The significance of care: How local worlds continuously change through global forces. An interview with Katrien De Graeve

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Abstract

This paper presents an interview with Katrien De Graeve, postdoctoral researcher at Ghent University and author of important publications in the field of critical adoption studies. The conversation with De Graeve on transnational adoption and aid for refugee minors allows us to explore how transnational migration is profoundly changing today's local systems of care by raising completely new questions and significant contradictions, particularly as far as caring for children is considered. The interview discusses the possibility to re-imagine care relationships beyond the ideal of exclusivity within the nuclear family and sheds light on cultural, social and political constraints which hamper such possibility. We will see how health care discourse enters this space of change in social coexistence impacting the way in which social actors make choices and negotiate the ethical sense of choices.

Keywords: parenting; childhood; immigration; transnational adoption; refugee minors.

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Introduction

Katrien De Graeve is postdoctoral researcher of the Research Foundation Flanders (FWO) at the Centre for Research on Culture and Gender (CRCG) in the Faculty of Arts and Philosophy (Department of Languages and Cultures) of Ghent University. Care relationships – especially when including ethnical, national and cultural differences – have been one of the main subjects of her research work. She has dealt in particular with transnational adoptions between Flanders and Ethiopia, and refugee aid and guardianships of unaccompanied refugee minors. Starting from an interest in the current significance of care, within local worlds that continuously change through global forces, she has studied the substantial impact of care practices in creating forms of citizenship and belonging, beyond any alleged division between the private, the public and the national sphere.

When I asked Dr. De Graeve to be interviewed, my thought was that the specific contexts of her empirical research and the theoretical frameworks that she is employing could bring meaningful insight into the question posed by this Special Issue of *Rivista di Psicologia Clinica* on change in health and social care.

In the last years, the connection between immigration and care has been the subject of a wide investigation focusing on the growing number of migrant women working in child care and long-term care for the elderly, and the risks of marginalization and power inequalities resulting from this process on a global scale. De Graeve's work turns the angle of inquiry by drawing attention to situations in which people of the ethnic majority take care of migrants. The interview makes visible how taking care of someone – both if initially connoted as an intimate gesture (e.g. parenting) or as a technical gesture (e.g. legal guardianship) – is always ultimately an event with influential and complex symbolic, identity, social and political implications, which often remain unseen. This becomes immediately clear discussing with De Graeve the contexts of transnational adoption and aid for unaccompanied refugee minors.

On the one hand, the international political debate on the crisis and change of health care systems often emphasizes the increased demand for and use of health care services in the face of an urgent shortage of public funding. On the other hand, different sectors of scholarly debate within the humanities and the social sciences have been pointing out the impact on social life, over the last decades, of an overproduction of medical and psychological categories in order to explain more and more aspects of everyday existence. Although addressing strongly interrelated problems, these two debates have mostly remained separated.
The interview explores how what De Graeve calls *scientization* of parental choices and functions is actually changing the way of making choices and negotiating the ethical sense of choices between social actors. Next to the abundance of expert knowledge, the widespread appeal to an ethics of rights, norms and justice is somehow depleting the capacity of a moral reasoning based on the social exchange, namely on the creative and pragmatic resources offered by the social exchange. As an alternative to traditional ethics centred on justice, feminist theorization has argued the possibility to envisage an ethics of care: i.e. an ethical model centred on care, as acknowledgement of the fundamental relationality and interdependence which are at the basis of the human condition and of a good life.
According to the feminist ethicist Joan Tronto (1993), for a political practice inspired by an ethics of care at least four inflections of care and corresponding values must be taken into account.

> *Caring about* involves becoming aware of and paying attention to the need for caring. The corresponding value is *attentiveness*. *Caring for* is the phase when someone assumes the responsibility to meet the identified need, *responsibility* being the value that counts here. *Taking care of* or *care giving* entails the direct meeting of the needs for care, the performance of a necessary caring task. *Competence* is the moral dimension of this. Finally, *care receiving* is the fourth phase of the politics of care and involves the moral element of *responsiveness* (Scuzzarello, 2009, p. 7).

Ultimately, this interview's central focus is the relationship between parents and children, and between adults and children more widely. Apparently never in history so much time and energy have been invested in children's care and parenting, as it is the case now, De Graeve will say during the interview. We will discuss the reasons and frameworks of this intense emphasis on childhood, and analyse the violent paradoxes that such attitude implies when we think of caring for children in a transnational dimension.

Interview

I would like to ask you how your interest in the issues of care, care relationships and care ethics started and how it is developing through your research.

