

Book Review: *Bananas, Bastards and Victims?: Australian Intercountry Adoptees and Cultural Belonging* by Kim Michele Gray (2009)

Dr Kim Gray, sociologist and white adoptive mother, begins her journey of discovery on adoptee race, identity and culture with a personal account of her experiences during a Saet Byol Motherland Tour to Korea in 2005. The rejection of the 'victim' label sometimes associated with adoptee identity and sense of cultural belonging in favour of a resilient and resistant adoptee perspective lies at the core of this work and is crystallised in the following excerpt.

The life of an adoptee is difficult but so many of us are making it. Our success is not because we are bananas, bastards and victims. It comes from something we have yet to write about". (Adult Korean-American adoptee on Korean Adoptees Worldwide listserv- May 2003) p 23

Utilising a qualitative research methodology appropriate for the dynamic interpretation of insider perspectives, Gray seeks to understand how adoptees construct and perceive their identities. This book, drawn from doctoral research using grounded theory, explores the struggles faced by twenty adolescents and older adoptees, aged from fourteen to thirty-four years, born in Vietnam, South Korea, Sri Lanka and Malaysia in their quest for identity.

The adoptees in the study are loosely divided into two groups, older and younger, and compared to the 1.5 generation, those children of immigrants born overseas but reared in Australia. Gray highlights differences between the two groups of adoptees and relates these to the shift from assimilation approaches to adoption to one influenced by multicultural perspectives more open to acknowledging difference. A hybrid identity that is fluid and characterised by multiple relationships with individuals and communities in multiple places and spaces is proposed. Identity is positioned according to time, place and with whom the activity is taking place. Gray theorises that familial strategies, historical specificity and social support determine how well adoptees position their identities. I have no doubt the findings presented in this book will generate debate amongst researchers of adoptee identity. The thick descriptions generated by this research make the participants 'real' and are a pleasure to read. These young adults bravely describe their very personal experiences of belonging, identity, racism and

explorations of their past. Gray shares how hearing their experiences, both intensely painful and uplifting, enabled her to reassess previously held assumptions and her privileged position.

The work delivers what it promises. While saying this, in some places I wanted to more. There are some methodological questions that are likely to be answered by turning to the original thesis. Gray had moments where she meandered off track to areas unrelated to the research aims such as adoption from foster care and the reported absence of 'rescue' talk in Australia today. Gray concludes by highlighting the need for more research on post adoption support and educating adoptive parents on cultural aspects of their children's wellbeing.

This book will appeal to prospective and adoptive parents, adoptees and adoption professionals and academics. Gray positions her work as a partial, incomplete and culturally specific work. This work is certainly a worthy contribution to knowledge and fills a gap in the intricate tapestry of knowledge concerning intercountry adoption and cultural belonging.

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