

Comptes rendus / Book Reviews 201

le début du XIX^e, le mélange de populations québécoise (bas-canadienne) et acadienne annonçait déjà la formation d'un peuple aux accents, aux coutumes et aux mœurs différents de ceux des autres francophones des Maritimes, beaucoup moins exposés aux mêmes influences découlant de cette cohabitation limitrophe à deux autres frontières.

Nicolas Landry

Université de Moncton, Campus de Shippagan

DUBINSKY, Karen – *Babies Without Borders: Adoption and Migration Across the Americas*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2010. Pp. 199.

Although very few people are themselves involved in adoption—no more than an estimated 4% in the U.S.—adoption regularly hits the newspapers and stirs national passions, and has for more than a century. Why this is so and how the adopted child has become a symbolic child around the world since World War II is the subject of Karen Dubinsky's excellent book, *Babies Without Borders: Adoption and Migration Across the Americas*. This is a great book that historians of foreign relations, family, the United States, Canada, and Latin America, along with those interested in adoption, should read and assign. Others before her have investigated institutions, secrecy, and legal statutes; Dubinsky focuses on the way that adoption works symbolically and politically in the world. Understanding adoption as either good or evil, as either an act of rescue or kidnapping, she argues, is too simple and unhelpful to adopted children and especially to birthparents who become invisible. *Babies Without Borders* also analyzes the workings of race and racism in adoption and employs a transnational perspective to illuminate the global circulation of babies and varying interpretations of adoption and racial identification. Through a combined analysis of transnational practices and very local and intimate events, Dubinsky argues that child adoptions and the narratives told about these processes are not incidental, “but centra[l] to state building projects (55).”

Dubinsky analyzes the adoptions that receive the most attention and raise controversy—international adoptions (generally from the global South or East to the West) and transracial adoptions (from black, brown, and indigenous families to white parents). The children in these controversies are always silent and serve as a symbol for other national controversies, battles, and traumas. Because children cannot speak for themselves, adoption narratives portray them as innocents who need protection. Cross-cultural and transracial adoptions are either understood as rescue by well-off white Americans and Canadians who adopt babies, or as kidnapping by communities of color and the nations who “give” children to wealthier nations and parents.

The book begins with “the national child” and the 1960 rescue of Cuban children in “Operation Peter Pan.” Cuban parents sent children to the United States in order to save them from Castro's revolution and their fear that children would be killed, sent to Russia, or taken away from their parents. Under the Catholic Church's direction, foster families eagerly took the children into their homes as refugees from communism. In reality, however, the children were not orphans, but rather left the island openly; many went to barracks, not homes, where they stayed for months until a placement could be found;

and as older, poorer, and blacker children arrived, foster families were less welcoming. Furthermore, the CIA funded this project and spread misinformation about Castro. Only it was not Castro, but Peter Pan, who separated parents and children. Cuba's later monuments to the Peter Pan children reveal the nation's portrayal of the symbolic child. While Americans saw themselves as saving children from communism; the newly-formed Cuba inspired its people with the anti-imperialist narrative that the U.S. stole not only their resources and money, but also their children.

Those familiar with the 1972 National Association of Black Social Workers' condemnation of adoption of black children by white parents in the U.S. may be surprised by black Canadians' support for the same kind of transracial adoption twenty years earlier. Transracial adoption began in 1950s Montreal as the Children's Centre needed more adoptive families. The Centre began placing children across racial boundaries with parents who "could take some chances" and would be willing to adopt children with disabilities or "with coloured blood (62)." White families joined the black community in various efforts and learned about racism. These "hybrid" children, as Dubinsky calls them, carried heavy cultural and political weight for they personified integration, racial peace, and the goodness of white Canadians. The success of the small number of transracial adoptions and the frequent publicity these adoptions received in the media contributed to Canada's self-congratulatory attitude about its positive racial relationships compared to its southern neighbour and allowed white Canadians to view Canada as a nation free of racial inequality.