I started doing research on parenting in transnational adoption and more specifically in Belgian-Ethiopian adoptions. I interviewed parents from Belgium who adopted children from Ethiopia.
One of the main things that I observed was an enormous engagement and a very strong commitment of the parents to their role as carers. What is also interesting to notice is that care is a very broad concept. The meaning of care is much more than feeding children or taking care of children, there are a lot of other elements in it, and one element certainly is identity. The parents I met were also thinking about how to make their children stronger in their identity in relation to racism, for instance. Thus, one of the things which struck me was what I called *culture work*. Almost all parents who have adopted a child from Ethiopia engage in doing something with Ethiopian culture: they go to Ethiopian restaurants, listen to Ethiopian music, there are gatherings where they dress up in Ethiopian clothes and this kind of funny actions. This was a striking element in my research and what I have found out is that people are doing this mainly because they want to act upon the child's identity. It is a strategy against racism and negative representations of black people in Belgian society. They want their child to feel proud of his or her birth country. An important aim of my research was trying to uncover the problematic aspects of these practices as well as the potential for change, inasmuch as they both have interesting and positive elements as well as problematic aspects. I had to do a very multi-layered analysis in order to understand these practices. I guess this is the case in every research, but there are so many elements that come together in my subject to be considered. So I looked at these different elements that play a role in parenting work.
Parenting was one aspect of my research. Another aspect is the dominant discourse on belonging. Immigration in Belgium has been having the tendency to colour-blindness, non-racialism and white privilege. The neoliberal idea that everyone has the same chances in life is maybe the main ideological framework in Belgium. This is, I think, also the dominant ideological framework within which parents do their parenting work, sharing many of these ideas on the one hand, but at the same time trying to negotiate these ideas in very different ways.

What do you mean by colour-blindness?

The prevailing idea in Belgium is that racism does not exist anymore: it is not important if you are black or white, everyone has the same opportunities. However, this denial of race as something socially and politically relevant stands in contrast to the racial stereotyping, exclusions and discriminations that "non-white" people face. Critical race studies have identified a shift from race to culture in Europe (Balibar, 1992; Goldberg, 2006). Not race, but cultural difference is now considered the main obstacle to immigrant integration and culture has become the explanation for racial inequality. Also in Belgium there is the idea that culture is the main problem and that the exclusion of certain groups from the labour market, for instance, is due to their cultural background. As such, the cause of social inequality is shifted onto the individual who is said to have a problematic culture. The concept of colour-blindness refers to this denial of race by the racially privileged. Colour-blindness fits within an ideology of *happy diversity* that starts from the idea that colour is not important anymore, yet tends to deny the systemic inequalities based on race. It is interesting to look to the ambiguous stance of adoptive parents towards their children's so-called *birth culture* because, on the one hand, they think that culture is important for their children's self-worth and identity, but at the same time that cultural difference is something that is generally considered problematic. The adoptee is often seen as the ideal immigrant precisely because she has left her birth culture and she is no longer like other immigrants who continue to be engaged in their own cultures, and, because of that, face discrimination and exclusion.
One of the things that I observed in my research is the complex blurring of culture and race. The literature shows how parents who adopt a child from Russia are not interested in Russian culture at all because their children are white and for this reason culture does not represent an issue (Marre, 2007). In case of adoption from Africa, culture becomes an issue because these children are black. Thus, there is an ambiguity: while on the one hand culture is seen as a problem, as a source of racism, something to avoid, on the other hand the phenotypic features of the child seem to impose a foreign culture, a foreign origin, a foreign place upon her. This is why adoptive parents believe they must incorporate the child's birth culture in their lives and they do

so in a celebratory way, reducing culture to a very superficial and non-problematic element. Anyway, it is a complicated issue involving a variety of different aspects.

Thus, if I understand, one important aspect of the care work that these parents do concerns how to deal with diversity, which maybe in these families is a more evident problem also in relation to skin colour.

