Love and Violence in Transracial/national Adoption

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in

Ethnic Studies

by

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The thesis of Kit Myers is approved, and it is acceptable in quality and form for publication on microfilm and electronically:

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Chair

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2009
DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to both of my families and parents. Thank you for loving me.
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Finally, I thank my parents and family for always loving and supporting me and being the family that they are. Words cannot convey how much you mean to me and how much I love you.
My thesis, “Love and Violence in Transracial/national Adoption,” examines a New York Times special transracial adoption blog series, “Relative Choices,” to critically interrogate how love and violence operate in adoption discourse. In doing so, it explores two main questions: How have transracial/national adoptions been posited in the past and how does that inform current articulations? Second, how would a global/historical framework help rethink transracial/national adoptions beyond one based on the local/present? Specifically, I am interested in how a global/historical framework, on a larger level, disrupts our understandings of narratives of love, inclusion and progress and, on an individual family or particular level, how does such a framework challenge the
strict constructions of the family, and then lastly, on both levels how does it reveal the productive violence at play?

I argue that the normative narrative of adoption discourse has shifted from assimilation overdrive to the embracement of colorblindness and liberal multiculturalism through claims of inclusion, progression, and revolution. The condition of possibility for these assertions is mobilized by the ability of many adoptive supporters, parents and even adoptees to strategically place adoption in a local/present framework. This positioning individualizes, depoliticizes, ahistoricizes transracial/national adoption, and it enables love to operate as the encompassing and guiding principle for adoption. While the concept and role of love is no doubt integral to the act (commitment) and process of adoption, its presence and hypervisibility obscures how the global and historical play important roles in shaping adoption. Specifically, the local/present framework erases and obfuscates the productive and political symbolic violence\(^1\) of transracial/national adoption.

\(^1\) I borrow social theorist Denise Ferreira da Silva’s formulation of productive violence, which is derived from Foucault’s conceptualization of power/knowledge. For Silva, however, productive power (violence) extends beyond Foucault’s description of interiority as the principle “distinguishing feature of man.” While Foucault provides a cursory examination of the role that the racial plays in modern representation, she decenters historicity as the sole onto-epistemological descriptor and claims that both historicity and globality have roles in how the racial produces the Subject and the “other.” Denise Ferreira da Silva, \textit{Toward a Global Idea of Race} (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 2007) 23-25.
Introduction

White couples who have adopted Negro children cannot be categorized on the basis of such factors as education, income, intelligence, sophistication, or geographic location. Nor are they, as one worker succinctly if inelegantly stated, ‘causey’ people. Their motivation for adoption is based on love for a child, not involvement with racial problems.  

—Harriet Fricke, Minnesota Social Worker 1965

After a long period of warning tremors, adoption is ‘changing’ like a simmering volcano changes when it can no longer contain its explosive energy. It erupts. The hot lava flows from its soul, permanently reshaping not only the mountain itself but also every inch of landscape it touches…. The metamorphosis itself is breathtaking. Before our eyes, in our homes and schools and media and workplaces, America is forever changing adoption even as adoption is forever changing America. This is nothing less than a revolution. After a decade of incremental improvements and tinkering at the margins, adoption is reshaping itself to the core.

—Adam Pertman, Author and Director of the Evans B. Donaldson Adoption Institute

[A]doption has evolved from a secretive, closed process weighed down by dark stigmas and painful misconceptions into an infinitely more transparent experience…. Where once children hid their adoption from friends, if they even knew of it, adopted children today can belong to play groups made up entirely of adopted children. They can buy storybooks about being adoption, go to summer camps for children adopted from particular foreign countries…. In some cities, like New York, San Francisco and Boston, playgrounds are peppered with parents of various races and nationalities chasing children of other races.

—The New York Times

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2 Harriet Fricke, “Interracial Adoption: Little Revolution” Social Work 10 (July 1965) 94.
The first quote above comes from Harriet Fricke’s published description of the “little revolution” that occurred in Minnesota during the 1960s. Although the term “revolution” only appears in the title of her article, Fricke certainly believed as much, and she was possibly the first person to frame transracial adoption using the idea of revolution. More than three decades after Fricke, Adam Pertman makes a clear statement: The adoption revolution is changing America. But is love the driving and sole force of adoption as Fricke suggests, and are we in the midst of a revolution that has demonstrated progress through inclusion and openness after a long history of exclusion and secrecy as Pertman and *The New York Times* seem to indicate? Supporters and those who are involved in the adoption community, including adoptive parents, adoptees, social workers, academic scholars, lawmakers, etc. overwhelmingly agree that adoption has changed for the better, especially in terms of transracial and transnational adoption. At the same time, transracial/national adoptions have continued to be mired in debate.

5 “Advancements” include areas such as increase in “open” adoptions, transracial adoptions, the visibility and rise of adoptions by gay and lesbian couples, and new laws and policies that help promote adoption and permanency.

6 It is important to note that when I reference transracial and transnational adoption I am referring to the dynamic in which white parents adopt non-white children either within the US (transracial) or from abroad (transnational). The acknowledgement of transracial and transnational adoptions by parents of color is important, but the vast majority of these adoptions involve white parents, especially in the case of transnational adoptions in which 97 percent of the adoptive parents are white. Hiromi Ishizawa et al. “Constructing Interracial Families Through Intercountry Adoption” *Social Science Quarterly* 87.5 (December 2006) 1207-1224. According to Pertman white parents constitute about 90 percent of transracial foster care adoptions. Pertman 2000: 29.

* Additionally, when talking about transracial adoption it is almost entirely within a white parent/black child binary and when talking about transnational adoption it is almost entirely within a white parent/non-white (but specifically Asian and African) binary. This method is very limiting but because the scope of this project I simplify the subjects of study. My simplification not only ignores the increase of adoptions of Latinos in the US and Latin and Central America but also the long history of white families adopting Native American children throughout the 20th century.

± While I agree with *Outsiders Within* editors that there is utility in placing transnational adoptions from Asia under the larger rubric of transracial adoption in order to highlight common histories, experiences and identities, my project is more concerned with the disaggregation and what that would reveal (that being and meaning among adoptees and between adoptees and non-adoptees differs). Indeed, this is the
The federal government has recently attempted to dig both transracial/national adoptions and adoption in general out of this quagmire. Since 1994, the U.S. Congress has taken an official stance that promotes all forms of adoption by passing a handful of laws, drastically affecting adoption in America, such as the Multi-ethnic Placement Act (MEPA) of 1994 and the Inter-ethnic Adoption Provision (IEP) of 1996,\(^7\) which were both aimed at increasing transracial adoptions from the U.S. foster care system; the development adoption tax credits in 1996; the Adoption and Safe Families Act of 1997,\(^8\) the Child Citizenship Act of 2000,\(^9\) and the recently ratified Hague Convention with Respect to Intercountry Adoption in December 2007. In addition, congress has implemented adoption awareness programs,\(^{10}\) state adoption incentives (where individual states receive federal funding if they can increase the number of adoptions);\(^{11}\) and more

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\(^7\) The Inter-ethnic Adoption Placement Act of 1996 was especially telling of the state’s support of transracial adoption. Aside from stating that agencies cannot use race in determining adoption placements for children in foster care, it also affirms that these statutes fall within the boundaries of civil rights law in which aggrieved individuals have the right to bring legal action against the state, and any noncompliance of IEP results in financial penalties. Jan Carter-Black, “Transracial Adoption and Foster Care Placement: Worker Perception and Attitude” *Child Welfare* 81.2 (2002) 346.

\(^8\) This law, among other things, repositioned adoption as a higher priority by allowing adoption to be an option earlier, shortening the time allocated for attempts at family reunification.

