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## Parenting, citizenship and belonging in Dutch adoption debates 1900-1995

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### ABSTRACT

This article tests the use of the concepts 'politics of belonging' and 'intimate citizenship' for explaining (dis)continuities in intercountry adoption. It focusses on the Netherlands in the period 1900–1995. Adopters, adoption agencies and authorities in the countries of origin and settlement were the main actors. This article shows that adopters were claiming a right to a family, receiving states were granting or withholding rights, and adoption agencies were not only voicing moral claims and following a political agenda, but also a commercial one. In the discourse used in press and Parliament, intercountry adoption was justified and children were 'freed for adoption' by redrawing boundaries and hierarchies between cultures and nations, as well as by redefining the importance of ties, (dis)qualifying 'parents' and stressing state responsibilities.

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In 1998, the South-Korean president welcomed back to the 'motherland' people who as children had been adopted by Europeans and Americans. He emphasised blood ties, kinship and loyalty to the nation. He apologised for the 200,000 adoptions since the 1950s, and said these filled his country with shame (Yngvesson 2002). This story highlights ideas about parenting, belonging and citizenship that are addressed in this article. Children are assumed to be nested in families, and families in communities, which in turn have loyalties to the nation-state. In order to make a child 'adoptable', what constitutes a 'parent', 'family' and 'belonging' had to be contested. Children were 'freed for adoption' at three levels: by emphasising that their family, community and country of birth failed them. This article looks at how parenting, belonging and citizenship intersect by analysing debates in Dutch Parliament and press in the twentieth century.

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## Parenting, citizenship and belonging

Theoretically, this article ties in with academic debates about the ‘politics of belonging’ and ‘intimate citizenship’. These concepts tap into the idea that public debates influence how laws and policies take shape (Bonjour and De Hart in this issue). Debates in the media and in Parliament structure and define families (Bonjour and de Hart 2013). The ‘politics of belonging’ focus on when, how, why and by whom boundaries between groups of people are (re)drawn. Boundaries between ‘us’ and ‘them’ are continuously renegotiated (Yuval-Davis 2006).

In debates on citizenship, a distinction is made between juridical and discursive citizenship. Juridical citizenship discriminates between citizens who have full legal rights, and non-citizens who do not. Discursive citizenship relates to the idea that citizens form a community and share a history, language, phenotypical features and religion (Soysal 1994; Pawley 2008). ‘Mothers’ are regarded as the guardians of the boundaries of discursive citizenry and ‘good mothers’ should act in the best interest of their children (Yuval-Davis 2006; Bonjour and de Hart 2013). Family migration is not (only) about the moral and legal claims of family members (outsiders) to get in, but also about the moral claims of insiders (citizens) to have the right to a family (Block 2015). Intercountry adoption (ICA) makes this especially clear. People need to represent themselves in the political sphere in order to do ‘boundary work’ even on issues that relate to the privacy of the family and the intimacy of reproduction (including adoption). This connection between public discourses and private life is called ‘intimate citizenship’ (Plummer 2003).

Research has shown that discourses might be anti-immigration in the policy making stage, and pro-immigrant rights in the policy implementation stage (Patler and Gonzales 2015). Politicians are confronted with what I call the ‘restrictionist paradox’; the same people who favour immigration restrictions, protest against harsh measures when policies are implemented. This is especially true when children are involved. ‘Child cases’ lead to inclusive constructions of citizenship in which child migrants are seen as ‘belonging’ to their new society even after a short stay. Children are *the* moral referent for ‘good citizenship’ and societies and people are only seen as civilised when they protect children (Moeller 2002).

Within the context of ICA, the tandem ‘intimate citizenship’ and the ‘politics of belonging’ explains the construction of shared ideas regarding ‘good’ and ‘bad parenting’, which qualify or disqualify people as parents, and make adoption possible. The tandem also relates to the construction of shared ideas regarding the state’s responsibilities to protect ‘its’ children (Yngvesson 2010). This article argues that, what is commonly called, ‘freeing children for adoption’ is a legal as well as a discursive process in which parenting and belonging are (re)defined (Frekko, Leinaweaver, and Marre

2015). Children are 'freed for adoption' when the family, community or state fails them (Hearst 2012; De Graeve and Bex 2016). At the level of the family, adopters need to prove they can be 'good parents', while birth parents are labelled 'bad parents'. At the level of the community a child becomes adoptable, if the (religious, ethnic) community can be constructed as not caring. At the level of the state, the idea is that 'good parents' live in 'good states', and – reversing the idea – states that generate a large number of adoptees are 'bad states'. This article looks at these three levels (family, community and state). It argues that in Dutch parliamentary debates and newspapers 'freeing' the child for ICA was presented as a positive, benevolent and civilised deed which was justified by redefining the importance of blood and religious ties, by (dis)qualifying 'parents' and by stressing the state's responsibility for 'good parenting'. In the sections that follow, the state of the art, methods, and Dutch adoption law are discussed briefly, followed by three sections on the three levels testing the usefulness of the concepts 'intimate citizenship' and the 'politics of belonging'.