Yes, absolutely, this is something that comes up during the process of becoming an adoptive parent, at the start of the idea that they want to adopt. Most of the parents in adoption go through infertility treatments and originally they want a child of their own. Then they decide: "Ok, maybe we can adopt a child", and they start thinking about how much difference they can take. They might start from the idea of a healthy white baby, but because of the decreasing availability of adoptable children worldwide, they change their preferences. While in the 1990s and early 2000s, adopting from Ethiopia was often a very deliberate choice (out of anti-racist motivations, philanthropic motivations, etc.), now there are so few options left. In 2013 more than 60% of all transnational adoptions in Flanders involved children from Ethiopia. The long waiting list and the decreasing number of adoptable children make prospective parents change the "difficulties" they are prepared to face: non-white children, older children, siblings, children with disabilities.
Adoption is a very supervised process: parents have to take a preparation course and they are evaluated. During the preparation course they learn that it is important to think of the cultural background of the child. As I said, it is a very ambiguous thing. Recently there has been again a discussion on racism in Belgium because the leader of the nationalist party said that racism is relative and is something that is used to hide personal problems; what he basically said was that each individual has the same chances in life and has just to take them. Such discussion has reinforced the general idea that racism is not really an issue. But at the same time, parents feel that they have to do something with this racial thing.
When you talk to black people, for instance, they will tell you that there is a lot of racism and discrimination. Belgium is not doing very well in terms of integration of people with an immigration background. There is a real issue and a real problem. One of the main critiques that I have on the whole process of preparing adoptive parents is that this is not really taken into account or they focus on the wrong things. Adoption is very much pathologized and mainly presented as an individual problem, I mean as a psychological problem so to speak. An individual who has been adopted is imagined as being uprooted from his or her birth country. This is considered traumatic and this is why the adoptee is considered susceptible to have a problem of attachment with the new family.
I do not say that it cannot be the case, an adoptee can have individual psychological problems, but the social issue and social problems are not seen at all. There is no training on issues such as racism for instance or problems on which we do research here, such as white privilege. Discourse analysis also could be very helpful for adoptive parents in order to think of what they are conveying through what they say. For instance, in one of my articles (De Graeve, 2015) I discuss an interview fragment in which I was having a conversation with a couple of adoptive parents, and the adoptive son was also present. They were talking about racism in school and said: "Well, our son does not face a lot of racism, it is much worse for the Muslim children in his class". "This is because of the culture, because they have a Muslim culture" they said, without realizing that they were implicitly stating that cultural difference is undesirable. In that same conversation these parents also told me that they were interested in Ethiopian culture and they wished their child too would get interested in Ethiopian culture, though he was not. You can see the ambiguity that I was mentioning before: on the one hand the parents say that culture is a problem inasmuch as it is a source of racism, but on the other hand they are in some way essentially connecting their child to his birth country's culture because he is black, so he has to be interested in Ethiopian culture.
Another thing that may be interesting to say and was an important element in my research concerns the issue of belonging in relation to immigration, which I address also in my new research subject on unaccompanied minors. In this regard, as I was saying, it is interesting to see how adoptees are somehow set apart from immigrants. They are not generally seen like immigrants, they usually do not see themselves as immigrant, they even distance themselves from immigrants and are scared to be mixed up with immigrants. An important part of my work was to explore what this denial of the immigrant status is doing and how it can be helpful, both on a theoretical and a practical level, to look at adoptees as immigrants, because they *are* immigrants, they are even first generation immigrant, which is interesting[1].

[1] De Graeve's work on experiences of transnational adoption casts light into ways of symbolizing the cultural and ethnical diversity, which are relevant to our understanding of social coexistence more widely.
She points out how significantly, in the discourse of the adoptive parents that she interviewed, culture is often invoked as an ahistorical and acontextual dimension: it is represented as a prerogative of the child, a characteristic of the

I have looked to how parents are dealing with culture on the one hand but also with charity on the other. Adoptive parents are usually engaged with charity and they are supporting different kinds of projects in Ethiopia. Through the adoption of their child they see themselves as connected to Ethiopia and feel obliged to support the country. I have looked to this type of transmigrant activity. It can be considered as a sort of transmigrant activity because it is very similar to what migrants do as well, I mean in terms of a stream of money going from migrants to their country of origin.
This connection between immigration and transnational adoption is what brought me to my postdoctoral project on unaccompanied minors.
There are a lot of similarities between the two groups of children: they both come to Belgium separated from their biological family; they do not come exactly from the same countries but from similar countries, in the South and the former Eastern bloc. At the same time, the way in which they are conceptualized and the way in which they are received is so dramatically different. This was a very interesting thing to investigate. Adoptees become a kind of a treasure, something that is seen as a value because there is a need in white middle-class families to complete their family. While, on the one hand, there are extremely long waiting lists of adoptive parents and there are not enough children, on the other hand a lot of children are coming on their own and they are not wanted here, and they are sent back as much as possible. Because of children rights-related issues we have to take care of them until they are 18 and then we can send them back.
What is also interesting to notice is that the whole discourse on adoption emphasizes that what a child really needs is a family. The best context to raise a child is the family context and there is a whole discourse on children who need a family and orphan children in poor countries who are not properly cared for, so we help these children. On the other hand, unaccompanied minors are almost always received in institutions and for them there is no discourse on their need for a family, they do not seem to need a family. Most of these minors are teenagers and this is of course a different age and they are not seen as easily malleable. But almost a quarter of them are younger than six, so there are also young children, but the problem in Belgium is that there are not enough families for foster care and these children have to compete with other children in Belgium who need a foster family.

May I ask you to tell us something more about the legislation that you were mentioning according to which Belgium is obliged to take care of unaccompanied minors until they are 18 and later these people can be sent back to their countries of origin?