\(^9\) This law allows foreign born children who are adopted by U.S. families to become citizens upon adoption.


than doubled the worth of the adoption tax credit in just over the ten years of its existence from $5,000 to $11,390.\textsuperscript{12}

By most accounts, the literature suggests that we have come a long way since transracial and transnational adoption’s beginnings in the 1950s. The reoccurring trajectory of transnational adoption places it along a numerical and teleological positive slope where numbers of adoptions have increased over time, and adoption agencies and parents have replaced old habits of what I call “assimilation overdrive” and colorblindness with “improved” practices of acknowledging difference, race, and culture through multiculturalism. The story told of domestic transracial adoption is often more complicated and necessarily includes the mention of the National Association of Black Social Workers’ position paper against transracial adoption in the early 1970s. Nearly every single source concerning transracial adoption mentions the NABSW and categorically marks the circulation of its position paper as the moment of disruption and decline of domestic transracial adoptions.\textsuperscript{13} Although the narratives of transracial and transnational adoptions depart from each other for a couple decades, they meet again in the mid-1990s with the passage of federal adoptions laws such as MEPA and IEP (commonly referred together and known as MEPA-IEP) and the signing of the Hague Convention in 1993\textsuperscript{14} and again with the emergence of new, revised adoption discourse.

So while some “pessimistic” supporters say that barriers to transracial adoptions for white


\textsuperscript{13} For one of the few sources that defends the NABSW see Laura Briggs, “Communities Resisting Interracial Adoption: The Indian Child Welfare Act and the NABSW Statement of 1972.” ASAIK Conference on Adoption and Culture, Tampa (Nov. 18, 2005) <http://www.u.arizona.edu/~lbriggs/adoptive.html>.

\textsuperscript{14} Although the Hague Convention took place in 1993, the US did not sign it until a year later, and it took another thirteen years for the US to finally ratify it.
parents still exist and must be eradicated, optimism abounds amongst the overall body of supporters.

At the same time, even with all of these “positive” transpirations, there is smaller but concerted critique that has repeatedly put transracial and transnational adoption on the defensive. Sensational stories such as the one involving Madonna and the Malawian child that she adopted in 2006 usually elicit the most damning critiques posted on blogs, journals, and other media, but increasingly, literature within academia and other locales have voiced concern and provided more cogent, nuanced critical analyses of both types of adoption. Thus, the two stories that I have quickly traced are ones of inclusion and progression and one of critique. It is at this nexus of “inclusion,” “progression,” and “critique” that I wish to examine and engage transracial/national adoption.

So much of the literature on domestic- and transnational transracial adoption is founded on statements by those who are either “for” or “against” them and whether it is “good” or “bad,” or beneficial or exploitative, or rescue or kidnap. This thesis aims to demonstrate that the critical questions should not center on the resolution of whether they are good or bad but rather what they do. Thus my broader question is what do transracial/national adoptions allow for and what do they foreclose? Their productiveness, in a practical, individual and flattened sense, cannot ethically be denied (no matter how ardently critics try) because of the social and material realities for children of color without permanent homes and guardians, caregivers, or parents. Although I do want to emphasize the practical (particular) aspect of transracial/national adoption, my focus is primarily on the political-symbolic dimension. I argue that a critical perspective of transracial/national adoption, as a lens of analysis, is valuable
because it not only disrupts paradigms of family\textsuperscript{15}, nation\textsuperscript{16}, and culture but \textit{most importantly} on the one hand, in a seemingly radical move, it makes a gesture toward post-raciality, where race would no longer matter.\textsuperscript{17} But this gesture, at its very base, is antithetical to post-raciality because race is always reinscribed, where cultural difference most often acts as the new proxy. Thus, on the other hand, a critical perspective exposes the limits of analyses and statements that are founded solely on historicity, inclusion, and progress.

In other words, whether or not a post-racial future is actually attainable or even desirable has yet to be determined, but movement toward the political-symbolic dimension of transracial/national adoption would allow us to explore globality as the

\textsuperscript{15} Carp notes adoption has historically been viewed as an inferior, illegitimate, and stigmatized form of family and kinship relation in U.S., while blood or biological ties have been “sanctified.” Thus adoption expands notions of family from solely blood kinship to adoptive kinship, but discourses and practices of transracial adoption also maintain problematic concepts of the nuclear and oftentimes heteronormativity. Adoption in America: Historical Perspectives. Ed. Wayne Carp (Ann Arbor: Univ. of Mich., 2002) 2. In his discussion of the “adoption revolution,” Adam Pertman argues that these foundational pillars (heteronormative and nuclear) of the American family are beginning to give. Single parenting has been on the rise and has tripled since the early 1990s (Pertman 2000: 238), and while gay and lesbian couples still have to jump through many (and oftentimes extra) hoops to dodge discriminatory practices, adoption is no longer monopolized by heterosexual couples and confined to previous notions of the “ideal” family. According to Pertman, 21 states allow same-sex couples to adopt, in one form or another (Ibid., 290-1). As a note to this footnote, although Pertman and many other authors have pointed toward this liberal trend, very few to none have critiqued how the desire for “inclusion” and “normalization” among gay and lesbian community is problematic. For greater discussion on the reproduction of the heteronormative family in adoption see Damian McCann and Fiona Tasker, “Lesbian and Gay Parents as Foster Carers and Adoptive Parents,” The Dynamics of Adoption: Social and Personal Perspectives. Eds. Treacher and Katz (London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2000). For varying perspectives on the issue in general see “Chapter Four: Should Adoptions by Gays and Lesbians Be Permitted,” Issues in Adoption. Ed. William Dudley (Greenhaven Press: Farmington Hills, MI, 2004).

\textsuperscript{16} The disruption of nation pertains specifically to transnational adoption where authors such as Volkman and Eng have argued that adoption has produced “new geographies of kinship” and the “new global family. Toby Alice Volkman, Cultures of Transnational Adoption. Ed. Volkman (Durham: Duke, 2005) and David Eng “Transnational Adoption and Queer Diasporas” Social Text 21.3 (2003) 1-37.

\textsuperscript{17} Paul Gilroy has articulated what post-raciality might look like. He calls for a radical “nonracial humanism” that responds to the sufferings wrought by raciology and reaffirms the stripped away human dignity caused by race-thinking (17-18). He calls for liberation not only from white supremacy but all forms of racializing, raciological thought, racialized seeing, thinking, and thinking about thinking. For Gilroy, this, indeed, is the only ethical solution. Paul Gilroy, Against Race: Imagining Political Culture Beyond the Color Line (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard, 2000) 41.
other ontoepistemological context. Thus, the new conditions of possibility for transracial/national adoptions require a move that escapes the dichotomous bog of good or bad, beneficial or injurious, and needed or unneeded, and instead, analytically consider the limits and the possibilities together, as mutually constitutive. Only with this repositioning can we get at the unaddressed issue that seemingly has escaped the grasp of adoption debaters, which is the idea of globality and historicity together, that is, how the historical informs the ways in which subjects emerge, which is intimately tied to the body and geographic regions. The goal can be simply stated as shifting from the local/present to the global/historical, where time and space and interiority and exteriority can be examined.

Thus, my two main research questions are first, how have transracial/national adoptions been posited in the past and how does that relate to how they are currently presented? Second, how would a global/historical framework help rethink transracial/national adoptions beyond one based on the local/present (or the liberal humanist model)? More specifically, how can such a framework, on a larger level, disrupt our understandings of narratives of inclusion and progress and, on an individual family level, challenge the strict constructions of the family and on both levels reveal the productive violence at play?