### State of the art

The literature on adoption is extensive and fragmented. Most publications are written by social workers, lawyers, psychologists and anthropologists, who highlight experiences of adopters and adoptees (Anagnost 2000; Yngvesson 2010; Leinaweaver and Van Wichelen 2015). Historians tend to focus on adoption scandals in the past (e.g. Balcom 2007). Most studies look at one group only (e.g. Korean adoptees in the US). ICA is a form of migration, but only a few authors have discussed it in this context (e.g. Weil 1984; Hajtó 2013). Lovelock (2000) compared the adoption and migration policies of the US, Canada and New Zealand and concluded that in migration law the interest of the state comes first, while in adoption law the interest of the child takes priority. Davis (2011) argued that by labelling adoptees 'refugees', US authorities could side-step the criticised US immigrant quota system. According to Winslow (2012) this side-stepping was used to improve the reputation of the US. The Soviet Union claimed that capitalism equalled racism, and the US quota system served as proof (Varzally 2017). Overall, the scant literature that does connect migration and adoption focusses on the experiences of adoptees and adopters, and on the US and its attempts to manoeuvre migration restrictions and criticism on immigration policies (Carp 2002; Stein 2001).

In Western Europe, adoptions are family migrations and not refugee migration (as it partly was in the US). Furthermore, for Western European countries, the colonial context was important, while for the US it was not. Most adoptees move from poor to rich countries, but the US both receives adoptees, and sends them out. There are also differences between European

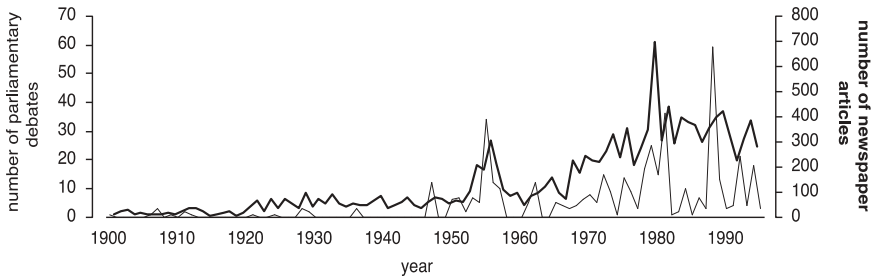
countries. In the UK, the number of domestic adoptions remained higher than in the Netherlands, because there were more teenage pregnancies, children were put up for domestic adoption earlier, and there were more adoptions by grandparents or stepparents (Mignot 2017). In Italy and Spain, ICA started late (San Román and Rotabi 2017). In Sweden and Norway, the adoption index (number of adoptions per 1000 births) was twice as high as in Belgium, the Netherlands and France. In Germany and Austria, the adoption index was much lower, while in Eastern European countries it was negative (children were adopted from these countries). Belgium, the UK and France received adoptees from the same countries as the Netherlands did. In all these four countries the number of domestic adoptions fell after 1975 because unmarried motherhood was no longer stigmatised, and contraceptives and abortion became more easily available (Lovelock 2000; Davis 2011). Overall, Dutch ICA and debates about adoption are comparable to those in France, Belgium and the UK.

This article adds to the literature by looking at adoptions from multiple countries and over a long period of time (almost a century) and by analysing how 'intimate citizenship' and the 'politics of belonging' worked at the levels of community, family and state.

## Method

For the analysis of debates in Dutch Parliament and press searches were conducted using Dutch words for 'adoption of children', and 'foster care' as well as the diminutives for adoptees from China, Korea, Vietnam, Colombia and Brazil. Diminutives for adoptees from other countries were not used, probably because they were awkward to pronounce.<sup>1</sup> Adoptees were called 'orphans', and the children's homes 'orphanages' even when they were not. Newspapers never called the adoptees 'migrants' or 'foreigners', but they did use the term 'foreign children'. The migration of the children was called 'home-coming'. By avoiding the label 'migrant', belonging was implied. Many of the articles were accompanied by photographs, usually depicting deplorable living conditions and the bad health of the children before adoption, and happily smiling adopters with well-dressed and well-fed children after adoption. Newspapers used 'war metaphors', in which adoptions were described as a fight against inflexible bureaucrats and harsh procedures. They used a 'pregnancy metaphor', in which waiting for a child was described as a pregnancy lasting for years. Dominant was the 'rescue metaphor': the child would have died, if it had not been adopted (compare Ahluwalia 2007; Anzil 2013; San Román and Rotabi 2017).

About 8,000 newspaper articles were published on adoption in the period 1900–1995 (see Figure 1 for a breakdown per year). Numbers peaked in the mid-1950s when the first Dutch Adoption Act was introduced partly as an



**Figure 1.** Number of Parliamentary debates about adoption (left y-axis, thin line) and number of Dutch newspaper articles on adoption (right y-axis and thick line) 1900–1995.

