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### **Review/Reseña**

Jessaca B. Leinaweaver, *The Circulation of Children: Kinship, Adoption and Morality in Andean Peru*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2008.

### **Ambiguous Affects: Children, Kinship, and Community in Post-War Ayacucho**

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This engaging, ethnographically driven book is an exploration of child circulation, local moral idioms, and the differing logics that shape the work of international and state adoption agencies, as well as Andean concepts of kinship and belonging in post-war Ayacucho, Peru. The first line, “This child is abandoned,” is the framing device for exploring the social and familial histories obscured in legal documents and interventions, as well as the practices employed to produce an “adoptable child” in a context in which the circulation of children amidst extended kinship networks has served as a key survival strategy and mode of social

mobility for a long time indeed. However, the author does not fall into a “portrayal of orthodoxy” (Hale 2002) in which evil bureaucrats sit in an imagined smoke-filled room plotting ways to make the life of the poor even more wretched. No, this book is more sophisticated and situated within the same ambiguity and ambivalence that shapes the discourse of kinship and affect in Ayacucho.

The author begins by noting that child circulation is a meaningful social practice (19) in which a child may move between numerous households as part of the massive rural-to-urban migration that has long been a route to “progress” and “de-Indianization” —a route that was greatly exacerbated by population displacement during the internal armed conflict of the 1980s and 1990s. In addition to the internal displacement, the death toll in Ayacucho was staggering. The Peruvian Truth and Reconciliation Commission labored for two years (2001-2003) and collected almost 17,000 testimonies. Through sophisticated statistical analysis, the TRC determined that nearly 70,000 people had been killed, and that three of every four people killed or disappeared spoke a language other than Spanish as their native tongue. The department of Ayacucho alone accounted for 40% of those deaths: in the communities with which I have worked there is virtually no one who did not lose a family member or other loved one during the conflict.

This backdrop gave rise to the establishment of the first orphanage in Ayacucho in the early 1980s to attend to the “orphans of terrorism” (64). With time, however, the “orphans” arriving at the large metal gate were not necessarily lacking parents; rather, they were lacking the broad social networks that had previously allowed children to be relocated among an extended network of people and households connected through *compadrazgo* and other forms of relatedness.

In a culture of indirectness, it is no surprise that various euphemisms are used to talk about these arrangements. These children and adolescents are said to “accompany” their elders, and indeed may provide great comfort—and domestic labor—in the houses in which they *acompañan*. Similarly, on the receiving end of these networks, young people are taken in (*recoger*) and frequently provided with access to

education, shelter, adequate food and perhaps even affection. If not, they can certainly try to press their own claims by using kinship terms that implicitly index reciprocity and obligation—both material and affective.

These strategies are also situated within broader cultural and social concerns, and the author organizes several chapters to reflect these “keywords.” In addition to accompaniment, other underlying social logics include *superación* (getting ahead or bettering oneself) and *pertenecer* (belonging), which involves those practices used to produce identity and kinship. Importantly, circulation “draws on and produces two central connections constitutive of life in the region: relatedness and inequality” (155.) The author persuasively demonstrates that although one may be “like a daughter,” the likeness remains of a second order, lacking the emphasis on blood ties that resonates throughout the author’s conversations.

Additionally, the author explores how the Peruvian state performs its modernity in part through the enactment of international human rights conventions and treaties, with uneven and at times unfortunate consequences. The author’s aim is to situate adoptions in the context not only of a post-war economy, but of the global political economy in which children move from “Third World sites of tragedy—of war, civil unrest, or disease—to First World parents in an unbalanced exchange” (2). The book treads on sensitive terrain, neither condemning nor endorsing the complexities of international adoptions and the inevitably unequal power relations that mold these transactions. However, rather than depicting this as a simple case of First World privilege, the author explores how the language of kinship in Ayacucho also works to create both relatedness and inequality right at, appropriately enough, home.

The book is a lively read and lays out a variety of questions for further research. The engaged writing drew me in, transporting me to a place I love. I have worked in Ayacucho since the mid-1990s, following the process of post-war reconstruction and social repair. In my earlier work, I stressed the importance of looking at both family and community as historical products (2004). The war left many social institutions severely altered: certainly both family and community are among those

institutions. Death, migration and abandonment left many people struggling to “get by,” materially and emotionally. I found there are many more “blended families,” to use a term coined in the US. With so many people killed—and so many *huérfanos*—there is much more remarriage than prior to the war. This is not just about godparents; it is overwhelmingly about stepparents—and talk about these people revealed deep ambivalence.

One day I was sitting outside at a wake in Carhuahurán, and a family member of the deceased brought me a bowl of soup with a large piece of meat bobbing to the oil-slick surface. This was an honor, and I recognized it as such. I took several sips before I heard little Shintaca calling out, “What about me, *hawamama* (step-mother)?” Everyone began laughing, and the women I was sitting with saw my puzzled expression. As they explained, because I had taken several sips without offering her any of my soup, I was behaving just like a stepmother.<sup>1</sup>

Stepfathers also prompted many commentaries, and the key themes were mistreatment and molestation. It went something like this. In the course of my conversations with widows, I would ask if they thought about taking another husband. Loud guffaws ensued, coupled with concerns that stepfathers would mistreat their children, in addition to “*fastidiando*” (bothering, with a sexual connotation) their daughters.

The debates on incest taboos are an anthropological version of the chicken-and-the egg: Which comes first—the desire to commit incest and thus the taboo, or the taboo that creates the desire? To what extent do these villagers’ concerns about stepparents—miserly, abusive, molesting, depending upon gender—reflect reality? What sorts of psychocultural themes are expressed in these stereotypes?