In explaining globality, Silva says that it is the other ontoepistemological context of representing human difference that emerged from history and science’s production of the racial in which a subject’s being and meaning are effects of exteriority and spatiality. Denise Ferreira da Silva, Toward a Global Idea of Race (Minn., MN: Univ. of Minn., 2007) 4. Globality, then, “fuses particular bodily traits, social configurations, and global regions, in which human difference is reproduced as irreducible and unsublatable” (Ibid., xix). My usage of globality in this project has less to do with universal reason’s domain over exteriority and is more concerned with the spatial and how modern subjects emerge differently based on their body and geographic regions, even while all are affected by things exterior to them.
I argue that the normative narrative of adoption discourse has shifted from assimilation overdrive to the embracement of colorblindness and liberal multiculturalism through claims of inclusion, progression, and revolution. The condition of possibility for these assertions is mobilized by the ability of many adoptive supporters, parents and even adoptees to strategically place adoption in a local/present framework. This positioning individualizes, depoliticizes, ahistoricizes transracial/national adoption, and it enables love to operate as the encompassing and guiding principle for adoption. While the concept and role of love is no doubt integral to the act (commitment) and process of adoption, its presence and visibility obscures how the global and historical play important roles in shaping adoption. Specifically, the local/present framework erases and obfuscates the productive and political symbolic violence of transracial/national adoption that has enabled the current contradictory situation in which transnational adoptions have increased significantly in the past two decades while transracial adoptions of black children in the US have stayed relatively stagnant since its peak in the early 1970s. Here, I am not suggesting that “progress” or “change” manifests via increased transracial adoptions; rather, I am attempting to get at the conditions of possibility for increase and stagnation, i.e. how the racial and cultural work simultaneously to violently help determine adoption decisions.

19 I borrow social theorist Denise Ferreira da Silva’s formulation of productive violence, which is derived from Foucault’s conceptualization of power/knowledge. For Silva, however, productive power (violence) extends beyond Foucault’s description of interiority as the principle “distinguishing feature of man.” While Foucault provides a cursory examination of the role that the racial plays in modern representation, she decenters historicity as the sole onto-epistemological descriptor and claims that both historicity and globality have roles in how the racial produces the Subject and the “other.” Ibid., 23-25.
What I propose instead of the limiting and simplifying local/present approach is a framework based on the global/historical. As I illustrate in chapter one, many scholars and even everyday individuals who respond to *The New York Times* blogs identify the importance of the historical in informing transracial/national adoption. What is less prevalent and thus less apparent is any discussion of how globality operates in concert with historicity. By globality, I do not mean to suggest that this thesis will interrogate an array of geographic areas or bodies. Rather, I use globality to mean how subjects have historically and continue to emerge differently in relation to each other based on how the racial is mapped onto certain bodies, consciousnesses, and geographic regions. In other words, the empirical evidence does not necessarily have to originate or occupy different geographic regions, but instead, the analysis would point to how subjects who currently inhabit the same geographic region can emerge differently because the ways in which globality maps racial and cultural particularities onto certain bodies, consciousnesses, and regions. By using a global-historical framework, we can understand the racial as a productively violent political-symbolic signifier and tool that institutes another way of

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20 Instead of using the socio-historical—what Silva calls the privileged ontoepistemological descriptor, as a way of being (the ontological) and knowing (the epistemological), where subjects emerge as a pristine black subject and are subsequently “racially constructed” to be excluded, oppressed, etc.—to understand the subjectivity and “exclusion” of racial subjects, she deploys the global/historical as a more accurate and complete descriptor, where globality (exteriority and spatiality) works with historicity (interiority and temporality) to determine the ways in which subjects emerge as either the “Transparent ‘I’”/Subject (who is self-determined) or the affectable Other, who must be excluded and annihiliated. Ibid.

21 In deploying these two concepts Silva parenthetically denotes that globality means exteriority and spatiality, while historicity encompasses interiority and temporality, and I use these terms in this general sense.

22 Silva argues that while the racial was produced or (scientifically) constructed in the nineteenth century by scientific projects of knowledge, it instituted globality, which affected and continues to affect the way in which subjects emerge. This is to say that despite the fact that the racial has been made and constantly reshaped since that moment, subjects always already emerge in racial difference because of globality’s onto-epistemological positioning. Ibid.
being and meaning—that of globality, which is constantly in relation to and informed by
the historical events and processes.

Such a framework allows me to identity two moments: First, it reveals how the
larger trajectories of transracial and transnational adoptions, which are articulated in
adoption discourse by adoption supporters and parents, while seemingly contradictory are
actually confirmations of how globality and the racial have historically operated.
Statements of inclusion, progress, and love are universally proclaimed for all “racial”
groups when discussing adoption, but these claims do not easily translate to US born
black children. What is absent from the discourse is any critical discussion of globality
and how the racial has institutes it and plays a vital role in the emergence of subjects. In
other words, adoption is often framed as an act of love, but I want to explore how white
adoptive parents have historically and currently emerged and been positioned in relation
to Asian and black adoptees and also birth parents and families. These emergences and
positionings are violent processes because of the way in which both the state and
adoptive families on the one hand collectively include and assign legibility to Asian
children. To be sure, “Asian” racial particularities fit the narrative of “difference” that
reifies the cultural and moral superiority of whiteness. Thus, they are marked as different
but with the redeeming qualities of savable, assimilable, and model minority.23 The
liberal embracement of such difference and simultaneous claims of equality effectively

23 See Anthony Shiu, “Flexible Production: International Adoption, Race, Whiteness” Jouvert 6.1-2 (Fall
inclusion is based on the idea of limits, “Historically, most forms of liberalism have celebrated what
[Uday] Mehta terms an ‘anthropological minimum’ within which cultural difference can be tolerated:
‘the limiting point of this perimeter is a form of alterity beyond which differences can no longer be
accommodated.’ Moore et al., Race, Nature, and the Politics of Difference Eds. Donald S. Moore, Jake
Kosek, and Anand Pandian (Durham: Duke Univ. Press, 2003) 44. This limit challenges the notion of
the capacity for different people to be equal citizens.
obscure, and in fact attempt to negate and neutralize, how the racial power operates in
transnational adoptions. On the other hand, the state and adoptive parents alternatively
displace and render black children as unintelligible. While the cultural and racial
particularity of Asian children can easily fit into the “positive” and “liberal” racial
grammar of the US, where Asian American/immigrants have been rendered different yet
savable and the model minority, black children remain disconnected from any
teleological narrative. Instead, blackness is still associated with illegality, culture of
poverty, and abjectness, which makes the transference from illegible to legible a near
social impossibility. Complicating these relational levels of legibility and illegibility are
birth parents and birth families whose position as racial others is more established.
Similar to tokenized people of color in authoritative or wealthy positions, they can only
be legible if they fit a particular and nonthreatening role.

This is not to say that there are no adoptive parents willing to love and embrace
black children, because there definitely are some who are and do, but it suggests that
underlying racial ideologies that have been informed by the global/historical have
material effects on the structures and outcomes in adoption. Thus, within the larger
trajectories, the multicultural move that recognizes and affirms the aesthetic cultural and
the racial particularities of Asian and black children in relation to white adoptive parents
actually erases how power operates, specifically how it hides and “forgets” historical,

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24 To be sure, a global/historical framework can be operational even while focusing on one central site or
geographical region such as the US because globality is concerned more with how subjects emerge
differently and in relation to each other rather than a strict coherence to examining “disparate” global
regions. This said, my dissertation hopes to analyze how discourses about and adoptions from Africa
greatly complicate our understanding of domestic black-white transracial adoptions in the US.
political, economic violences, among these neutralized aesthetic cultural and racial
signifiers.\textsuperscript{25}

Second, the global/historical framework provides the tools to investigate the
*individual* trajectories of transnational and transracial adoptions and how the narration
and formation of the adoptive family by adoptive parents and adoptees require the
displacement, foreclosure, and/or obliteration of multiple identities and histories and most
importantly birth parents, most often in the form of a “clean break.” This productive
violence is the consequence of the local/present perspective that adoptive parents and
adoptees assert, which effectively erases various forms of violence—i.e. what I delineate
as precessional and successional violence, both of which are under the rubric of
productive violence—and attempts to resolve the complexity and uncertainty of adoption
such as the violence, trauma, and the absent presences. Narrated in linear time in which
the “break” is the central reference point, the family is constricted in meaning and form in
an attempt to fit the normative family structure that has historically been wedded to and
represents the nation. Again, missing from these individual trajectories of
transracial/national adoptions is the global/historical and an interpretation of how the
racial, violence, and power operate. The foreclosure of the multiple pasts and
displacement and negation the birth parents are the absent presences being ignored and
effaced. The past and everything associated with it, such as other identities and especially
birth parents, are deemed irrelevant. Nonthreatening memorializations and/or aesthetic
cultural representations can be incorporated into the adoptive family narrative but only as

\textsuperscript{25} Alternatively, my project is also about how the multicultural move “remembers” certain narratives that
are considered “usable pasts.”
a means to resolve the unresolved, the haunting presence of the past. In other words, these strategic moves simultaneously produce, reiterate, and hide precessional and successional violence, all of which marginalize what happens before and outside of adoption.