Based on Dutch digitised newspapers (<http://lab.kb.nl/tool/newspaper-ngram-viewer>) and Dutch digitised Parliamentary debates (<http://search.politicalmashup.nl/>).

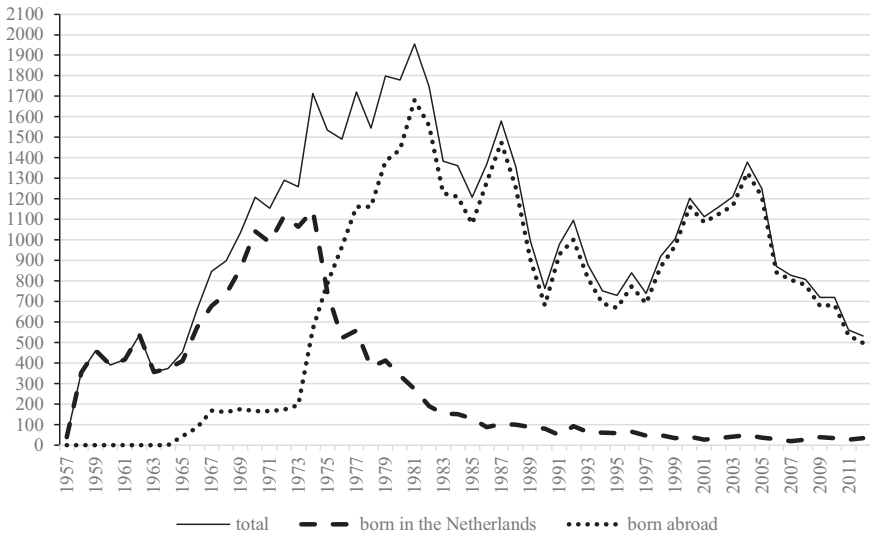
outcome of debates about ‘war children’, as will be described below. Numbers increased in the 1970s, when ICA replaced domestic adoption, and in the 1980s when adoptions from Sri Lanka became a subject of heated debate. Parliamentary debates more or less followed the trend in newspapers, with the exception of the 1980s, when the debate in the press about Sri Lanka was not echoed in Parliament. In the 1990s, interest in Parliament increased because of the adoptions from Romania, as will be described below.

The analysis focussed on how problems and causes were framed (Schrover 2011; Schrover and Schinkel 2013). Was ‘bad parenting’ presented as the problem? Were states seen as failing? Were children regarded as at risk? What was presented as the remedy (e.g. state interference)?

There is a large and inconclusive academic debate about the interaction between media and policy (see Schrover and Walaardt 2018): authors do not agree on what influence newspapers have on policies, if any. However, extensive media coverage cannot easily be ignored by policy makers, especially if it is about children at risk (Moeller 2002). As described below, there was a connection between press campaigns and individual solutions (e.g. in the case of Bertha) or policy changes (e.g. in the case of ‘war children’). The article focusses on cases that were covered extensively by the press, or in Parliamentary debates, or both.

## Dutch intercountry adoption

The Netherlands introduced its first Adoption Act in 1956. Before 1956 there were adoption-like situations (described below). Between 1956 and 2010, 55,000 children were adopted, 39,000 of whom came from abroad (Winter, Eilbracht, and Sprangers 2010). After 1970, in the Netherlands, ICAs replaced domestic adoptions (Figure 2). In the 1980s, the number of ICAs was the largest: about 2,000 children per year. In 1990, single parent adoption became possible, and this



**Figure 2.** Number of adoptions in the Netherlands 1956–2012.

Source: based on data from the Dutch Central Bureau of Statistics.

opened a door for adoption by same sex couples. In 2016, the Dutch Council for the Protection of Juveniles advised the Dutch Minister of Justice to stop all ICAs because adoptees frequently developed problems later in life. The Dutch Minister of Justice did not follow that advice, but instead urged for more control. The number of ICAs in the Netherlands fell further when infertility treatments improved (Wolfsen et al. 2016).

## Redefining belonging

This first section focusses on community, while testing the usefulness of the concepts ‘intimate citizenship’ and ‘politics of belonging’. The introduction of the first Dutch Adoption Act was the outcome of highly emotional debates about what to do with Jewish children who had survived the Holocaust hidden by non-Jews (compare for Belgium and France: Marrus 2008; Zahra 2009).<sup>2</sup> The introduction of an adoption law had been discussed on three previous occasions. Firstly, in the 1890s, when adoptions in the Dutch East Indies caught the eye of the press. Only the Chinese minority in the Dutch colony could adopt, while Europeans and the native population could not. According to a Dutch politician, adoption was part of ‘the Chinese un-Christian culture’ (*Java-bode* 16-4-1891).<sup>3</sup> Dutch authorities regarded adoption as exotic, and linked it to trafficking. A Dutch child saving organisation said ‘our Chinese brothers and sisters’ thought different about adoption than ‘we’ did. Dutch people should not be encouraged to copy these practices, and therefore there should be no adoption law.

