

# Adopted from Haïti

by **Christla Petitberghien** adopted from Haiti to France.



While the 2013 reform certainly made progress, I do not think it is enough. I believe that full adoption must be abolished, which not only deprives adopted persons of the crucial contact with their natural families but also erases their existence legally. In full adoption, our birth certificate is declared null and void and is replaced by another fictitious document that declares we were born to our adopters. This is forgery. In other words, it is a form of cognitive diversion which denies and crushes our first biological identity and our reality in favour of a so-called legal “Fiction” and yet which is at the origin of most of the systemic discriminations that we must make. In front of us, adopted people, a marginalised and invisible social group. I always wonder how people can find it normal to cut and destroy the bond between the child and his family? How can we find this acceptable? Why do we find it normal for individuals to spend their lives looking for their families? To live in uncertainty and non-information? To wonder whether his family is still alive? Or if we will find our dead fathers and mothers? Why do we trivialise separation so much and even seek to encourage it. We should stop believing that removing children from families in precarious socio-economic situations helps children. It doesn't help. It doesn't solve anything except to create more trauma for this child.

In the adoption system, poverty is seen as an acceptable reason for adopting children. It is therefore assumed that removing children from their families is a solution to poverty. Even though the living conditions of the original family should not be the reason for all separation of a child from its parents. Did we not see the vehement reactions of the American and world population when Donald Trump implemented a policy of separations between immigrant families and their children? How many people were outraged? How many people were alerted to the fact that separating a child from his family because of their economic situation is inhumane? However, with adoption, the same thing happens. Mothers are separated from their children for economic and social reasons instead of receiving the appropriate support and no-one takes offence. Through adoption, this is made acceptable. Ritta Högbäck, researcher at the University of Helsinki recalled in her study on “*International adoption and the social production of abandonment*” that “the United Nations General Assembly (2010), for example, clearly declared that poverty should never be the only justification for removing a child from its parents, for placing it in an alternative care facility or for preventing its reintegration, but should be seen as a signal of the need to bring appropriate support for the family. In practice, material deprivation is a major motivator for adoptions, and impoverished natural mothers have not received help or support to keep their children. The adoption system leaves mothers on their own and does not help them. “Is it true,

how many of us have found our families in the same situation as when we were adopted? Still in the same poverty, still without resources and having received no help? Parents are always left behind in the adoption system”, as Debora L. Spar, Senior Associate Dean of Harvard Business School Harvard School of Business said. “It's the poor states that produce children and the rich who consume them. In this process, poor parents are left behind, being only the original makers of other people's children.”

Let us stop thinking that children in nurseries and orphanages have no families, that they have been abandoned because this is not true for the vast majority. Many people claim that families have made the choice to leave their children behind. This is not true. None had the capacity to make a genuine choice. Indeed, they are not offered any other possibilities except adoption. There are no alternatives of temporary care, financial help, support structures for mothers in difficult situations, support in the face of lack of resources. So what is a choice made in the absence of other options? What we do not consider in the rhetoric of the supposed free choice of natural families is the very precise and constraining framework in which the decision of separation fits. In fact, what we are removing from the table is how the renunciation of the child by a mother and her family was determined by social, economic and political factors; the actions of most birth mothers, far from being an enlightened choice and made with complete freedom, they are more forced separations than anything else. Their "choice" was made in the absence of any other alternatives, therefore constrained by the inequality of the conditions in which they live. In addition, when we speak of "informed consent" in matters of adoption, it should be remembered that this consent is always never fully informed and that there is always an enormous asymmetry of information which helps to promote consents from natural mothers. Indeed, if sometimes mothers have been correctly informed of their loss of all parental rights over the child and the permanent rupture with their offspring caused by adoption, certain information which would nevertheless be decisive for the mothers' decision-making was never told to them. What am I talking about? Of the devastating trauma of separating a mother from her child, both for themselves and for the child. Mothers are never made aware of the research established on separation, the risks for the adoptee, the chances of secondary infertility and of developing mental disorders and post-traumatic stress, the importance of the mother-child bond. How can we explain that adopters are now duly informed of the effects of trauma (separation, uprooting and adoption) on the adopted child, even though natural mothers who are pressured into making a decision with irreversible consequences are not? We can therefore see that consent can never be made in an informed manner when we omit the truth about the fate of the child and its mother.

Thus, we must think of nursery children not as abandoned but as having a family. These children have parents and usually a whole extended family who care about them. We must not think of this family because we will only truly help the child, we can only prevent abandonment by taking their whole families into account. Instead, let's help them look after their children. Let us support them financially so that they can raise them with dignity. Let's invest in family preservation and family reunification associations. Let's invest in family empowerment programs. Let's work to further reduce the number of adoptions.