

Waiting for the White Child

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Zoraida Hernández and Ramón Garriga have not managed to do it. Ten years later, their attempts are still fruitless. Maternity and paternity has become their own, personal *via crucis*, a burden even perseverance has not been able to overcome. Every time they try, the answer is the same: you cannot adopt until a white child comes along. The result this reality's chilling effect brings about is a double loss: for maternity—about which is the most persistent—and for anti-racism.

This is a true story. As a couple, Zoraida Hernández and Ramón Garriga are somewhat strange. They got married at a very early age, fifteen years ago, and have maintained a relationship built on profound love—and I don't mean this rhetorically, like certain words meant to be a vocabulary of appearances. Theirs' is a serious thing because their marriage has been through a test: to remain together, not for any children they might have, which for many couples represents a Calvary sweetened by gratitude of their descendants, but rather for the children who do not come—due to biology.

Five years after much loving, consults with the best specialists around, being subjected to unfathomable treatments, and even medicine imported and recommended by physicians, Zoraida was not able to conceive. To improve her chances, she turned to artificial insemination when it was thought that at least half the problem was Ramon's sperm count. Once that

was ruled out, it was concluded that Zoraida was just not able to carry a fetus for very long.

They then decided to adopt. It was and still is the only option for them to be able to satisfy their most visceral, human desire: to have, educate, celebrate and prolong themselves through their values and strength of character. However, adoption is quite a process, as it should be. One must be carefully examined in the context of one's community and workplace, and by medical institutions that can assess a couple's psychological condition. The accuracy of these determinations is very important.

It is important to evaluate their psychological state as a couple, and not just as individuals, given the risk involved in handing over a child to people who want to form a family and then having it disintegrate. It is important for the couple to clearly demonstrate signs of stability, mutual respect and empathy before deciding something that will decidedly affect an infant's future. Even if the State does not have total responsibility over biological children, it certainly does when it concerns those it decides, with good intentions, to turn over to someone to raise at the center of a nuclear family.

The couple must also deal with legal and other institutions that deal with infancy. One can have had no legal or criminal problems, and have no record of child abuse. It is a rigor-

ous process. The issue's sensitivity and delicate nature demand this. Our most precious patrimony, our nation's children, can be given to someone if and only if there is a guaranty that they will not become unfortunate children. Of course, one never really knows, which is why the State is so cautious.

Zoraida and Ramón passed all their tests with flying colors. The very last measure, an evaluation of their economic stability, was the strongest of all indicators: both are professionals in the tertiary sector, which deals with foreign investment. Are ideal conditions for the greatest of all human endeavors really necessary? Yes. Except that those ideals are often contradicted by environmental circumstances that culture imposes, and one of them is racism.

Once they were thoroughly examined, the couple began to visit public orphanages to see children, most of the victims of abandonment. This is where social reality, their work, and an incredible overload of information began to reveal to them something unknown to them: institutionalized racism as public policy—in two ways.

The first, that the majority of children in public orphanages are black. Not much is ever said about this, but it seems to create the conditions for another social reality that characterizes how race is experienced in Cuba: the majority of black people, mostly men, are the ones who most often are found in two of our country's institutions: prison and the police force. This same, dual socio-racial phenomenon can also be seen as originating in public orphanages, and there is really a cultural link between the two. These places seem to be the primary environments through which the violence with which black people in Cuba are raised is channeled, whether it is through marginal neighborhoods, or small, parentless, childhood institutions. Legal and illegal vio-

lence have become the destiny of the black race in Cuba.

Zoraida and Ramón are witnesses to and live with this reality on a small scale. The reason? Because they finally realized how hard it was to adopt a white child in Cuba. For three years, they were unable to find an ethnically compatible little one so they could achieve their dream. White families are the most likely to protect their issue, a reality that should be researched from multiple angles. The social impact, a Cuban political process that did not successfully break the color or ethnic barrier of inequality, as was its stated objective, should be studied. The children of *different others* are the best mirror in which to see the social fissures that continue to follow the historical and cultural fault lines created by a multiplicity of races. The revolution has achieved nothing in this respect, despite its principles.

Despite all this, and after a conversation that included both their families, Zoraida and Ramón decided to adopt a black child. They reject the idea of a girl because both of them have always wanted a boy. There is a reason for this. Both families have many women: aunts. The couple wanted to show up with something different, a novelty, a wee baby who would be coddled and loved precisely because he was theirs. They were willing to offer this to a child of the black race. After all, they were brought up in humble, white families that were not racist, and willing to establish a post-racial family.

This was impossible. All their attempts to adopt a different child were met with the other institutionalized form of racism. Five attempts, even one this very year, have not been able to convince the authorities that society is moving in the right direction regarding racial integration. This is evidence of the cultural conservatism of these institutions regarding the innate postmodernity of our society's most progressive trends.

This institutionalized racism's position can be read in the following manner: the State does not have a policy of granting prospective parents of one race a child of another race. For apparently psychological reasons, according to a racist psychology that establishes what by all appearances is a racist judgment, it is believed that a black child in a white family or a white child in a black family will grow up in a socially negative environment that will not contribute to his or her normal development. According to these "extremely profound, psychological studies," the consequences of this for the identity of these children could be irreversible, and affect their future ability to integrate into their socio-cultural milieu.

According to this national school of psychological thought, which is along the lines of psychological studies that were very popular in the American South in the 1950s, the damage, in the long term, would occur at three supposedly related levels:

- At the affective level in a public space: these children would not be seen as equals by their potential peers
- At the level of identity: these children would not enjoy filial, ethnic or cultural connections
- At a third level of socio-psychological stability, which is considered essential for having the security necessary to be socially successful in adolescence and adulthood.

This is real racism. Psychologically, all these arguments can be dismantled the moment they are met with a rigorous challenge because they underestimate, among other things, the creative rupture that can and should take place in our social and symbolic cultural life. Zoraida and Ramón know this intuitively, which is why they get so upset when the State tries to cover up a weakness in our culture by using a totally baseless psychosocial argument. Fur-

thermore, they would never have assumed that the State would turn popular prejudices into science in order to frustrate their attempt to create a multiracial family.

This makes Cuba seem backward when considering the cultural progress that has been made worldwide. Couples are adopting children regardless of their race, ethnicity or any other marker of difference all over the place. There is abundant evidence of this and one need not name celebrity couples like Brad Pitt and Angeline Jolie to prove something that is supported statistically and through census figures.

This interracial practice is a very effective way of combating racism from infancy on. Children growing up in the multiracial environments tend to grow up more integrated in cultures that are becoming globalized, and being more socially tolerant. This is absolutely necessary for creating a healthy coexistence in an enriching and civilized milieu. A focus on ethnic purity is always parallel to the perversion and distortion of cultures and a cultural endogamy that limits human growth. This is particularly true in naturally multiracial environments like Cuba, in which all racial ghettos that have tried to forcefully *creolize* Cuban identity, have failed.

This institutionalized, racist practice is unconstitutional, no matter what angle it is seen from. The Family Code (1975) says nothing about adoption being limited by race or skin color. Zoraida and Ramón just want a constitutionally legitimate child as a way to fight this. This purpose, a more recent addition to their original one, is meant to combat the culturally institutionalized nature of a racism that prevents their happiness and hinders Cuba from finding itself. Waiting for a white child is not important in this struggle. A black child is.