Secondly, the arrival of Hungarian children led to debates about an adoption law. Between 1920 and 1925, 60,000 children from Austria-Hungary, Russia and Germany were transferred to Great Britain, Switzerland, the Netherlands, Belgium and the Nordic countries for a temporary stay and to recover from the hardship of the war (Hajtó 2009, 2013). About 8,000 of the 14,000 Hungarian children that came to the Netherlands stayed permanently. Members of Parliament (MPs) suggested to formalise these adoptions by introducing a law, but Dutch authorities feared that would stimulate adoption.<sup>4</sup> Unwanted children were best cared for by relatives, by foster parents or in institutions from which they could be reclaimed once the mother got her life back on track: blood ties were considered paramount.<sup>5</sup> Children could never belong to a new family; they always belonged to their birth mothers, some MPs argued.

The third time the introduction of an adoption law was discussed was after the arrival of British children in the period 1936–1939. In England, children, who had been put in orphanages by poor mothers, were seen as a burden to the state. Thousands of these children were brought to Australia, Canada and New Zealand (Sherington and Jeffery 1998). 300 to 500 of these babies were ‘adopted’ in the Netherlands and the Dutch East Indies (*Nieuwe Tilburgsche Courant* 23-7-1936; *Soerabaiasch Handelsblad* 1-8-1936; *De Sumatra Post* 23-7-1937).<sup>6</sup> The Minister of Justice continued to oppose the introduction of an adoption law, hoping that its absence would discourage these ‘adoptions’ (*De Telegraaf* 18-7-1936).<sup>7</sup> A fascist MP said ‘we’ should not care for ‘British paupers’.<sup>8</sup> England may try to rid itself permanently of its paupers, but without an adoption law in the Netherlands the children could never truly belong to Dutch families. It was in line with ideas regarding the importance of blood ties and belonging formulated earlier. In 1939, Dutch newspapers started to write about ‘trafficking’ in British children, and mentioned a ‘price list’ from which adopters could choose. Birth agencies asked 4000 to 6000 guilders (2000 to 3000 dollars) per child. British authorities in response stopped the ‘baby export’ (*Het Vaderland* 19-2-1939).

The ‘war children’ changed the debate fundamentally (Hoksbergen 2012).<sup>9</sup> After the Second World War, there were 4,000 ‘war children’ in the Netherlands, 3,500 of whom were Jewish.<sup>10</sup> The Jewish children were in the care of non-Jewish families and institutions, which had hidden them during the war. Jewish families and organisations reclaimed them, but their caregivers did not want to give them up. The children had been converted to Christianity, and were seen by their ‘adopters’ and others as no longer belonging to the Jewish community (Fishman 1978). The Minister of Justice stuck to the pre-war ideas and opposed the introduction of an adoption law that would formalise the relationship between the Jewish child and its non-Jewish care-taker.<sup>11</sup> However, now no longer everybody agreed. Already in 1944, a committee prepared a plan for the Dutch government in exile on how



to remove the parental authority of Jewish parents, who had placed their children in foster care during the war (Verhey 1991). The Jewish parents were labelled 'bad parents', who had abandoned their children. The foster parents were the 'good parents', who had saved the children. When the committee drafted its plan, it was not yet clear if the parents were dead or alive. The plan aimed to protect the rights of the foster parents over those of the birth parents. In light of pre-war debates this was highly surprising. Jewish organisations were furious, labelled the plan anti-Semitic and called it child robbery (*Nieuw Israelietisch Weekblad* 13-5-1949; Verhey 1991; Manasse 2004; Van Klinken 2006).

Debates in the press focused on Anneke Beekman, who had survived the war in hiding and had been baptised as a Catholic (over 2000 newspaper articles were published about her, but only part of them were about adoption; for a detailed newspaper analysis see De Verdwijning 1954). Anneke was born in Amsterdam in 1940 to Jewish parents. In 1943, her parents placed her in the care of five unmarried Van Moorst sisters, who ran a Catholic rest home. Anneke survived the war, but her parents did not. After the war, a Jewish organisation asked for her transfer to a Jewish family, but the Van Moorst sisters refused and claimed that the child was a Catholic and belonged to their community. After a bitter legal battle, a court decided that the child should be transferred to a Jewish family. The Van Moorst sisters hid her in a convent in Belgium (*De Volkskrant* 13-12-1958). Some newspapers claimed that it was in the best interest of Anneke if she stayed in her Catholic community, to which she belonged. Returning her to a Jewish community would be too much of a shock. Anneke reappeared only in 1961, after she reached majority (*Het Vrije Volk* 1-12-1961). She had been hiding in convents in Belgium and France. The claim of the Van Moorst sisters that Anneke did no longer belong to her Jewish community already shortly after the end of the war, was widely supported by newspapers, which presented the Van Moorst sisters as the hero-saviours (*De Tijd De Maasbode* 29-11-1961). It clearly was a break away from the dominant pre-war discourse.