I enter this conversation about transracial/national adoption as a transnational adoptee from Hong Kong. Although the subjects, identities and experiences of adoptees are heterogeneous, my identification is very important because I place myself delicately and strategically in this conversation. And despite the heterogeneities of adoptees, they possess similarities based on the fact that transracial/national adoptions are informed by adoption institutions and the state, which operate more homogeneously. My investment in this project stems from my own experiences and trying to imagine a new way of thinking about adoption. I am a believer (which I distinguish from supporter or advocate) in transracial/national adoptions not because I believe white parents can save the lives of children of color but more because I am still hopeful that individuals can and do make differences at particular, practical, and material levels. From my own experience, I do not doubt a person’s ability to love based on the space or position that s/he emerges from and occupies, but I do doubt the acknowledgement of power and privilege and the understanding of how the racial and violence play out in adoption by many, if not nearly all, transracial/national adoptive parents, supporters, and even some adoptees. This misstep is one of the main things, in my view, that has kept the debate from being as productive as it could be.

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26 This is not to say that all families and adoption institutions function in the same manner or that adoptees do not have agency in creating and forming their identity, for that is exactly why experiences differ.
Another point of discomfort for me stems from the fact that I, being in a place of privilege—the ivory steps on the way to the top of the tower—do not feel it is my place to judge others. I am not an arbitrator of who is moral, ethical, “down with the cause,” or doing things the “right way.” On the one hand, all too often there is an urge by “doers,” (and in this case adoptive parents and adoptions advocates) those who claim to practice “action,” to simplify a situation and a context. Understanding this problematic, we must heed the notice and warning that Patricia Williams puts forth—that things, issues, identities, subjectivities, practices, power, the local, the translocal, the transnational, the global, and life in general are complex, and that this complexity is of great analytical importance. On the other hand, however, over complication of the complexity of transracial/national adoptions has the potential to obfuscate to the point that it is unreal and unproductive. In this sense, transracial/national adoptions are not the answers but they are individual ways to address (poorly or profoundly) some of the global social and material realities that children face in homelessness, poverty, institutional and foster-drift, abuse, and in some cases those who are without parents.

My goal in this thesis is to explore the hidden complexities of a largely two-sided debate. Because of their genuine personal nature, adoptions are all too often simplified to local/present. Thus, while adoption is certainly personal, we cannot ignore the immensely political and global/historical aspects that structure adoption. Also at stake is the genealogy and future of adoptees and adoptive families. Displacement, negation, and foreclosure of the past and birth parents not only hide the personal pasts of adoptees and

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the value and relevance birth parents but such actions also confine the opportunities and possibilities for the present and the future. Hence, the goal of my project is to acknowledge the transformative individual act of adoption but also examine the violence of adoption and possible alternatives, where violence and foreclosure are not the first options. This partly begins with rethinking notions of the family and framing adoption as collective effort and a chance to enact collective transformative change. And while I do not get to address it much in my thesis, I think it is important to note that also at stake is the subjectivity of those who are not adopted, those who are socio-economically and politically-symbolically ignored, exclude and/or annihilated—the birth parents and communities of color within and outside of the US such as immigrants wanting to come or stay in America, parents of color in prison, etc.

Notes of Methods

For this project I examine a special series of weblogs (blogs) entitled “Relative Choices: Adoption and the American Family” from the “Opinion” section of The New York Times online. I stumbled upon this series via a colleague who had sent me the link. The Times, in some fashion, chose eleven authors who submitted a combined twenty written pieces about their experiences as an adoptive parent, adoptee, and one by a birth mother, and I mapped and examined ten of them in depth. While The Times did not state it, nearly all of the blogs dealt with transnational adoptions that were also transracial. Of the two that did not, one was by a young African American adoptee and the other was by a white birth parent who reunited with her biracial daughter, both of which were included in my analysis.
For the most part blogs are personal web sites in which the user posts interesting news headlines and related commentary. Proficient bloggers create an intricate web interface that provides multiple links to various stories and outside sources, but basic blogs often contain journal and personal information. The importance and influence of blogs has increased rapidly in recent years and is demonstrated by more than 120 credentialed blogs for the 2008 Democratic National Convention.\textsuperscript{28} The uniqueness of blogs is that they allow any individual with internet access to contribute to knowledge production. While blogs certainly do not have the powerful reach of mainstream or in some cases even alternative media, they have the potential to connect with hundreds or thousands of readers each day. The format of The Times blog series was more unconventional because it was hosted by a major news source and comprised many authors rather than a single person. In addition, while online forums have been around for more than a decade, the ability to post comments on news articles is a relatively recent phenomenon that has increased exponentially in the last few years to the point where the Democratic Presidential Candidate Barack Obama’s speech on race garnered more than 2,250 comments in an article on The Times' web site.\textsuperscript{29} What the comment function enables is basically an instantaneous letter to the editor that creates a public conversation (albeit sometimes unruly and heated) among readers.

The use of blogs and specifically the more than 1000 total comments posted in response to them as a primary source is, I would contend, unique. I cannot find any


published sources that use blogs or their comments from everyday individuals as the main primary source. Nearly all of the books about blogs are “How to” or “new media” literature rather using them as a source. A query search for “weblog” in the “Dissertation and Theses” database returned 24 results most of which are irrelevant to this methodology, but three of the results suggest that the authors used blogs as a primary source. One thesis examined personal record keeping through a comparative analysis of blogs in relation to more traditional forms of journals. A dissertation by Tammy Powley explores how women participate in nontraditional forms of writing through the act of memory-craft, using blogs as one site of investigation. The most relevant example I found, however, was a dissertation by Clancy Ann Ratliff, who examines the absence of women in influential blogs. By looking at the rhetoric from the blogs and the comments, she argues that blogging practices are gendered by comparing the main blogging “sites” for women as opposed to men, analyzing the trope of Madonna/whore, and revealing what “counts” as political discourse.

I use these blogs as a primary source to examine how adoptive parents, adoptees, and birth parents (to a much smaller extent) and random readers interpret and articulate statements about transracial and transnational adoptions. Most interesting to me were not so much the blogs themselves—of course they were fascinating and revealing—but the corresponding comments that readers posted. In short, I find these blogs and comments

intriguing and worthwhile because they are both a niche and open public space for the circulation of knowledge about adoption. Ultimately the blogs and the comments, as a site of knowledge circulation, reinforce or disrupt racial and cultural ideologies that inform globality and historicity. More specifically, while they are not by any means as comprehensive or directive as interviews, nor do they possess the consistency and particularity of surveys, they numerically allow greater input. In the new hypertextual and interactive world of the Internet, cyberspaces such as YouTube, Facebook, MySpace and Wordpress allow more and more individuals to have the opportunity to articulate their ideas, opinions, and ramblings. The comment space for these blogs is just that—the capturing of initial thoughts that is on the one hand still mediated because many posters sign their names after their post so that there is some degree of self-censorship but on the other less mediated because there is a distinctive anonymous element to it, where a poster can say whatever comes to her/his mind. This is somewhat demonstrated by numerous spelling and grammatical errors that plague many of the entries. While there were numerous comments that were brief, usually expressing gratitude or thanks for sharing, there were just as many comments that were extremely lengthy. Many of these longer comments provided complex perspectives about adoption that revealed interesting trends or notable tensions. At the same time, even comments that were shorter and of average length provided fruitful insight into how adoptive parents, adoptees, and various other individuals felt. Unfortunately, the rate of response for birth parents was staggeringly low, in part because only one blog entry was authored by a birth mother. While that particular piece, “Reunion,” received at least 35 responses (out of 182 total) from birth mothers, the other entries received no more than five. In addition, all of the responses
from birth mother were in all likelihood from those who live in the US, leaving birth mothers from transnational adoptions unheard.

