

— BOOK REVIEWS —

Adela Souralova (2015). *New Perspectives on Mutual Dependency in Care-Giving*. Farnham: Ashgate, 158 pp.

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 relatively 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 while in fact living in these Czech women's homes. This is a rather unique arrangement in the global world of care, as it is Vietnamese migrant entrepreneurs who are hiring 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 throughout 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. Between 2010 and 2012, she used purposeful sampling to meticulously handpick her qualitative data, interviewing a total of fifty persons involved in these relationships. Finally and very importantly, Souralová's research had a special focus on the perspectives of migrant youths on childcare arrangements – a subject that has received little academic attention so far – and thus provides 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 upon which Adéla

Souralová's monograph is based represents one of the earliest attempts to show and understand how migration has also impacted family life and childcare regimes in the East Central European region.

The seven chapters of the hardcover volume are followed by a collection of tables containing information about the interviewees, an extensive list of references, and an index. Throughout the chapters Souralová seeks the answers to a number of questions, such as why many Vietnamese migrant mothers opt for the delegation of childcare; why it is worthwhile for Czech women to become full-time carers of a young migrant child in their own homes; and in what way the specific relationship that formed between carers and children serves migrants' integration in local society.

Highlighting the intimate empirical foundation of the book, the first six chapters are titled with quotes from interviewees, and the topics of these chapters are introduced by excerpts taken from the texts of the interviews with the contributors from the field. Chapter one presents the care regime of Vietnamese children in the Czech Republic and outlines the structure of the book. It is in this chapter that the author introduces the notion of mutual dependency, a concept borrowed from care literature related to international migration which she used 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 kinship theory relying on a performative definition of kinship (as opposed to a biogenetic one) and adopting Signe Howell's concept of 'kinning' to describe to 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 familiarises readers with the general Vietnamese migrant context in the Czech Republic. We learn

that it was as early as 1956 that the first international agreement allowed a couple of hundred war victims to enter the country and settle there. Subsequent phases of bilateral cooperation allowed several hundred Vietnamese students to enrol in Czech universities starting in the 1960s, mostly in technical programmes. Further agreements of mutual assistance followed in the 1970s, as a result of which thirty thousand Vietnamese students, apprentices and young workers were present in the country in the early 1980s, only two thirds of whom returned to Vietnam. When entrepreneurial possibilities opened up in the region after 1990, it therefore became an attractive destination for Vietnamese economic migrants, some of whom were returnees with pre-existent social networks. With these new migratory waves, the Vietnamese migrant population grew to sixty thousand, becoming 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; furthermore, the mothers' choice to employ Czech carers is also defined by their intention to reproduce their kinship networks in the host country and to fulfil their socioculturally shaped ideal of relatives in family life (p. 15). Souralová's work clearly demonstrates how Vietnamese parenting strategies and childcare models clash with Western 'myths of motherhood' (p. 31) and the ideology of 'intensive mothering' (p. 31). The author's observations on the culture-specific, non-universal perspectives of Vietnamese immigrants with regard to motherhood and good care are very important contributions to the field, and concord with Leslie K. Wang's findings in another case involving a confrontation of Western and East Asian notions of good care and motherhood (Wang 2016). Souralová shows that Vietnamese mothers' parenting strategy is defined by the intention to provide a better future for their children, a goal they

hope to realise by delegating the care of their children and spending more time working.

Chapter three focuses on the motivations of Czech women who choose to enter into such care relationships, and provides rich insights into these personal processes. The author notes that the overwhelming majority of carers in her sample were financially dependent on the welfare state at the time when they became carers. However, upon further reflection she argues that the reason in fact lies in the subjective motivation of these Czech women, which can be understood through what she calls their 'caring biographies', which are constructed according to local gender norms.

The fourth chapter presents and discusses mothers', children's and carers' reflections on the delegation of childcare, their positions and roles in the care relationship. The mothering strategies of Vietnamese migrants (fulfilling one's duties as a mother through labour market activity; i.e. working harder to give one's children a better life), and Czech carers' perceptions of motherhood (giving affection, physical contact, spending time together) and good child care (a tendency towards feeling morally superior for providing 'better care') are analysed and contrasted. After these first two sections, the third part of chapter four presents the children's perspective on paid delegated childcare. It examines how Vietnamese youths perceive delegated care and how this care arrangement impacts intergenerational family ties and personal identities.