Dubinsky raises questions about another hybrid baby and Canadians' self-perception. In this case, it is "the Sixties Scoop" of Aboriginal children by white adoptive parents that is universally condemned as colonialist and genocidal. Investigating the case records, Dubinsky finds that white parents and social workers tended to expect these hybrid children to "fit in" with and "adjust ... to white standards (91)" and tended to ignore racial differences; in contrast white adoptive parents of black babies in Montreal made adjustments themselves and taught black pride to their children. Still, the records reveal birthparents' sad stories, voluntary relinquishment in a quarter of the cases, and poverty, not genocide. Widespread acceptance of the kidnap narrative of genocide has blinded Canadians to the welfare system, poverty, and racism that still underpin the removal of Native children from their families, cultures, and communities.

The final symbolic child that Dubinsky identifies is "the missing child." The country that "sends" the most children to the United States and Canada for adoption is Guatemala and Guatemala collectively cries for its missing children. Reports of baby-stealing, baby-selling, and baby-killing periodically arise and frighten communities in Guatemala, sometimes resulting in attacks on or murder of suspected North Americans. Dubinsky looks to Guatemalan history to understand the nation's fear, pain, and panic about missing children. Since the 1954 coup, she explains, the country has been chaotic and many have disappeared. Among the thousands missing and dead are children. The increasing exodus of children feeds into a political history of missing children, exploitation, and interference from Northern neighbours. With great sensitivity, Dubinsky draws a picture of Guatemalan lives, especially birthmothers, and their contrast with wealthy North Americans. Adopted children from Guatemala are not parentless. Most are children of poor parents who cannot pay for the essentials of food, housing,

clothing, and schooling. Some mothers had been raped, abandoned, or abused by the fathers. Nations with social welfare systems, such as in Canada or Western Europe, that provide for the basic needs of all mothers and children have fewer poor mothers placing infants into adoption than in Guatemala or the US. Yet the largest population of “adoptable” or “waiting” children who may spend years in foster care in Canada and the U.S. alike, come from the poorest people of color: Native children in Canada, African Americans in the U.S. These truths underscore the problem of looking at adoption through sentimental or tragic lenses—they ignore and leave standing the racism, sexism, and poverty that produce adoption.

Finally, Dubinsky foregrounds her personal story as a white woman who adopted a brown child and uses it to engage the popular question of rescue or kidnapping. In so doing, she embraces the realities of the complexity and pain of adoption while showing how she and her child have been made to embody national myths of kidnapping and rescue. Some historians may view the inclusion of the author’s personal story in a carefully researched historical study as problematic. *Babies Without Borders* should help put those concerns to rest since Dubinsky uses her own experience to help produce a rich and insightful history of people, policies, and nations in the Americas.

Leslie J. Reagan

University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign

DURFLINGER, Serge Marc – *Veterans with a Vision: Canada’s War Blinded in Peace and War*. Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2010. Pp. 428.

In *Veterans with a Vision: Canada’s War Blinded in Peace and War*, Serge Marc Durflinger recounts the experiences and contributions of war blinded veterans in twentieth-century Canada. Though the monograph covers the years between 1899 and 2002, it primarily focuses on the tumultuous aftermaths of the two world wars. Concerned with both institutions and government policy, *Veterans with a Vision* traces the development of the Canadian National Institute for the Blind (CNIB) and the Sir Arthur Pearson Association of War Blinded (SAPA) from their haphazard roots in the First World War into competent bureaucracies involved in both military and civilian initiatives. To do so, Durflinger draws on extensive archival holdings that include the CNIB and SAPA Archives as well as the records of the Departments of Militia and Defence and Veterans’ Affairs housed at Library and Archives of Canada.

Veterans with a Vision contends that Canadian re-establishment organizations and veterans’ associations, while initially designed to temporarily ease the transition of war blinded soldiers into civil society, were transformed into efficient and permanent institutions over the twentieth century. “The war blind served,” writes Durflinger, “as a hinge not just between the civilian and military blind but between disabled and non-disabled veterans” (p. 9). This argument is sustained through six chronological chapters that often contain comparisons that situate Canada’s initiatives towards the war blinded alongside those of other countries. Though each chapter broadly focuses on institutional development, Durflinger also relies extensively on individual biographies as case studies of