In attempt to be as comprehensive and analytical (but not necessarily objective) as possible, I coded the blogs and every individual comment posted. I deploy the system of codes as a way to map the hundreds of statements by the blog authors and the commenters. The coding itself is a subjective list of variables that I compiled after reading a few of the submissions and posts. The variables include: the position of the author (as an adoptive parent, adoptee, or birth parent); the nature of the author’s relationship with adoption, if any (i.e. whether s/he is an adoptive parent or an adoptee of a transnational or transracial adoption); and the number of children (adopted and not) of the author. This information was important because it allowed me to know with great certainty the self-identification and demographics of some of the respondents. While not everyone was specific and explicit, many commenters were surprisingly revealing and detailed. This enabled me to make more forceful connections and arguments. Although not all of the respondents are transracial/national adoptees or adoptive parents of transracial/national adoptees, a vast majority of these comments were in response to transracial/national adoptions, making nearly all of the lengthy comments relevant to transracial/national adoption discourse and practice.

I also included reoccurring themes into the coding, such as love, rescue, gratitude and luck. In addition, I recorded themes that were not necessarily prevalent as the former but what I determined as important to the analysis, such as articulations of cultural and racial difference or cultural and racial consciousness; statements that did or did not
addressed or acknowledge birth parents and birth culture; and comments that contextualize adoption as a historical or global thing.

One of the unknown factors of using these blogs and comments as a primary source is being able to fully grasp the demographics of the respondents. Readers of *The New York Times* in general consist mainly of older, wealthy and highly educated readers. But only a minority of commenters actually responded with self-identifying information. At the same time, these very demographics overlap with those who adopt. According to Pertman, the average adoptive parents are white, earn at least $50,000 income, and are in their late 30s or older. Kennedy also suggests that adoptive parents are at least “solidly middle class” but can also range to “well off financially.”

Another significant limit with the blogs and the comments in particular is that there is censorship. As one commenter noted in response to one of the more controversial blogs, “The Real Thing”, some comments by adoptees were not posted or had been deleted. I was first alerted to this by Bryan Thao Worra, a Laotian transcultural adoptee poet and activist when we were discussing the blogs at the Association for Asian American Studies annual meeting in the spring of 2008. The specter of censorship ties into how productive violence displaces and negates the bodies and voices of birth mothers and the complexity of adoptee identity and history. This connects back to one of my fundamental points about negation and foreclosure. Only since very recently have

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34 Pertman 2000: 144.


silenced adult adoptees and forgotten and exiled birth mothers spoken out about their experiences. The vast majority of the literature is produced by adoptive parents and adoption professionals and researchers. For various reasons the voice of adoptees and birth parents have been either negated or foreclosed. This implores the question: where is agency in all of this? This is an important question and I begin to address in the conclusion.

Chapter one is a largely a literature review of the various positions transracial/national adoption. I frame this review around the fact that the most vocal statements create a firm binary of support and opposition. I estimate that there is significant group whose views would complicate this binary, but the division is important to highlight because it underscores how transracial/national adoptions have been discussed. Challenging the argument that a revolution is occurring within the adoption world, I explore how transracial/national adoption literature takes adoption out of various contexts. First, I present how transracial/national adoptions are situated in a local/present configuration. This framework heavily contends that love is the guiding principle for successful adoption policy and practice. Love, however, is only effective when transracial/national adoptions are individualized and dehistoricized. They are posited as apolitical and antihistorical to the extent that the individual stories of adoption are confined to a linear narrative in which the beginning is the moment of the adoption and middle and end are intricately tied to the adoptive family.

I then explore critiques of transracial/national adoption that provide social, economic, and historical analyses. This literature interrogates colorblind perspectives, questions the state’s prioritization of adoption over family preservation, and argues for
more recruitment for adoption in communities of color. Critics also examine the economic aspect that is inherently tied to adoption. Uneven costs associated with different types of adoption and ethical issues surrounding the existence of black markets and forced or coerced relinquishments highlight the suppressed economic issues at hand. Furthermore, in attempt to give further social and political context, a few scholars connect these current practices to historical developments of transnational adoptions following the Korean War. Although these arguments provide necessary components to rethink transracial/national adoption, I conclude chapter one by providing a clearer description and arguing for a framework that considers both globality and historicity, which describes more comprehensively (but of course not completely) the ways in which power, the racial, and violence are operating in transracial/national adoptions. This is to say, that I describe how I am thinking about violence as productive and its role in negation, foreclosure, and trauma.

The second chapter presents the contradiction that embodies transracial/national adoptions, one which some of the respondents from the *New York Times* blogs have noted but not fully articulated. Claims of progress, inclusion, and revolution that are assigned to transracial/national adoptions hold some weight, but under a broader and more in depth scrutiny they bend and break. This is evidenced by the disparity between the US rates of transnational adoptions, which has increased significantly since the early 1990s, and domestic transracial adoptions of black children, which has not made a net increase since its peak in 1971. By revealing this contradiction, I underscore how the limits of love and liberal multiculturalism are connected to the presence and power of the racial. The existence and role of the racial in determining the differential opportunities and outcomes
for adoptees has been only minimally addressed. Even these statements do not address justice beyond the adoptee. Thus, this chapter not only explores how the racial is deployed in reiterations of rescue for transnational adoptions but also how the specific language is not wholly present for transracial adoption because it does not neatly fit the previously existing racial grammar.

In the third chapter, I examine the blogs further by looking at statements by both adoptive parents and adoptees and how the violence of adoption operates, that is, how it is produced, reiterated, and negated or foreclosed. The moment of relinquishment or separation, referred to as the “clean break,” is the principle reference point for many adoptive families and adoptees because it acknowledges the need for adoption but ignores what occurred prior to that “need.” Indeed, adoption is narrated as a transformative experience that allows adoptees to reemerge into a new opportunity and chance at life. Often articulated as a shift away from violence to a place of love, support, and safety, the linear narratives of transracial/national adoptions negate and/or foreclose the precessional and successional productive violences that are generated and maintained by the state, adoption agencies, adoptive families, and even by adoptees themselves. Thus, I analyze antihistorical statements and articulations of “realness” along with expressions of love and rejections of the political in attempt to understand how the adoptive family is often created and maintained in a linear narrative that displaces, negates, and forecloses not only that which happened before and outside of adoption but also any possibilities of the past and future in regards to a complex genealogy, multiple identities, and the acknowledgment of birth parents.
The conclusion will return to possible ways to address the two levels of adoption that I explore in the thesis. Expanding the notion of family and keeping it fluid rather than static is one way to help keep the past, present, and future from the danger of being foreclosed. Part of this involves acknowledging the finitude of the self and rejecting the notion of complete interiority or self-determination. Another method is by merely validating the voices and experiences of adoptees. Lastly, alternative possibilities include Edkin’s idea of encircling trauma. Rather than attempting to resolve the irresolvable, we must encircle trauma, embrace uneasiness, and keep our notions of the family, the past, present, and future open.
Chapter 1
Adoption Discourse and a Global/historical Framework

The common conception of adoption before the 1950s was that it was something to be ashamed of and hide.\textsuperscript{37} That view for the most part has changed dramatically. Past speculations and beliefs that adoptions produce inferior, second-rate, or non-ideal family structures are disappearing with understanding that adoption is a legitimate means of creating families and generating loving, socially significant familial bonds that are at the same level of any other family, including biological ones.\textsuperscript{38} The 2000 Census (the first year for which adoptions were enumerated) indicated that there were more than 2 million people who were adopted and living in the United States.\textsuperscript{39} Adam Pertman, author of \textit{Adoption Nation: How The Adoption Revolution is Changing America} (2000) and former Director of the Evans B. Donaldson Adoption Institute, says the number is actually three times that amount—between five to six million.\textsuperscript{40} Despite the increase in numbers and acceptance—in most cases embracement—of adoption in general, this overall positive perception has not seamlessly transferred to transracial/national adoptions. While there has been official governmental support for transracial/national adoptions—through the passage of MEPA-IEP, which encourages the adoption of children of color from foster