Chapters five and six form something of a dyad, addressing the topic of kinship from two different perspectives. Chapter five considers 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, who over time, usually after their return to their parents', become their Czech grandmothers. Souralová 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 understanding how care relationships affect second-generation Vietnamese migrants living in the Czech Republic. Chapter six, on the other hand, focuses on children's attitudes towards Vietnamese grandmothers and 'Grandmotherland' and analyses how being part of a 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, and different conceptions of good motherhood regularly clash. Mothers are biologically connected to their children, but the Vietnamese mothers enact their motherhood by providing for their children. Local carers and migrant children develop mutual emotional bonds that gradually grow into ties resembling enacted kinship ties of grandchildren and grandmothers.

This migrant child care monograph is rich in qualitative data, and the author discusses her empirical findings in relation to international care literature throughout the text. There is much to appreciate and reflect on in Souralová's book, and I would like to comment on a few of the issues it describes.

To begin with, there is the fundamental question as to why this phenomenon is occurring. Why do Vietnamese parents delegate child care in this manner? And why do Czech women actively participate in the phenomenon? Why does this care regime operate in the Czech Republic and but not in the US or in other Western European countries with Vietnamese migrant populations? And why do Chinese and Vietnamese migrant entrepreneurs delegate childcare in an almost identical way in Hungary (see Kovács 2018)? As has already been pointed out, Souralová offers her readers much insight into considerations involved in the hiring process, both on the side of the nannies and of the migrant families. She makes reference to Nazli Kibrias's study on Vietnamese families in the US and emphasises that migrants' decisions and strategies are influenced and explained by their 'cultural baggage', i.e. their persistent attempts to reconstruct family life, the way it used to

be in the home country, after their arrival. She has convincingly shown that the hiring decision is an inherent form of family resettlement (p. 15); nevertheless, this cannot be considered to be the only cause. The situations in which these care relations occur seem inseparable from the socio-economic historical context of ex-socialist East Central Europe and the entrepreneurial model that Vietnamese and Chinese migrant entrepreneurs, both male and female, have developed there. As regards the carers, their involvement and subjective motivations to become nannies are explained by their individual biographies in much detail. The economic motives are presented, but they are given a somewhat secondary role by the author, and one may wonder whether carers build these narratives of care-giving, or 'caring biographies', in order to, among others, create a positive image of themselves. The cases presented in the volume without a doubt represent successful cases of delegated child care where emotional bonding and subsequent kinning between carer and child occurred. However, one may wonder: are there cases that do not follow the same path at all?

The methodology section in Souralová's introductory chapter makes brief references to the challenges Souralová faced in her attempt to collect sensitive personal information from first-generation Vietnamese migrant entrepreneur mothers with limited Czech language skills during her fieldwork. Even when one enlists the help of an interpreter, the workload of Vietnamese (and Chinese; see Kovács 2018) entrepreneurs and their socio-culturally conditioned norms for the communication of personal information hamper the obtainment of qualitative data during fieldwork. The data in the book that was obtained from second-generation migrants appears to be richer in detail. According to Appendix 1, Souralová interviewed children and young adults aged 16–25 who told her about their delegated care experiences from the past. On the other hand, two of the chapters (two and three) open with quotes from an eight-year old Vietnamese child who does not figure among her interviewees. Souralová collected a great deal of data in her years of fieldwork, during which she met young Vietnamese children (including the eight-year-old interviewee cited by her) and her methodology section

could have referred to how young children's data was used in the book. The author states that she intentionally did not include fathers in her research, as it was relations between carers and mothers that she wanted to trace. On the one hand, I think the inclusion of the fathers' views would have given more dimension to the Vietnamese migrant entrepreneur families' hiring decisions, but on the other hand – based on a parallel research among Chinese entrepreneurs in Hungary – convincing the fathers to participate in the research project would have been even more difficult.

Parenting norms and strategies have changed rapidly over the past decades in Asian countries, and differ significantly, not only according to geographical region and settlement type, but according to parents' social class and level of education as well. Changes that are happening in Chinese parenting styles also vary according to these factors. It would have been interesting to see, in the discussion of the mothering approaches of Vietnamese migrant women, whether and how their strategies vary according to their level of education, social class, and the type of settlement they were raised in.

New Perspectives on Mutual Dependency in Care-Giving represents an important contribution to several areas of migration scholarship. Souralová demonstrates excellently how care-giving can 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. These unique reversed cases, where the care service buyers are migrants and the service providers are locals, open 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 the integration of migrants in Central Europe.

Nóra Kovács

Hungarian Academy of Sciences, Hungary

References

- Kovács N. (2018). Transnational Migrant Entrepreneurs' Childcare Practices from the Carers' Perspective: Chinese Children in Hungarian Homes, in: V. Ducu, M. Nedelcu, A. Telegdi-Csetri (eds), *Childhood and Parenting in Transnational Settings*, pp. 25–42. Springer.
- Wang L. K. (2016). *Outsourced Children. Orphanage Care and Adoption in Globalizing China*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.