Well, unaccompanied minors are first and mostly seen as immigrants and their stories are treated in the same way like other immigrants or refugees. There are international conventions according to which States have to take care of these minors until the age of 18, so even if they have not a permit they can stay in the country, in a sort of extra-legal condition, because they are not yet 18. There is a wide debate on this issue because, of course, it is very problematic and contingent. It makes being less than 18 very attractive and many of these minors are teenagers but their age is not very clear because they come from countries that even do not know how old they are exactly. There are now tests based on radiography that are employed in order to determine their age. Also the guardianship of these minors within the guest country is supposed to stop the day they become 18.
This was one of the ways through which an *ethics of care* became an important concept in my research, because what is now used instead is primarily an *ethics of rights*. So, unaccompanied minors are seen as bearers of rights: because of their age they have certain rights. Such perspective envisages groups of children, categories of children within which everyone has the same rights and it is all about doing the same for everyone.

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individual, of her or his lifestyle, a personal asset; in other words something that can be given or removed. This is in line with what De Graeve calls "consumerist tendencies to deal with difference in Flanders – in which diversity is idealized, but reduced to a choice from a variety of consumerist ethnic entertainment" (De Graeve, 2013, p. 6).
Culture as history of the relationship between European and African countries, which also means a political past of colonialism, seems to be obliterated. In the same way, culture as the present history of the relationship between these parts of the world, which includes today immigration as its most prominent feature, tends to be obliterated. Parents highlight how their children have been immersed in Flemish culture and habits, from childhood, and are therefore socially perceived as insiders, which protects them from the racial stigma (De Graeve, 2015). At the same time – like De Graeve is going to discuss in the aftermath of this interview – as a part of a wider public representation that focuses on adoption as an alternative form of reproduction, "many people do not even see the connection between transnational adoption and immigration" (De Graeve, 2015, p. 10).

I thought that it was interesting to investigate what an ethics of care could do and I interviewed guardians of unaccompanied minors focusing in particular on guardians who have only few children under their care. Guardians are people in the guest country who are formally entrusted with taking care of these minors in various ways. Most of the guardians I spoke to are retired people who want to do something good and therefore decide to take care of a couple of unaccompanied minors. They put a lot of effort and a lot of commitment in it, and really do this with their heart. I thought that it was interesting to look at how they look to these minors and in what their perspective as carers is different from the conventional ethics of rights' perspective. When the minors become 18, many guardians continue their guardianship, not officially but they just do it on a voluntary basis because they know that the minor still needs care. It is not because a person turns 18 that he or she has suddenly become mature enough to be on her or his own.
There are different types of guardians in Belgium. There are the employee guardians who have a wage and take care of about 25 children. Then, there are the independent guardians who can have up to 50 children. Some of them are lawyers and they do this as a way to earn extra money. Maybe they are doing a good job, in the sense that they take care well for the different procedures concerning the minor, but there is no real relationship; many of the minors have seen their guardian only once or twice. Within the group of the independent guardians there are also people who have many pupils, but some take care only of a couple of minors. For them, money is not their incentive, often they want to do something meaningful in their life after retirement. As long as they have no more than 3 unaccompanied minors, they are called voluntary guardians. There is an ongoing discussion now on professionalization and European streamlining of guardianships. In the Netherlands, for instance, there are only employee guardians and there is a tendency also in Belgium to consider the voluntary guardians as less professional. Moreover, the different types of guardians implies that the unaccompanied minors are treated in an unequal way: some guardians invest so much time and really develop a kind of kinship relationship with their pupil, some others not. Therefore, it seems to be very unequal, like a lottery. When you come here as unaccompanied minor you can be lucky, and have a very good guardian or you can have bad luck and have one who just takes care of your procedures. I think it is interesting to see how something that is basically good (the former unaccompanied minors in my study seem to consider the emotional involvement of care givers most important), is threatened to be abolished because it is considered unfair. This kind of issues touch upon the limits of the ethics of rights and point to what the ethics of care can teach us[2].

Could you tell us how these children arrive in Belgium, through which pathways, and what the term "unaccompanied" exactly means?

It is a very diversified group; their experience can be very different. They are called unaccompanied when there is no legal representative, no parents and no legal guardian, but sometimes an uncle accompanies them for instance. Here again, in Belgium there is a strict view of what a family is, ethnocentric views of the nuclear family are used to define what makes an appropriate supervisor of the child. However, in these cases