Kinship is key to survival and to inheritance in these villages. Clearly kinship is in part a discourse on power and hierarchy, cloaked in the language of affect. Harvey has suggested that, “Affinal relations express difference and work against the ordered hierarchical

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<sup>1</sup> “*Hawamama*” is a fascinating term. “Hawa” signifies exteriority, distance or remove. For instance, one word for foreigners or strangers is “*hawaruna*”—a combination of the word “people” (*runa*) plus the emphasis on exteriority. Thus the term *hawamama* is an unsettling mixture of the familiar *mama* rendered strange.

complementarity of kinship. Affinity is necessary for productive sociality yet it implies disorder, confrontation, instability. Affinal relations are not contained by principles of ordered hierarchy” (1994: 86). Harvey thus contrasts the “trusting hierarchy of kinship” with the achieved hierarchy of affinal relationships, in which the non-blood relation is always potentially disruptive, disorderly.

Thus the reconfiguration of family is intensely ambiguous. Bluntly, there is not enough of anything to go around. Land, food, affection—this is a restricted economy in every sense of the word. Although some villagers benefited from the political violence and the pillaging the *rondas* and the *Senderistas* carried out on their sweeps through the countryside, far more often war exacerbated poverty. The competition for scarce resources works in the material, affective, and symbolic spheres. Anxious talk about stepparents is also anxious talk about life and love in times of war—and its tenuous aftermath.

The author focuses on *compadres* and *comadres*, undeniably key figures in the circulation of children. However, I found myself wanting to hear more about stepparents and how people manage these seemingly omnipresent concerns. Tawdry tabloids (*la prensa chicha*) routinely feature stories of sexually abusive step-fathers, and this theme resonated as much with my family in Lima as in Ayacucho. How is this managed within the circulation of children?

The gendered dimension of these social practices also intrigues me. The author does note that more girls than boys are involved in the networks of circulation—indeed, this is a veritable traffic in (female) children. She rightly notes the demand for domestic labor in urban Peru, which makes girls and female adolescents more desirable. Importantly, she notes a surprising advantage this preference may confer: these girls, by way of being placed in urban and “upwardly mobile” homes may have increased access to education and a greater opportunity to “*superarse*” (127).

However, I need to know more about both the boys and the men. The book is centered on women and girls, an approach I appreciate to be sure. However, those of us working in gender studies have spent too much

time insisting that boys and men are gendered beings as well, and that masculinities are an important topic for study in times of war as well as “peace.” Thus I must dig in here and ask for more. In agricultural settings, boy’s labor may be seen as more important; indeed, the author cites Orlove’s research in which people described women’s “help” and men’s “work” (2002). However, I wonder what other factors are at work? In my conversations, numerous mothers described differential treatment for a sick daughter versus a sick son; for the boy, they might be willing to scrape together two *soles* and head to the health post. I also remember many meals and the “protein hierarchy” that left girls at the end of the familial food chain. Might it be that boys are circulated less because one loves or values them more?

Additionally, mothers were very candid about which of their children they loved and which they did not. The responsibility for producing that emotion lay on the shoulders of those little children. Part of the emotional education children receive includes the repeated reminder that they must learn to make others love them (*kuyachicuyta yachana*) (Theidon 2004: 62-63). They are reminded of this in daily life, and I also heard this repeated at weddings as the bride and groom prepared to forge a new kinship network. This sort of emotional work is a key component in managing conflict in these communities; in the context of child circulation, it may be part of “becoming familiar.”

I also think of the origin—conception, if I may—of the children sent out in circulation during the internal armed conflict. The TRC determined that the primary targets of sexual violence were poor Quechua-speaking women of reproductive age (PTRC 2003, Vol. VIII). This resonates with what women have told my research team and me over the years (Theidon 2004: 2007). There is no way to know the full magnitude of the sexual violence and its legacies: pregnancies, abortions, infanticide, unwanted children sent to live with extended family members, children raised by their mothers amidst whispers and stigma, and children who carry names that mark them for life (Theidon, forthcoming). In one community with which I have worked, communal authorities lamented *los regalos de los soldados*—more than fifty children

“left behind” by the soldiers stationed in the military base for “security” purposes. Knowing the fate of the mothers and those *regalos*—and of the thousands of women and children whose lives were affected by sexual violence throughout Peru—remains a pressing topic not only from a research perspective, but also in terms of designing and delivering the reparations they have a right to demand.<sup>2</sup>

And some do place that demand. Since 2001, a number of “orphan’s associations” have emerged throughout the country. For example, in Ayacucho a group of orphans—now young adults—formed the *Asociación de Jóvenes Huerfanos Víctimas de la Violencia Política* (AJOHVISOP) in 2001. In my interviews with various members, it is clear they have taken up the label of *huérfanos víctimas* strategically, and press their claims in the language of human rights and in light of the moral authority their orphan status confers on them. The ways in which “orphans”—and other iconic victim categories such as “war widows” and “rape victims”—mobilize remains a fascinating topic worthy of further research. Additionally, the post-TRC category of *afectados* works via one’s own victim status or relationship to someone classified as a victim for the purpose of reparations; how does the discourse of kinship work within this economy of potential reparations and redress?

In conclusion, I applaud the author for writing a book that raises so many compelling questions, and does so in an accessible and engaging manner. This book will be a welcome text for undergraduate courses on Latin America, the global politics of adoption, contemporary kinship studies and the anthropology of emotions.

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<sup>2</sup> R. Charli Carpenter’s work on the topic of “children born of war” lays out a set of research questions that I am exploring with my colleagues Edith Del Pino and Juan José Yupanqui.

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