\textsuperscript{37} Carp 2002 and Pertman 2000.
\textsuperscript{38} “National Adoption Attitudes Survey” \textit{Research Report by Dave Thomas Foundation for Adoption} \textit{and The Evans B. Donaldson Adoption Institute} (June 2002). At the same time, Pertman and Carp both say that some individuals still consider adoptive families second rate.
\textsuperscript{39} There are about 1.5 million children under 18 years of age, with the remaining 500,000 18 years of age or above. “Total population: In family households; Child: Adopted: Census 2000 Summary File 3 (SF 3) - Sample Data, United States.” \textit{American FactFinder} (2000) Bureau of the Census. Date Accessed: Nov. 26, 2006 <http://factfinder.census.gov/servlet/BasicFactsServlet>.
\textsuperscript{40} Pertman 2000: 9.
care and made it so race could no longer be a determining factor placements, and the ratification of the Hague Convention, which organized priorities for transnational adoptions and instituted standards for adoption agencies operating in nations that have ratified the convention—the debate on these forms of adoption continues.

In this chapter, I present a literature review that highlights how transracial/national adoption has been discussed in mostly a firm binary of support and opposition. Thus, this chapter simply asks: How can we reframe the way we think about transracial/national adoption? I explore how transracial/national adoption literature that supports adoption has been confined to the individual and local/present contexts, while ignoring socio-economic, socio-historical, and global/historical contexts. Critiques of adoption have been more encompassing and have attended to these various contexts that have been previously disregarded, but even then, none have framed their projects to consider both the global and historical and how they enable subjects to emerge violently and differently in relation to each other.

Literature pertaining specifically to adoption is voluminous and contentious. The voluminous aspect makes the work of reviewing the literature an extremely daunting task. Here, I will try my best to provide an overview of what I have found, and I will mostly limit this review to literature pertaining to transracial and transnational adoption as opposed to adoption in general. Two broad camps of transracial/national adoption have dominated what is really a complex debate. There are of course differences between and among transracial and transnational adoption discourses within my summarized

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41 Underscoring the similarity between the two, Outsiders Within editors, Jane Jeong Trenka et al. place transnational adoptions under the rubric of transracial adoption. For my project, however, I disaggregate the two in order to think about them comparatively and relationally.
characterizations, which I try to tease out too. On the one hand, there is an array of people whose support ranges from conditional to unwavering. On the other hand, but in similar style, the opposition ranges from slight to vehement. Often, this contentious literature is couched under the head of “in best interest for the child.”\textsuperscript{42} Ironically, or maybe strategically—like many partisan issues—both sides of this dichotomy claim ownership of this goal.

**Dehistoricization, Individualization, Love**

Accounts from supporters of transracial and transnational adoption narrate these adoptions in the context of the individual, where they are good and beneficial because they provide what is best for a child who is “doomed” to poverty and life without a home, permanency, love, and a family that institutional structures such as orphanages and foster care cannot provide.\textsuperscript{43} The detrimental effects of institutional care and from foster drift are well documented from anecdotes and studies and referenced by many supporters as a main reason why such adoptions are necessary and in the best interest of the children.

Randall Kennedy, a Harvard Law professor and passionate transracial adoption supporter,\textsuperscript{27}

\textsuperscript{42} In a recent congressional testimony concerning international adoption and the “Status of the U.S. Implementation of Hague Intercountry Adoptions,” Thomas Atwood, president and chief executive officer of the National Council For Adoption, claimed that the NCFA “has been a leader in serving the best interests of children through policies that promote a global culture of adoption and child welfare…” *International Adoptions.* 109\textsuperscript{th} Cong., 2d Sess. 1 (2006) (testimony Thomas Atwood) CQ Congressional Testimony.

\textsuperscript{*} In a bold statement, Rita J. Simon, author of an often cited longitudinal study on transracial adoption and how it does not produce harm to children, says, “After more than two and a half decades, in which numerous studies were conducted on the impact of transracial adoption on minority children, the data show unequivocally that transracial adoptions serve the children’s best interest” [emphasis mine]. Rita J. Simon, “Adoption and the Race Factor: How Important is It?” *Sociological Inquiry* 68.2 (May 1998) 278.

\textsuperscript{43} Randall Kennedy embraces this opinion and articulates his praise, “… J. Douglas Bates, Jana Wolff, and Sharon Rush are good, generous, intelligent people who have succeeded in doing something that warrants high praise: affording parentless youngsters a better chance in life than they otherwise would have had. That these white people crossed racial lines to adopt redoubles the praise they are due.” Kennedy 2003: 468.
argues that this lone problem of delay of placements is the strongest argument against race-matching policies.Elizabeth Bartholet, a strong transracial adoption advocate and established “expert” in the field, argues that there is no credible evidence to suggest that transracial adoptions produce harm, but that there is evidence to suggest that children are indeed harmed by institutional care that “delays adoptive placement or denies adoption altogether.”

A majority of empirical studies have generally asserted claims that transracial/national adoptions do harm are false and have established that they are in fact beneficial. In probably the most highly referenced study, Rita J. Simon and Howard Altstein’s longitudinal examination from 1970 to 1992 “empirically demonstrates” that children who are adopted transracially do not experience significant negative effects on self-esteem, self-identity, and physical or intellectual behavior development. Their early 1990s research is also included in a more recent compilation of studies done by other researchers. Simon and Altstein conclude that “the quality of parenting was more important than whether the black child had been inracially or transracially adopted,” and that “transracial adoptees had developed pride in being black and were comfortable in their interactions with both black and white races.” Along with these arguments, Simon and Altstein contend that transracial adoptions were no more disruptive than other types

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46 Rita J. Simon and Howard Altstein, Adoption Across Borders: Serving the Children in Transracial and Intercountry Adoptions (Lanham, Md.: Rowman Littlefield, 2000). In exploring the idea that black parents are better “equipped” to provide the necessary tools to successfully survive a racist society, Kennedy asserts that the notion that blacks through their experienced victimhood are more capable of teaching youngsters how to overcome racism is merely a hunch or “common sense” that is not based on factual or definitive evidence. Kennedy 2003: 407.
47 Simon and Altstein 2000: 52.
of adoption and were successful because parents took a colorblind approach. In other
words, according to them, transracial/national adoptions are the best solutions: “A
message that comes through loudly and clearly from all the empirical studies that have
been cited in this book is that transracial and intercountry adoptions serve the children’s
best interests.” Bartholet, and others such as Kennedy and Howard and Altstein,
concludes that race should not matter in adoption and that the MEPA-IEP are necessary
and good laws that promote the best “interests of both children and of the larger society”
by placing children in homes no matter what their color. The issues of
transracial/national adoption get reduced to a limited concept of identity that is more
concerned with the absence or presence of “race” rather than complicating it as
something fluid and not reducible.

