

## **'Baby Come Back': Child Circulation, Crises of Social Reproduction, and the Political Economy of Childhood in Intercountry Adoption**

While the symbolic value of children as embodiments of a nation's future has been well documented,<sup>[1]</sup> children's political economic importance is easily overlooked in favor of sentimentalized notions of children. Intercountry adoption (ICA) places (often very young) children at the center of essential development questions – most especially crises of social reproduction – in the global North and South. Yet humanitarian narratives of 'child saving' can gloss over the structural issues of poverty, demographic inequalities, and insecurity that gave rise to ICAs in the first place, recasting broader international development questions as 'giving children a better life'. Through a generational approach to the global political economy of adoption, this paper will thus problematize how children's exportability in the global economy alleviates crises of social reproduction, from the 'baby famine' in Western industrialized nations to the 'youth bulge' in developing countries. This is because the central importance of children to a nation becomes globalized in ICA: transnational adoptees become symptomatic embodiments of both receiving countries' social and economic 'progress' and sending nations' failures to 'take care of their own'.<sup>[2]</sup> Considering the ways in which adoptees are recast as powerful symbols of social redemption and renewal, from receiving countries' narratives of 'child-saving' to sending countries' re-scriptings of adoptees as ambassadors and development allies, it will highlight how studying ICA as development strategy can thus enhance our critical understandings of larger questions of children's centrality in international development.

Keywords: ICA, development, political economy, social reproduction

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<sup>[1]</sup> Cheney, K. E. 2007. *Pillars of the Nation: Child Citizens and Ugandan National Development*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

Burman, E. 2008. *Developments: child, image, nation*. London; New York: Routledge.

<sup>[2]</sup> Dubinsky, K. 2010. *Babies without Borders: Adoption and Migration across the Americas*. New York: NYU Press.

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