As this section showed, the 1956 Adoption Act signified a dramatic redefinition of belonging: until the 1940s, blood ties were seen as defining belonging, and adoptions were labelled 'un-Christian' practices and 'pauper exports', as described above. MPs therefore protested against the introduction of an adoption law. This changed during the war when blood ties and religious ties were suddenly seen as irrelevant and children were labelled as belonging to their new communities even after a short stay. It changed 'intimate citizenship' and it illustrates how the 'politics of belonging', mostly working via press campaigns about Jewish 'orphans', paved the way for an adoption law and later intercountry adoptions.

## Disqualifying parents

This second section focusses on the family and tells the stories of Bertha and Miyah, with emphasis on 'good' and 'bad parenting' in a (post)colonial context.

In 1950, Dutch, Singaporean, American, English and German newspapers published 550 newspaper articles about the 13-year-old Bertha Hertogh (this newspaper coverage is analysed in detail in Schrover 2011). Bertha was born in the Dutch East Indies from a Dutch father and an Indo-European mother. During WWII, she was separated from her Catholic parents. After the war, her parents and siblings left for the Netherlands, without Bertha. Years later, Bertha was found in The Federation of Malaya (Malaysia), where she had been living since 1942 with Aminah, a Malayan Muslim woman, who said that Bertha had been given to her by the birth mother for adoption. Bertha refused to return to her parents and Aminah refused to let her go. In a court case in Singapore it was decided that Bertha should stay with Aminah. Three days later, 13-year-old Bertha, or Nadra as she was called in Singapore, married a 22-year-old Muslim Malayan school teacher. In a second court case the first decision was overruled and the marriage annulled. Bertha was removed from her home and hidden in a convent. It led to the Nadra riots, in which 19 people died and 200 were injured (*The Straits Times* 7-8-1951). Bertha left for the Netherlands with her birth mother. Muslim leaders framed it as a story about colonialism, and about Islam versus Christianity. Bertha was reunited with her birth mother after she had been living with Aminah for eight years. She hardly spoke Dutch, and had converted to Islam and married. Dutch newspapers disputed the conversion and the marriage, and emphasised the rights of the birth parents, and Bertha's belonging to Dutch society. In Singaporean newspapers, the birth mother was portrayed as the 'bad mother': she had given up her child for adoption, and she had left for the Netherlands without her (*The Straits Times* 20-5-1950). In Dutch papers, Aminah was the 'bad mother. She was portrayed as a child minder who had stolen Bertha, forced her to convert to Islam, kept her away from her birth mother, and married her off at age 13 (*Het Vrije Volk* 22-5-1950; *Het Parool* 24-5-1950). This 'bad parenting' justified interference by the Dutch state, and the 'rescue' of Bertha (Schrover 2011).

This construction of the 'bad' versus the 'good parent' was repeated on several occasions, including in the 1980s in the case of an Indonesian girl named Miyah. Debates started after the number of adoptions from Indonesia increased from 249 in 1978 to 4535 in 1981. Indonesia had gained independence from the Netherlands in 1949 after a bloody war. The first Dutch adoption organisations working in Indonesia began as travel agencies, which offered tours to people who had left the former Dutch colony a few decades earlier. The sight of abandoned and starving children on the streets

abhorred the tourists. These children were presented as proof that independence came too early (*De Telegraaf* 9-9-1978; *De Telegraaf* 8-11-1986). Islamic organisations in Indonesia objected against adoption because it did not exist within Islam. They feared the children would return to Indonesia as adults and spread Marxism or Christianity (*Leeuwarder Courant* 11-8-1979; *De Telegraaf* 12-11-1979; *Leeuwarder Courant* 23-7-1981). Indonesian authorities said couples in the West were paying 5000 to 6000 guilders for babies (2000 to 2400 dollar) (*Nederlands Dagblad* 12-7-1983; *De Telegraaf* 29-7-1983). According to newspapers, child trafficking was the result of a demand that was twice as high as the supply (1,200 children were available for adoption, while 7,000 couples were on waiting lists). Indonesian newspapers wrote about tricked mothers: when they could not pay their hospital bills after delivery, hospitals suggested giving up the child for adoption (*Nieuwsblad van het Noorden* 17-8-1979; *De Waarheid* 30-12-1980).