[2] The debate on the *ethics of care* started in the early Eighties with the work of the American psychologist, feminist and ethicist Carol Gilligan. In her book "In a different voice" (1982) Gilligan challenged the model of moral development proposed by her mentor and colleague Lawrence Kohlberg. According to Kohlberg, human moral development, from infancy to adulthood, follows a pathway made of six culturally universal and progressive stages (Kohlberg, 1973). Differently from children and adolescents, adults' moral judgement is no longer ruled by particular and contingent criteria, like the fear of punishment, the desire to secure others' approval and love or the pursuit of self-interest, but rather by a set of self-imposed universal ethical principles that – in accordance with a Kantian moral perspective – transcend all conventional moralities. Kohlberg's studies also suggested that the moral reasoning of girls, because of its prevailing preoccupation with immediate relations, tends to progress more slowly in reaching maturity with respect to boys. Gilligan argued that what Kohlberg misinterpreted as a slow development was actually the expression of a "different voice", a feminine way of conceiving moral judgements that emphasizes actual relationships and responsibilities between people. The care perspective was an alternative, but equally legitimate form of moral reasoning obscured by the dominant language of traditional ethics - namely, a language of justice that stresses rights and rules (Tong & Williams, 2014) as disembodied corpora of ethical principles.
Although criticized for essentializing gender differences, Carol Gilligan's work on care ethics has inspired a rich tradition of scholarly research and cultural debate. The need to search for a relational model of moral agency, one of the fundamental insights of care ethics, has been a relevant point in feminist ethics and philosophical debate more generally (Tronto, 1999). Such hypothesis continues to offer a promising perspective in order to critically review the status the Western cultural tradition has granted to autonomy and independency, as "the pinnacle of human achievement, the source of human dignity, the mark of moral maturity" (Keller, 1998, p. 154) while the capacity to form and maintain relationships, although equally essential to human life, has historically received little attention.

unaccompanied minors usually stay with their family, not in institutions, yet they do get a legal guardian. The majority of unaccompanied minors are boys from Afghanistan and often have been sent to Belgium by their parents who hope they will find a better future. Their migratory trajectories can be very different, they travel by boat, by plane, with the help of smugglers, etc. Some come accompanied by their parents, but when the parents are expelled from the country they decide to leave their children here because children have more rights and cannot be sent back, and they hope to offer them more chances in life. I interviewed a family who had an unaccompanied minor in foster care, a boy from Kosovo. In this case the boy came with his parents to Belgium. When they were expelled from the country, they decided to leave him here. The boy had a very good relationship with his sports teacher, and they told the boy that he had to ask his teacher for help. The sports teacher and his wife had never considered having a foster child, but when the boy appeared at their door, they decided to take care of him. It was something that just happened to them. The boy was 16 years old. Now he is part of their family and seems to be fine with it.
This was one of the things that stroke me when I compared the two groups of children. On the one hand, there are so many problems in adoption, with the long waiting lists, the huge demand for adoptive children, but also the irregularities, cases of abductions, falsifications, and so on. On the other hand, there are the unaccompanied children, who come to our country voluntarily in high number. There must be a way to rethink the transnational care for children.
When we go beyond the ideal of the nuclear family and the ideal of one's own child in an exclusive relationship with the parents, there could be other possibilities of taking care of children in a transnational way. There must be more and other possibilities of taking care of these unaccompanied minors for instance. I think there is a need for rethinking that and questioning these compartments of different kinds of children and different kinds of care and care needs.

Did you explore how the guardians or the foster parents represent themselves in their role as carers?

This is an interesting question and something that I have explored in this research, and I had already explored in my research on adoption: the way care can be a means of citizenship production or identity production, or construction. What was striking in the interviews with the guardians was how they presented themselves as good citizens, middle-class, and even cosmopolitan subjects, people who are open to the world, who are philanthropic and are doing something important. A guardian for instance said: "When I retired I wanted to do something important. When my mother was dying, I saw people taking care of her in the hospital, fluffing up her pillow. It is very good that these people were willing to do that, but I wanted to do something "important, something with responsibilities". You must know – this was also striking – that the majority of the guardians with whom I talked were men. Guardianship seem to be a very male way of caring. It is not only about fluffing up pillows but involves a lot of procedures and legal issues. And by saying that he wanted something with responsibilities he was implicitly stating that other forms of caring do not involve any responsibility. Most of the guardians were retired from very well paid jobs. One of them was a high officer in a military body, one worked for the European Commission, there was a teacher, and most had very good jobs. Guardians must learn a lot of complicated procedures and at least they must want to do this kind of investment in learning about all these procedures. It is something that I guess people who are uneducated maybe do not dare to do. For example, some of the guardians referred to another guardian who apparently is a hairdresser saying that she was doing very well but implying that she was a kind of special case.
It is evidently a site of construing themselves as good citizens and let us hope it also helps the citizenship of the minors.
This identity building is something that I also explored in my study of adoptive parents; I investigated how parenting is a site of identity construction. There are quite some similarities between the two groups. Many guardians compared their task with parenting, so they also see the similarities, although it is completely different in terms of engagement since the minors do not live with the guardian, so it is a different type of relationship.

This special issue of RPC intends to explore to what extent and how care practices are socially changing. In this respect, one crucial question certainly is how the relationship between care and citizenship comes up today as a political problem. I am very interested in the social and political implications of care, which clearly emerge from your discourse. In these contexts – especially guardianship but also transnational adoption – care seems to be experienced as a profoundly personal but not at all private task, while generally

parenting can be experienced mostly as a private issue, something that concerns basically me, my family, my closest friends and social networks.