Adding to the discourse are some recent “popular” writings that have shifted away
from sentimental narratives and simplistic articulations and binaries of transracial and
transnational adoption. They explain or admit that such adoption used to be simple:
white parents would adopt nonwhite children from the ghettos or overseas and then they
would assimilate into (white) Americans. Prior histories, cultures, and birth families were
erased, ignored, and/or contained. Now, as seen in many “revelation narratives,” they

49 Elizabeth Bartholet, “Commentary: Cultural Stereotypes Can and Do Die: It’s Time to Move on with
50 For examples of sentimental transracial adoption narratives of rescue, multiculturalism, and the easy
ability to transcend race and nation see Bartholet’s Family Bonds (1993) and Nobody’s Children
(1999), Pearl S. Buck’s Children for Adoption (1964) and All Under Heaven (1973), Bertha Holt’s
Seeds From the East (1954), and Shirley Peck-Barne’s The War Cradle (2000).
are more complex and the culture of adoption has changed for the “better.” Adoptive parents more commonly encourage their children to explore their multiple identities, cultures, histories, and families.\footnote{Randall Kennedy examines three such narratives: J. Douglas Bates, \textit{Gifted Children: A Story of Race, Family, and Adoption in a Divided America} (1993); Jana Wolff, \textit{Secret Thoughts of an Adoptive Mother} (1997); Sharon E. Rush, \textit{Loving Across the Color Line: A White Adoptive Mother Learns About Race} (2000). Kennedy actually provides an intriguingly forceful critique in that these narratives commonly posit (wrongly according to Kennedy) the white adoptive family (themselves) as inherently inferior, i.e. transracial adoption is good insofar as it is the “best alternative” to children languishing in foster care. This is in juxtaposition to the abstract black adoptive family that is always assumed to be the “best option” (Kennedy 468). Instead, white adoptive parents disrupt the racial myth of white parent inferiority and should cross the racial line unapologetically. He cites one parent, as a prime example, who says, “I am a white man with a white wife, and …we adopted a … black baby girl. She grew up with six siblings, all white. Today she is a vice president with Morgan Stanley Dean Witter…. Tell me this marvelous young woman is somehow handicapped and I’ll laugh in your face and throw you off my porch.” (Kennedy 468).}

The plethora of contemporary transracial and transnational adoption discourses indicates that one of the trends is the inauguration of a new epoch that relegates colorblindness as a lesson learned and a thing of the past; informed by previous mistakes that have been revealed by adoptive parents, adoptees, and social workers, recent literature critiques previous practices that hid the past and the identities of adoptees. For optimistic supporters, there is a new, seemingly refreshing attitude that recognizes and lends itself to the politics of difference, i.e. multiculturalism and the need to be ‘inclusive,’ where adoptive communities and parents are becoming increasingly aware of the social existence of race and the ubiquitous realities of racism.

Still, these revelation narratives are often problematic because the way in which race and culture are fixed as something authentic. There is supposedly “good” intent in trying to instill “pride” and “celebrate culture” of adoptees, but many people have argued that the fixation on “authentic” birth culture and the exotic fetishization of adoptees

\footnote{Volkman 2005: 5 and Ann Anagnost, “Scenes of Misrecognition: Maternal Citizenship in the Age of Transnational Adoption” \textit{positions} 8.2 (Fall 2000) 389-391.}
through consuming “cultural bites” works only to manage, aestheticism, reinscribe, and deracinate or absorb meaningful cultural difference.\(^{54}\) This “weak,” “white,” and “superficial”\(^{55}\) multiculturalism not only fixes culture to the stereotypical venues such as, sushi, Kimchi, Kwanzaa, tae-kwon-do, black churches, and traditional dance, but it also disregards the complex identity of adoptees, reduces their transracial and transnational identities and histories, and ignores the hidden trauma produced by never belonging.\(^{56}\)

Thus, this burgeoning, insightful, and at times critical, knowledge production still flirts and engages with languages of liberal multiculturalism, colorblindness, assimilation and sameness.

The issue at hand with literature from adoption advocates is that it often takes transracial and transnational adoption out of historical (temporal) and global (spatial) contexts. This move enables such adoptions to be individualized (in that they are exclusive from society) and flattened or simplified to the extent that they emerge only from a local space (e.g. foster care or orphanages) and a particular time (e.g. in a time of “need” for the child, birth mother, or adoptive parents). Individuals do perform a *transgressive* act, but only in an *individual* context. Thus, the deployment of love can only operate seamlessly if it is preceded by the dehistoricization and individualization of transracial and transnational adoption. In this way, the argument that adoption is a

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\(^{56}\) This practice of celebrating culture is realized through countless culture and heritage camps that are hosted and sponsored by adoption agencies and is evident in the results of the “Survey of the First Generation of Adult Korean Adoptees” in which some respondents said Korean food was used to explore their identity while growing up and tae-kwon-do was interpreted as an activity of comfort. The Evan B. Donaldson Adoption Institute and Holt International Children's Services, “Survey of the First Generation of Adult Korean Adoptees” Survey (2000).
personal choice based on feelings only works if we think of feelings as individual in form rather than their structural architecture in which feelings and choices are always informed by context and power.

**Socio-economic and -historical contexts**

On the opposite side of the debate spectrum there is an array of arguments that consider the various social, economic, and historical contexts. These accounts oppose and/or critique transracial and transnational adoption arguing that family preservation or reunification should be prioritized and if this is not possible, then intraracial or same-race adoptions (or in the case of transnational adoption—domestic adoptions) ought to be the next option. If these possibilities are exhausted, only then would transracial or transnational placements be considered “in the best interest of the child.” They argue that while white parents might have good intentions, they often possess dangerous and problematic colorblind perspectives and are largely ignorant to racism and white privilege. Race and ethnicity, in other words, should be a considered factor because the children are raised in highly racialized societies where they are often perceived as different, which can cause low self-esteem, identity crises, and, in the case of transnational adoptees, they can have the feeling of not belonging to either their country of origin or their new home. Additionally, they argue that transnational adoptions specifically exploit poor countries and cultures and involve ideologies of paternalism and rescue. Transracial and transnational adoptions, in essence, do not get at the real issues that need to be addressed such as the social, political, and economic welfare of mothers.
so they are not forced into a position of relinquishing their children for adoption. As the editors of the recent and highly critical book on transracial adoption, *Outsiders Within*, said, “[T]he real alternative is found in welfare policies that support poor mothers of color rather than penalizing them, criminal justice policies that strengthen and heal communities rather than destroying them, and international policies that prioritize human security over profits.”

The critique of domestic transracial adoption is most often directed at the largest social structure influencing transracial adoptions—the foster care system; it is not necessarily an oppositional stance but one that rejects the notion that transracial adoption in the US has improved. In attempting to eliminate delays in or denials of adoption placements for children of color in the US foster care system (claimed to be produced by race-matching policies and preferences) the US Congress passed the Howard M. Metzenbaum Multiethnic Placement Act, which determined that federally funded adoption agencies may not “categorically deny” or delay either a person’s opportunity to be an adoptive or foster parent or the placement of a child in adoption or foster care “solely on the basis of the race, color, or national origin of the adoptive or foster parent.

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57 These arguments were and continue to be the basic foundations of why the National Association of Black Social Workers supports same race adoption. Lori Askeland *Children and Youth in Adoption, Orphanages, and Foster Care: A Historical Handbook and Guide*. Ed. Askeland (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 2006) 54-55.


or the child, involved.”

Two years later, Congress passed the Interethnic Adoption Provisions (IEP), which in essence overhauled MEPA to close certain loopholes that previously allowed race to be “a” factor in placement decisions so long as it was not the sole reason.