When the affair started, six-year-old Miyah was in the Netherlands for 18 months. Her birth father said she had been kidnapped and should be returned to him. Her Dutch adopters refused and demanded proof (*De Telegraaf* 29-10-1981). The birth father presented false papers and this made him the 'bad parent', according to Dutch newspapers (*Leeuwarder Courant* 23-7-1981). An Indonesian court decided that Miyah, whose birth name was Kurniawati, had been abducted and sold, and should return. Her adopters refused because, in their view, the adoption was legal (*Nederlands Dagblad* 6-7-1982). According to Miyah's adopters the Indonesian party DPI – which made this a cause célèbre in its 1982 election campaign – was telling the birth father what to say. This discredited him further. Sending Miyah back would be murder, the adoptive father added. Miyah had been ill when she arrived, and her adoptive parents had nursed her back to health. Rescuing her justified their claim that she belonged to her new family. The adopters were the 'good parents' who wanted to return Miyah if the story was true, but who had also saved her and were not willing to put her at risk again. The Indonesian ambassador in the Netherlands suggested a swap: Miyah could be exchanged for a more beautiful girl. According to the adopters this proved that this was a political issue. In the meantime, Indonesian authorities refused to sign adoption papers of all Dutch couples, and referred complainants to Miyah's adopters (*Leeuwarder Courant* 4-12-1981). The adoption ban was meant to force Dutch authorities into compliance. A Dutch man described to a journalist how children in an orphanage in Indonesia had thighs the size of his thumb (*De Telegraaf* 29-10-1981). The story stressed the need for action: children would die if they were not adopted soon. Orphanages filled up rapidly. Couples who had applied for adoption travelled to Indonesia and smuggled children out of the country. Newspapers presented them as heroes, rather than as lawbreakers. Indonesian authorities lifted the adoption ban six months later and arrested a woman who was accused of kidnapping

children (*Nieuwsblad van het Noorden* 17-11-1981). Miyah was not returned to her birth parents, despite Indonesian requests (*De Telegraaf* 1-8-1981). In 1983, Indonesia prohibited intercountry adoption (*De Telegraaf* 19-10-1983, 6-12-1983).

The stories of Bertha and Miyah – which were emblematic for many other stories presented in the press – showed how children were ‘freed for adoption’ by creating a dichotomy between the ‘bad’ and the ‘good parent’. The ‘good parent’ was Dutch, white and Christian, the ‘bad parent’ was not. The cases showed how the story about two girls and the intimacy of their families interacted with ‘politics of belonging’ when the Dutch state supported the claims of the Dutch ‘parent’, even at the costs of an international a boycott (in the case of Bertha) or severe clash with the former colony (in the case of Miyah). Bertha still belonged to her birth parents after a separation of eight years, while Miyah was seen as belonging to her adopting parents after a few months only.

### Disqualifying states

This third section looks at the level of the state. Adoption agencies were strong claim makers, who exercised pressure on states directly or via the press. In the 1920s, international women’s organisations campaigned against ‘bad adoptions’ and in favour of state interference. In 1925, the World Conference for the Child in Geneva stressed the states’ responsibility in case of neglecting parents and communities (Herman 2002). In 1938, a report for the League of Nations urged for more state control: in a civilised society the state should find a new family for the child if the family and the community failed (League of Nations 1939). If ‘bad states’ failed to protect ‘their’ children, ‘good states’ should rescue them. Children belonged to the states that protected them. This idea was used to justify the adoption of children born from relationships between Afro-American servicemen and women in countries they were deployed in. After WWII, about 10,000 babies were born from relationships between German mothers and Afro-American servicemen. In the 1950s, the American press started to write about German mothers abandoning their Afro-German children, and their mistreatment in orphanages (Fehrenbach 2005). Afro-American leaders thereupon urged Afro-American families to adopt them (Lemke Muniz de Faria 2003). Deployment of American troops in Japan (1945–1952), Korea (1950–1953) and Vietnam (1955–1975) led to the birth of children who were, according to US papers and adoption agencies, not accepted by Japanese, Korean or Vietnamese society. They were ‘rescued’ and brought ‘home’ to the US (Lovelock 2000; Choy 2013). The US was portrayed as taking its responsibility and cleaning up the remnants of war. The same rhetoric was used to ‘rescue’ so-called mixed-race children from the French, Dutch and Belgium former

colonies. In the colonies, hundreds of thousands of 'mixed-race' children – born to so-called native mothers and European fathers – were removed from their mothers, 'adopted by the state' and brought up as Europeans in orphanages. After decolonialisation, the former colonisers 'rescued' these children by bringing them 'home' to the 'mother country' often without the consent of the birth mother (Heynssens 2016; Rosen Jacobson 2018). The justification for these adoptions implied criticism on the adoptees' countries of birth, which the authorities in these countries did not appreciate and responded to with adoption bans. The same rhetoric was used in many other cases, as this section will show.

Between 1953 and 2004, 200,000 Korean children were adopted; 50,000 of them by families in Europe (Oh 2005). Most children were adopted in the 1950s and 1960s. In 1967, the famous Dutch novelist Jan de Hartog promoted on the popular Dutch Saturday night television show his book about his adoption of two Korean children. He said it would be great if 'we' could save some of these children. In response 800 Dutch couples offered to adopt a Korean baby; 110 children were indeed adopted (Hoksbergen 2012). According to newspapers 'mixed race' children in Korea were doomed to die; they had to be saved from a racist society (*Het Vrije Volk* 1-5-1973). Adoptions from Korea continued until complaints about malpractices increased. South Korea prohibited adoption in 1990 (*De Leeuwarder Courant* 29-11-1990). This story is typical for the responses to the criticism on ICA: it led to a ban in the country of origin and a search by adoption agencies for a new country of supply. Dutch adoption agencies very actively looked for adoptable children, moving from one country to the next.