This is very interesting. Such experience of privateness, this not seeing the political implications, seems to be mainly something people of the privileged middle-class milieu might feel. Research on parenting in migrant mothers for instance has shown how the migrant mothers consider their parenting as a way of acting upon identity and making their children proud of themselves. I wrote an article with Chia Longman and Tine Brouckaert on the citizenship potential of parenting (2013) and in that article we build upon the ongoing discussion on the political nature of parenting, and the question of when exactly parenting is something political and when it is not. Ruth Lister (2007) considers parenting as something political only when is done from a subaltern position. I am inclined to say that it is always a political issue but when you are from a privileged position you are not aware of it. Nonetheless, in some way you are teaching your child to be a privileged white person; you give the privilege to your child through the way you raise your child. This process became more visible in the adoptive parenting work that I studied, as the adoptive parents are only able to pass on their privilege partially. They also are teaching their child to be a middle-class person but they cannot pass on their whiteness. Peggy McIntosh's concept of *knapsack of white privilege* is very useful here. It seems that transracial adoptive parents are able to pass on to their children that knapsack only partially because there is this difference of colour and other physical features. Thus, at that point they become conscious of their acting in a political way, so to speak. When you are in a privileged position you are not aware of the political meaning of your actions because it seems so evident, something that just happens, and you are not fighting a struggle or anything similar. It is just to be white middle-class and you can give it to your child without being conscious of that. I think that in adoptive families this is something that becomes very visible[3].
This division between the public and the private is so pervasive and we have learned it already for such a long time that these concepts are very strong. But at the same time it is so obvious that they cannot be separated. As we said, parenting is generally considered as something deeply private but at the same time it is so much supervised and seen as something that the State must control. Think for instance about the discourse on migrant youngsters who are hanging around in the city. Here in Flanders they call it "hangjongeren" which means "hang-around youth": it is depicted as a problematic behaviour, and it is often the parents who are blamed for not keeping their children off the streets. There are many examples of how the private and the public are divided and connected at the same time.

In Japan, for example, quite an opposite problem has been taking centre stage in these years. It is called "hikikomori" and refers to teenagers who withdraw from school and any other social engagement, and stay at home, closed in their room (Tajan, 2015). It appears like a very problematic behaviour and here again

[3] In a memorable essay of 1988 "White Privilege and Male Privilege: A Personal Account of Coming to See Correspondences Through Work in Women's Studies", Peggy McIntosh shows how systems of oppression rely upon two fundamental mechanisms. The first is visible: there are active forms of oppression, disadvantage, constraints to which low-power groups are susceptible. The second is invisible because embedded in every-day life, it makes part of the social order that the members of the dominant group are accustomed to take for granted. According to McIntosh white people are not taught to recognize how their status as white people confers on them many privileges, because, on the contrary, since school they are taught to think of their lives as morally neutral, normative, and average. The invisibility of the white privilege is at the basis of an involuntary oppressiveness which seems much more difficult to challenge than active oppression because its very existence coincides with its oblivion. In her article she tries to unpack this invisible, weightless *knapsack of white privilege* by listing 46 actions and conditions of her daily personal experience that once she took for granted as neutral, normal and available to everybody while they are not. We give here an extract from McIntosh's list (pp. 5-9):

> 3. If I should need to move, I can be pretty sure of renting or purchasing housing in an area which I can afford and in which I would want to live. [...]
> 6. I can turn on the television or open to the front page of the paper and see people of my race widely represented. [...]
> 13. Whether I use checks, credit cards or cash, I can count on my skin color not to work against the appearance of financial reliability. [...]
> 15. I do not have to educate my children to be aware of systemic racism for their own daily physical protection. [...]
> 41. I can be sure that if I need legal or medical help, my race will not work against me. [...]
> 46. I can choose blemish cover or bandages in "flesh" color and have them more or less match my skin.

Acknowledging the substantial condition of inequality which unapparently permeates every-day life means to McIntosh, as immediate consequence, questioning the myth of a meritocratic society.

parents are encouraged to correct it and to solve somehow the problem. It seems like specular to hanging around.

