The economic motifs are presented but they are given a somewhat secondary role, and one may wonder whether carers build these narratives of care-giving also in order to create a positive image of themselves? The cases presented in the volume definitely represent the high end, successful cases of delegated child care where emotional bonding and subsequent kinning between carer and child occurred. But one may wonder if there are cases that do not follow the same path at all?

The methodology section in the introductory chapter makes brief references to the challenges Adéla had to face while trying to collect sensitive personal information from first generation Vietnamese migrant entrepreneur mothers with limited Czech language skills during her fieldwork. Vietnamese (and Chinese, see Kovács 2018) entrepreneurs' workload and socio-culturally conditioned norms of communicating personal details stand in the way to obtain qualitative data during fieldwork, often with using the help of an interpreter. The books' data coming from the second generation seems to be richer in detail. According to Appendix 1. Adéla interviewed children and young adults aged 16-25 who told her about their delegated care experiences from the past. On the other hand, she started two of her chapters (two and three) with quotes from an eight-year old Vietnamese child who does not figure among her interviewees. She obtained much data during her years of fieldwork and probably met young Vietnamese children and it would add to the book if it referred to it all. The author states that she intentionally did not include fathers in her research as it was relations between women she wanted to trace. On the one hand, I think fathers' views would have given more dimension to the Vietnamese migrant entrepreneur families' hiring decisions, but on the other hand and based on a parallel research among Chinese entrepreneurs in Hungary, it would have been even more challenging to convince them to participate in the research project.

Parenting norms and strategies have changed rapidly during past decades in Asian countries and differ to a great degree not only according geographical region and settlement type but also according parents' class and level of education. Changing Chinese parenting styles offer a good example for this. When talking about Vietnamese migrant women's mothering, it would have been good to see whether and how their strategies vary according to their level of education, class, and the type of the settlement they come from.

'New Perspectives of Mutual Dependency in Care-Giving' is an important contribution to several areas of migration scholarship. Adéla demonstrates excellently how care giving may establish ties of intimacy and emotionality and how it may lead to a kinning process. With its focus on migrant children's experiences of delegated childcare in the host country it discusses transnational migrant family life from an innovative perspective. The reversed case of migrant care service buyers and local service providers opens up alternative ways of thinking about delegated child care. It is also one of the few rich, in-depth studies of (South) East Asian immigration and migrants' integration in Central Europe.

References

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