

Adoption: solution or problem?

Roughly said, in the Netherlands there is still this dominating image of international adoption: a couple unable to conceive any children of their own adopts a child from the poverty in a Third World Country, so that everybody is happy.

If it weren't such a bright commercial pesky expression this could have been a "win-win situation".

However, according to Marcia Engel and Luís Carlos Vogels this is definitely an obsolete romantic ideal. Having a child, adopted or not, is almost in definition a selfish deed, and growing up in our country isn't always the best thing for a Third World Child.

This doesn't mean they imply that there aren't happy adoption parents and adopted children. Thankfully there are. However, to picture the opposed image of this Luís brings up a quote from an African boy he got to know: adoption is a choice between dying from hunger or dying from sorrow.

Marcia views this as a form of something that's life lasting. "You are and will always be an adoptee".

"The thing you can do best is to learn how to deal with it, so that it won't have any effect on your social life and your future." However, she knows from her own experience how difficult that is as much as Luís when you hear their life stories which are given in the next column.

The expectations of a lot of adoption parents are too bright.

Difficulties in raising often lead to a divorce, where the child will end up on the streets for the second time. The fear of commitment and leaving which is big to adopted children will only become worse by this. Lots of them end up at places such as youth care who are unable to give them the right help they need. Suicide occurs fairly often.

In a nutshell, those are the problems they describe. Should you think that Marcia and Luís have not experienced this themselves, then they definitely got them from fellow sufferers. For them this was the reason for founding Plan Angel. The most important parts for that initiative now are the international registration system for the reunion of adopted children – approximately 35,000 in the Netherlands – with their biological parents abroad, and the large collection of adoption files.

Not that they are against adoption as a matter of principle, but the interest of a child always needs to be on the first place.

According to them it can only be done in a relation where both adoption parents and biological parents are involved. "Only after all parties in the triangle receive the recognition and respect they deserve there will be talk of a good adoption", Marcia says.

Luís cites the human rights to demonstrate that international adoption should be stopped. "Children have a greater benefit in staying in their original surroundings. It would be best if the welfare and social securities would be made equal in the world." Marcia realizes that it takes some time. He says: "That is right, but that is my ideal."

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He: "That's right, but i ideal."

She: "Adoption should be the last resource."

He: "But often this is seen as a first option."

Luís thinks adoption is not a social solution but a social problem. He speaks of a Legal form of a child market, and Marcia supports him in that statement even if she'd rather speak of a "camouflaged" form of a child market.

Anyhow, there are a lot of people in Western and corrupt Asian, African or Latin American countries who make a lot of money in adoption.

Marcia, who wants to get to the source of the problem with her foundation, knows that in her country of origin a Colombian couple ca nadopt a child for \$2,000, while a foreign couple has to pay more than \$20,000.

There are also recent examples from Chad and Cambodia from where it seems that money is often a thriving factor at adoption.

"It really is just a market", Marcia says.

"Since the demand for adoption children is bigger than the offer, not only will the price increase, but in many ways the offer is increased as well."

Luís: "It seems as if child factories originate where bonuses are given out to bring adoption children."

Marcia: "Mothers are being put under pressure to give up their children, directors of orphanages are more than willing to take care of the desired papers against a fee of course

Luís is the one who deals with the adoption files. "They are virtually incomplete. Children are laundered like

money for adoption while it is fundamental for the papers about the origin and the biological parents to be correct.”

He is not alone in this notion. The files are also a source of care for “Wereldkinderen”, by far the biggest conciliation association in the Netherlands.

For instance, they cancelled the adoption from Ethiopia last month when it appeared that the files didn’t match to the truth for a great part.

The start Luís made with the founding of a worldwide digitalised network of adoption files is quite modest. “But if I can prove of a thousand files that they’re not correct, then the Dutch Ministry of Justice and European Court won’t be able to dodge the fact to fight against false adoption papers.”

“Wereldkinderen” leaves a comment for the initiative of Marcia and Luís that they are also against adoption on base of incorrect files. According to spokeswoman Martien Miedema the internet does offer new possibilities to reunite children and biological parents, but she would like to see this happen under correct guidance such as “Wereldkinderen”.

“Wereldkinderen” says to always be open to contact with adoption children, and Luís certainly does not exclude a cooperation with this organization and others such as Unicef and Amnesty.

Marcia, who has also plans for educative projects in countries of origin and a special crisis shelter for adoption children in the Netherlands, thinks the same way. They both realize that their ambitions are big. Perhaps too big? “If we take one step at a time we will be able to handle it.”

See also www.adoptionangelsnetwork.com and www.adoptionfilesnetwork.com.

They just started this year and their project is still in an infant stage, but their ambition is big: a worldwide network has to end the atrocities around international adoption. Two – already somewhat older- adoption children are telling about their initiative.

by **Peter van Vlerken**



Marcia Engel and Luís Carlos Vogels. Pictures: **René Manders**