Yes, hanging around is mainly connected to migrant populations. The so-called "autochthonous" people are constructed as people who stay inside, who do not cause trouble, while immigrant children hang around and cause a lot of problems.
It is also interesting to consider how this is connected with the problem of moralization of care. Especially mothering is very much a site of moralization and it is disguised as scientific truth in many cases. I think of the debate on breastfeeding for instance. Every decision a woman has to make is presented no longer as a choice but something that is scientifically proved: you have to breastfeed your child because it is the best for the child. So, it is no longer a matter of practical choice. In fact it becomes a very moralized choice. It can have far-reaching implications for a woman, for her ability to go to work for instance, for her career. But these considerations cannot really be taken into account faced with objective, scientific arguments that have proven that breastfeeding is good, and formula is bad. This is something that you can constantly see, this scientization and psychologization of parenting, of every decision that parents have to make[4]. In adoptive parenting this is even pushed to extremes. As adoption as such is already constructed as inherently posing a psychological problem, adoptive parenting is seen as an extremely difficult task that needs a lot of emotional investment, and must be intensively guided by expert help.
There is a lot of work now on these themes, which has been very important for my understanding, like the work on intensive parenting[5] and also parenting as a means of identity construction. Parenting is not simply about rearing children, the type of parenting people adopt has become part of identity constructions. Think for instance about the discourse on "tiger" parenting, attachment parenting, etc. It is interesting because apparently never in history so much time and energy have been invested in children, as it is the case now. Historical research shows that in the past it was not such a huge thing like it is now. Parenting is now seen as something so extremely important and psychology has played a crucial role in this process, like Michel Foucault and Nicholas Rose wrote in a very interesting way.

What do you think such interest in infancy and childhood might mean?

This is a good question. It is very interesting to see how although women are much more involved in paid work than in the Sixties or Seventies, parenting has intensified and has even become more demanding. This is very interesting and seems like a mechanism to suppress women, or something similar. Women much more than men are asked to give account for the way they combine family and career. Men with careers are seldom asked how they deal with the care of their children for instance. It is mainly women who are held responsible for childcare. Moreover, although men now take up more parenting tasks, this does not seem to diminish the work of women. It seems that the parenting work has expanded, more work that parents must do to be good parents has been created. Women basically continue to do what they did in the past, while men are doing other things, they play with the children and bring them to the sport clubs, or other extra-activities. But, what does it mean? I do not know.

It could also be related to what we were saying before, I mean the problem of dealing with diversity. At a symbolic level, infancy or childhood seem to represent a sort of primary site of origin and identity that should be protected and controlled resorting to all means in order to guarantee our future.

The idea of attachment and the first years of infancy as a crucial phase in development have played an important part in the expansion of what is considered "good" parenting. Frank Furedi's "Paranoid parenting" (2001), for instance, shows an interesting perspective on this. It is a critique of how we are exaggerating the role of parents and how this whole idea is justifying an extreme supervision of children. Furedi argues that the current exaggerated supervision of children might be harmful, but it is considered fine and sensible.

[4] For a critical reflection on the social scientific debate on psychologization of social life, see Renzo Carli's Editorial in the Special Issue of *Rivista di Psicologia Clinica* dedicated to the contemporary relevance of psychology and its contribution to social coexistence (Carli, 2013).
[5] In her work *The cultural contradictions of motherhood* (1997) Sharon Hays traces the historical and cultural pathway to what she describes as an ideology of "intensive mothering", that is the idea that a good mothering must be "child-centered, expert-guided, emotionally absorbing, labor-intensive, and financially expensive" (Hays, 1996, p. 8). De Graeve and Longman (2013) analyze how adoptive parents assume such ideological framework in order to legitimate their choice of transnational adoption.

In my research on adoption I found an example of extreme supervision that is justified by a language of pathologization and medicalization of adoptees. Several of the parents in my study told me that after the arrival of their child, they organized a six months period of so-called "quarantine", in which they tried to be alone with their child as much as possible, and, in the most extreme cases, even asked other people not to have eye contact with the child. This measure is meant as a preventive treatment of the attachment disorder the child is most likely to have and to "discipline" the child in an exclusive relationship with her parent. Some of the parents did even not allow the grandparents or other family members to come and see the child during the first months. This is an extreme example, but so many parents go along with it as it overlaps with the general discourse, the dominant discourse in adoption. The dominant discourse shares the same basic ideas. The main theoretical framework that is used to prepare adoptive parents is attachment theory, the development stages of the child must go towards the development of a healthy attachment and the first months of the child's life are considered extremely important. It also shares the assumption that the exclusive nuclear family is the best, and the natural unit to grow up. Furthermore, it shares the ideology of intensive parenting in a society full of risks, which justifies excessive child supervision. Nowadays, it is considered fine not to allow your child to walk to school alone for instance. Some time ago, a couple was in the media because their children of 6 and 8 were going to school on their own by bike and this was considered a scandal.
Of course, this also implies a lot more work for parents: when your child cannot go alone, you have to bring her, which increases the workload of parents. I think this is really interesting also in the light of women going out to work, and of how this has gone hand in hand with an intensification of parenting.