In 1963, Dutch newspapers wrote about the outcome of such a search for adoptable children, which had led to the children's home Mitera, near Athens (*Het Vrije Volk* 20-7-1963). The positive story triggered a response, especially after TV documentaries explained how to adopt in Greece (*Nieuwsblad van het Noorden* 16-4-1964). The media contrasted Dutch and Greek procedures. In the Netherlands, procedures were long and intrusions into the intimacy of the adopters' private life were severe. A large number of questions was asked including: was the couple happily married (to be confirmed by friends and relatives)? Had they accepted the fact that their marriage had remained barren? (*De Tijd-Maasbode* 21-12-1963). The number of adoptions from Greece increased until journalists in 1966 mentioned trafficking and Greece forbid intercountry adoptions (*De Waarheid* 16-9-1966). Adoption organisations looked for a new country and turned to Sri Lanka.

In the 1970s, adoptions from Sri Lanka started. Numbers increased in the 1980s after Indonesia prohibited adoption (*Het Vrije Volk* 5-6-1987). In 1985, sister Elizabeth – the director of two European sponsored orphanages in Sri Lanka – left her monastery and religious life, and moved to the Netherlands in order to work with an adoption agency (BANDD: *Buitenlandse Adoptie Noord-*

*Nederland; Leeuwarder Courant* 4-2-1985). In 1986, 1670 children were adopted from Sri Lanka; only 37 of them came from orphanages, while all the others came from so-called 'baby farms'. 'Baby farms' were places where women could stay who were willing to give up their baby for commercial adoption (*Leeuwarder Courant* 4-6-1987). Newspapers wrote that Dutch adopters were paying 30,000 guilders (12,000 dollars) for a Sri Lankan child (*Het Vrije Volk* 5-6-1987). Adoption organisations denied that: adopters only paid 3500 to 5500 guilders. Newspapers wrote about trafficking, and about doctors and lawyers who profited from what newspapers called 'child hunting'. Lawyers in Sri Lanka, according to Dutch newspapers, earned 600,000 guilders yearly by facilitating adoptions. The Dutch organisation FLASH (Foundation for Life Adoption Services and Happiness) accused BIA (Bureau for Intercountry Adoption, also known as World Children) of trafficking, and BIA accused FLASH of the same. Western countries paid 10 million guilders per year to Sri Lanka for adoption, papers claimed. If that money would be spent on child care in Sri Lanka, more children would be better off. However, parents were not willing to pay for care in Sri Lanka, while they were for adoption, according to newspapers (*Het Vrije Volk* 18-4-1987). In 1987, Sri Lanka prohibited ICAs (*Leeuwarder Courant* 25-6-1987). Adoption agencies actively looked for a new country, and found adoptable children in Hungary.

In 1989, Adriaan Talens – director of the adoption agency *Meiling* – went on holiday to Hungary and accidentally came across a home filled with 'gypsy' children. According to Talens, it was by now 'very difficult to find new adoption channels', and many governments refused to cooperate. Hungarian authorities were however willing to work with him, especially when it came to the unwanted 'gypsy' children. Finding the orphanage was a lucky strike, in his view, and 'too good to be true' (*Nieuwsblad van het Noorden* 18-10-1989).

In the same year a scandal erupted in Romania. Ceausescu's communist regime had forbidden abortion and birth control, leading to the establishment of numerous, large and overcrowded 'orphanages'. Romanian people did not know about them until Ceausescu's fall, and did not adopt. Foreign demand was driven by the fact that Romanian children could pass as biological offspring. They did not stand out as much as adoptees from Indonesia, Korea, Vietnam and Sri Lanka (Noy-Sharav 2005). TV-broadcasts about 100,000 Romanian children living in destitute conditions, led to an adoption frenzy in the US and Western Europe. Media coverage of group departures of the children was extensive. 10,000 Romanian children left their country of birth between January 1990 and July 1991. Aspiring adopters travelled to Romania, but when the institutionalised children were rumoured to have hepatitis B and HIV, adopters approached families directly and offered 5,000 to 10,000 dollars in exchange for babies (Lovelock 2000; Stein 2001; Denechere and Scutaru 2010; Davis 2011; Hayes 2011). In 1990, Dutch TV

showed images of Romanian children with their new parents: the children were laughing, and the adopters were crying for joy (*Limburgs Dagblad* 10-1-1990). The director of a Dutch adoption agency went to Romania on 'a business trip', as he called it, searching for more children to adopt. He was shocked at what he found: children were standing in beds with iron bars and torn sheets. There was an overwhelming stench of urine, and there were no nurses. There were 63 orphanages, with 15,000 children on a population of 25 million, and 80 per cent of the children were, what the director called, 'gypsy' children. When the director asked about adoption possibilities, the head of the homes reacted surprised: the director surely did not travel all the way from the Netherlands to adopt 'black children'? The post-communist authorities forbid adoption, but soon afterwards the decision was revoked because orphanages filled up rapidly (*De Leeuwarder Courant* 19-1-1990). Shortly after, the adoption ban was re-installed because of objections within Romania.