How do you think the scientization of care that we are discussing is related, if it is, to the ethics of rights that you mentioned before? Expert knowledge seems to be an important organizer of parental choices on the one hand, as much as right on the other. I am thinking for instance of the concept of reproductive rights[6]*. When having a child is treated in terms of rights, which are the implications in your view?*

The way we treat children today can somehow violate some of the basic rights of children, the right to privacy for instance or the right to their own life, I mean to organize their own life. We keep children very childish, I think, in many ways.
The concept of reproductive rights is highly contested in adoption circles but I think in practice it is the main driving force in the whole transnational adoption business. On paper adoption is about children rights and child protection: we are searching parents for children and not the other way around. But the policy in Belgium shows that this is not entirely true. What is now happening is that the government has decided to actively search for new channels to satisfy the increasing demand for adoptable children. This is stated in the new policy document of Belgian government; it literally says that adoptive parents *must* be able to rely on sufficient, well functioning and trustworthy adoption channels. I think this is very problematic, especially in the light of the Hague Convention on transnational adoption written in the Nineties, and ratified by Belgium[7]. The Hague Convention embraces the principle of subsidiarity, which prescribes that for children who cannot live with their biological family anymore, a solution must be found in the country of origin first. This convention has helped to increase the number of domestic adoptions, in China for instance where there were no domestic adoption in the past. According to the convention, transnational adoption can only be a second choice, an option of last resort so to speak. Only institutional care is considered worse. The convention turns transnational adoption in a (undesirable) placement option in the child welfare system of a sending country, not as a reproductive option in rich Western countries. But the Belgian policy seems to embrace the second interpretation.
What is also interesting is how institutional care even in the Hague Convention is considered as worse than transnational adoption. This shows that the template of the nuclear family is still very important.
One of the things that I have showed is problematic in adoption (and probably in parenting more general) is that children are too much considered as a possession of the parents and that parenthood is seen as an exclusive relationship. It is this kind of conceptualisation that makes the multiple parenthood in adoption such a difficult thing. Even though the current discourse says that it is important to take the past into account

[6] On the concept of reproductive rights in the context of transnational adoption, see Rickie Solinger's book *Beggars and Choosers: How the Politics of Choice Shapes Adoption, Abortion, and Welfare in the United States* (2001). In this work, the author discusses how one woman's possession of reproductive choice, in the richest countries of the world, may actually depend on or deepen another woman's social and reproductive vulnerability, in the poorest countries.
[7] The Hague Convention of 29 May 1993 on Protection of Children and Co-operation in Respect of Intercountry Adoption (Duncan, 1993).

and have respect for the adoptive children's birth parents, in most cases ties with the birth family are broken and adoptive parents and children often even do not know who the birth parents are. An increasing number of adoptees are engaged in research on adoption now, and they have been doing very interesting work. Some of them have been very important in the post-colonial critique of transnational adoption by designating transnational adoption as a neo-colonial transfer of goods, children as goods, from the poor South to the rich West. Moreover, they have testified about their experiences and feelings of not knowing themselves due to clean break adoption policies that erased their birth ties in a cultural context that highly values blood relations and authentic national origins (Oparah, Shin, & Trenka, 2006).

Which trajectories of social change and development could you identify through your research?

What we see in many of the traditional "receiving" countries is that the number of adoptions has dramatically decreased. Last summer I participated in the International Forum on Intercountry Adoption and Global Surrogacy in The Hague and I heard one of the other participants say: "What we have accomplished in transnational adoption research is that transnational adoption has almost come to an end but with the proliferation of global surrogacy we have got something worse instead".
Partly as a consequence of the diminishing of transnational adoption, global surrogacy is booming. There are Indian clinics, for instance, in which women stay to grow the embryos of rich North Americans or Indians; embryos that have been produced with the help of (often white) egg cell donors. This is a very complex practice driven by unequal global power relations and a neoliberal global market, which raises complex ethical issues and questions regarding how free a choice is. It also raises questions on how to deal with the new multiplicities it creates: a child can have different genetic, gestational and social parents. How is it going to be dealt with this multiplicity? Who will be considered a mother and who is not, and what consequences this will have on the identity work of parents and children?
In my research I want to investigate how to find other ways of caring for children, by changing our way to look at children and family, beyond the ideology of exclusivity within the nuclear family. I want to find out what leaving this framework can bring about. Are there any other options that could be better for children? Can we find better ways to take care for the unaccompanied minors, the ones who come to Belgium voluntarily and are now often being sent back? My interest is mainly in fundamental research, I am investigating things mainly on a theoretical level. However, I think that things are changing, and in transnational adoption for instance things have already changed in some ways. I see a lot of willingness among adoptive parents to be in contact with biological parents for instance, as well as there is willingness among birth parents to be in contact with the adoptive parents, although this willingness is still not structurally supported. I also heard in my research on unaccompanied minors that in spite of the structural barriers that hamper the development of durable and meaningful care relationships, some of the unaccompanied minors are able to build strong ties with social workers, guardians, or with volunteers. These ties were often described by the former unaccompanied minors as meaningful and positively affecting their feelings of belonging, and were sometimes even qualified as *kin-like*. So things happen, which means that change is possible.

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