The stories presented above can be repeated for many other countries including China, Poland, Russia, Colombia, Brazil, Peru, Ecuador, Philippines, India, Taiwan, Thailand, South Africa and Ethiopia. In all cases, aspiring adopters and adoption agencies actively looked for countries from which to adopt. A successful search was followed by stories about rescue and an increase in the number of adoptions. This led to stories about child kidnapping, 'baby farms', trade and fraud. Authorities in the countries of origin of the adoptees responded to the implied criticism, and prohibited intercountry adoptions. Aspiring adopters and organisations moved to the next country. The objections of adopters to procedures illustrates how 'intimate citizenship' and 'politics of belonging' worked; adopters complained publicly against the intrusions into their private lives and the denial of their right to a child. Authorities in the countries of adoption condoned adoption practices and supported claims that the children were better off than in failing states, until proof of fraudulent practices became too strong. In all cases it was the country of origin that forbade intercountry adoptions, not the country which received the children.

## Conclusion

Intercountry adoption was justified in Dutch parliamentary debates and newspapers at three levels: first by redefining the importance of ties, secondly by disqualifying 'parents' and thirdly by stressing state responsibility. The construction of 'good' and 'bad parents' was related to ethnicity, class, and religion. Newspaper stories created empathy with the 'good parent', and aversion to the 'bad parent'. 'Good parents' were bringing 'their' children 'home', and the 'home' of the adopter was middle-class, White, Christian, and 'stable': everything the household of the 'bad parent' was believed not to be.

The adopters' state supported claims of adopters and agencies even at the risk of an international conflict. The Cold War and post-colonial relations were relevant to how the politics of belonging worked out. This article showed that freeing children for adoption was about defining ties and families as well as boundaries and hierarchies between cultures and nations.

Intercountry adoption had the advantage that it reduced the authorities' opportunities for intrusions into the private life of the aspiring adopters, which was common in the case of domestic adoption. As such intercountry adoption can be seen as part of an 'intimate citizenship' strategy. Adopters and adoption agencies successfully avoided the controls that state authorities sought to put in place. In the 'politics of belonging' adoption agencies played a crucial role. This article showed that not only adopters, who were claiming rights to a family, or states, which were granting or withholding rights, had a role. The adoption agencies were an active third party. They however did not only voice moral claims or follow a political agenda, but also commercial one.

## Notes

1. Dutch words are 'adoptie van kinderen', 'geadopteerde kinderen', 'illegale adoptie' 'adoptieouders' 'adoptie', 'buitenlandse kinderen' 'pleegkinderen', 'pleegzorg', 'pleegouders', 'Chineesjes', 'Koreaantjes', 'Vietnameesjes', 'Colombiaantjes', 'Braziliaantjes', 'weeshuizen', and 'weeskinderen'. For Parliamentary debate the tool <http://search.politicalmashup.nl/was> used. The newspaper articles were found in digitised newspapers. 1.3 million Dutch newspapers have been digitised (about half of all Dutch newspapers). All national papers have been digitised plus, part of the large local papers, papers published in the Dutch East Indies. They are accessible via. <http://www.delpher.nl/>. Until the 1970s, the name of the journalist is mostly not mentioned in newspapers. Thereafter names are mentioned more but individual journalists are not important as claim makers.
2. Parliamentary Papers Dutch Lower House (PP) 1946–1947, 29-4-1947, 1527.
3. See also: PP 1915–1916, 4 no. 43, 102; PP 1904–1905, 121 no.5, 17.
4. Minutes Dutch Senate 1923–1924, 2 IV no.2 page 46, 163, 82, 300.
5. PP 1927–1928, 260 no. 3, 3.
6. Senate 1935–1936, 12-3-1936, 487.
7. Senate 1935–1936, 11-3-1936, 467; Senate 1935–1936, 11-3-1936, 467; Senate 1935–1936, 2 IV no. 2, 1 and 8; Senate 1935–1936, 11-3-1936, 467; Senate 1935–1936, 12-3-1936, 487.
8. Senate 1935–1936, 11-3-1936, 473.
9. PP 1946–1947, 29-4-1947, 1530.
10. PP 1946–1947, 2 IV no.8, 51; Onderzoeksgids Oorlogsgetroffenen WO2, 'Commissie voor Oorlogspleegkinderen', <http://www.oorlogsgetroffenen.nl/archiefvormer/CommissieOorlogspleegkinderen>.
11. PP 1946–1947, 3-12-1947, 585.



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