MEPA-IEP were intended to encourage and increase transracial adoptions, but many scholars such as Dorothy Roberts and Laura Briggs critique such laws and policies as racist because of the dismal recruitment of black parents and dismantling support for preserving and maintaining black families. Roberts argues that the child welfare system targets poor people who are disproportionately black and that research has shown racial bias at every point in the “decision making process—reporting, investigating and substantiation, child placement, service provision, and permanency decision-making.” Roberts argues that black children are “placed in foster care at twice the rate as white children. … [And] remain in foster care longer; are moved more often; receive fewer

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60 A provision of the MEPA as cited in Askeland 2006: 142.
62 Defenders of transracial adoptions respond by espousing that same-race placements are reverse discrimination against white parents who want to adopt black children. Judy Fenster, “Transracial Adoption in Black and White: A Survey of Social Worker Attitudes” Adoption Quarterly. 5.4 (2002) 36. See also Kennedy, who provides a much more complex argument than one of merely reverse racism. Kennedy 2003: Ch. 10, “The Tragedy of Race Matching in Black and White.” In exploring the idea that black parents are better “equipped” to provide the necessary tools to successfully survive a racist society, Kennedy asserts that the notion that blacks through their experienced victimhood are more capable of teaching youngsters how to overcome racism is merely a hunch or “common sense” that is not based on factual or definitive evidence. Kennedy 2003: 407.
63 One example, was a study that showed between 1994 to 2000, black and Latino toddlers who were hospitalized for fractured were five times more likely to be evaluated and three times more likely to be reported to child protective services than white toddlers. Dorothy Roberts, “Adoption Myths and Racial Realities in the United States” Outsiders Within (2006) 51.
6* One interviewee of Carter-Black’s qualitative study on perceptions of TRA by black social workers expressed this point, “I think that racism does play a part because… when mothers are delivering in the hospitals… a lot of who gets tested for drugs is up to the doctor’s discretion, and you know black women are much more likely to get scrutinized and test for drugs than whites are.” Carter-Black 2002: 356.
services; and are less likely to be either returned home or adopted than any other children." These trends, she argues, are driven by adoption myths, such as the belief that adoption can create permanency and reduce the foster care population and that the main obstacle to placing black children are race-matching policies that prevent white families from adopting black children. Black children, however, account for 44 percent of children in foster care but only constitute 15 percent of the total child population.

Additionally, Roberts argues that transracial adoptions have declined since the passage and the implementation of both the MEPA-IEP and the Adoption and Safe Families Act of 1997. The former was intended to increase transracial adoption and the latter was intended to promote adoption and diligently recruit black parents to adopt, but neither has come to fruition. Briggs, similarly, refers to state policies, such as the MEPA-IEP and the adoption tax credit as racist. She argues that they do nothing to support black families and instead move children of color from poor families—who are stereotyped as locked in a pathological culture of poverty—to white middle-class families who can “redeem” them.

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64 Dorothy Roberts, “Adoption Myths and Racial Realities in the United States” Outsiders Within (2006): 51. In a study by Richard Barths (1997) on the effects of age and race as factors for determining the odds of adoption versus remaining in foster care, he found that black children are one-fifth less likely to be adopted than white children, after controlling for age. Brooks et al. (2002): 557. Using raw data from The ARCARS Report, it suggests that in 1998 white children in foster care were 1.5 times more likely to be adopted than black children. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, “The AFCARS Report: Preliminary FY 2005.” See also Jan Carter-Black who states the MEPA was established because the waiting period for black children in foster care was five years as opposed to three years for white children. Carter-Black 2002: 338.


66 The Adoption and Safe Families Act placed greater emphasis on reducing time limits and delays in foster care; decreased previous emphasis and efforts for family reunification; increased financial incentives to states to promote adoption; and promoted adoption as the preferred alternative to foster care when reunification could not be achieved. Brooks et al. 2002: 576.


transracial adoption from a largely individual, flattened process that supporters articulate to one highly influenced and affected by social and political structures.

The differential cost associated with adoptions has been the other main object of scrutiny. Deploying a socio-economic perspective, these critiques of transracial and transnational adoption have described them as illegal and immoral “markets” or “trade.” Kim Park Nelson, for example, describes transnational adoption as an industry that has demand and supply characteristics similar to other forms of international trade. The adoption “trade” however, is more complex, because it involves human beings—both the children adopted and the birth and adoptive parents. The demand is so high that illegal operations have developed, and the practice is so convoluted that not only are agencies, lawyers, and intermediaries making large profits but so are the people and publishers who write how-to manuals on transnational adoption, which all approach and/or encroach the

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lines of ethicality.\textsuperscript{71} This industry is even more questionable as critical authors have revealed the variance in costs for children based on “race.” Reverend Ken Hutcherson’s posited a controversial question as a part of a billboard campaigns in 2001 and 2002 to raise awareness about price disparities: “Are adoptions agencies in it for love or money?”\textsuperscript{72} Along with the question there was a corresponding picture of three babies with different adoption fees for each one: $30,000 for a white infant, $10,000 for a Latino and $4,000 for an African-American.\textsuperscript{73} Interestingly, these prices are in conjunction with the tax breaks that Briggs discusses. Thus, there are essentially three social- and political-economic processes occurring simultaneously: adoption agencies, orphanages, middle-persons, and lawyers make profits from the adoption trade that is based on racial hierarchies; the families adopting, who are mostly white because the required recruitment

\textsuperscript{71} Ibid. 94-96.

\textsuperscript{72} Mike Lindblom, “Campaign targets adoption fees” \textit{The Seattle Times} (March 1, 2002) B1. Date Accessed: May 25, 2007 <http://seattletimes.nwsource.com/cgi-bin/PrintStory.pl?document_id=134413056&slug=adopt01m0&date=20020301>. ABC news ran a story that allowed adoption advocates and agencies to respond to Reverend Ken Hutcherson of the Antioch Bible Church, the sponsor of the billboard campaign. One adoption lawyer claimed the difference in costs was due to fewer healthy white infants and their high demand in the US. A director of an adoption agency said the difference in costs was not discriminatory, “The difference is in the cost of the process — living expenses, medical expenses. Our agency fee[s] for all adoptions are identical.” Still, other professionals said there is no good explanation for the varying costs. Cindy Freidmutter, for example, the then executive director of the Evan B. Donaldson Adoption Institute, a non-partisan policy and research institution based in New York, said, “The costs of adopting either child shouldn't be any different…. Money should not be the driving factor.” Dean Schabner, “Why it Costs More to Adopt a White Baby” \textit{ABC.com} (March 12, 2002) Date Accessed: May 25, 2007 <http://abcnews.go.com/US/Story?id=91834&page=1>.

\textsuperscript{73} Kathryn B. Creedy, The Root of All Evil” \textit{Adoption Quarterly} 5.4 (2002) 78. This disparity is confirmed by sources, such as Adoption.com and the Adoption Institute, that say, domestic public agency adoptions (foster care and mostly children of color) cost zero to $2,500; domestic private agency adoption (mostly healthy white infants) cost $4,000 to $30,000 and up; domestic independent adoption (mostly healthy white infants) $8,000 to $30,000 and up; and intercountry private agency (or independent adoption) cost $7,000 to $25,000. “Adoption Costs.” \textit{Adoption.com} (2007) <http://costs.adoption.com/> and “Research Adoption Facts: Costs of Adoption” \textit{The Evans B. Donaldson Adoption Institute} (2007) Date Accessed: Nov. 27 2006 <http://adoptioninstitute.org/research/costsadoption.php>. Also see Kim Park Nelson, “Shopping for Children in the International Market” \textit{Outsiders Within} (2006) 94-96 and 101-102 and Briggs, “Orphaning Children on Welfare” \textit{Outsiders Within} (2006) 85.
for black parents is being ignored, get the tax relief; and lastly, while the state has increased funding for adoption and adoption awareness/promotion, it has withdrawn funding for family preservation and support and safety-net programs such as welfare.

Some of the recent scholarly work on transracial adoption has shifted away from the central focus of what is “best for the child” to social- and political-historical analyses. They argue that these historical analyses are necessary in order to tease out the dynamics of adoption today. For example, opposite to the sentimental and rescue narratives are various historicizations of transracial and transnational adoption pasts, which address orphan trains, indigenous children who were forcibly removed from their families and communities, and adoptions after WWII and the Korean and Vietnam wars. They discuss how the tropes of rescue and themes of poverty, war, savagery, and religion have guided, shaped, and been central to adoption in the US and how they upset the politics of inclusion.74 Laura Briggs, for example, critically engages the sentimental narrative and the rescue trope of transnational adoptions and their dependence on stereotypes of innocent, sick, helpless, and crying children vis-à-vis cold, indifferent, backwards, and/or grateful birth parents. Briggs not only points to the striking difference in power relations between adoptive parents and birth parents and the receiving countries versus sending countries but also points to the ways that violent realities and narratives of illegal

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adoption and pulling apart families would inherently disrupt this historic trope of rescue.\textsuperscript{75}

Christina Klein and Arissa Oh are two other authors who deploy a critical historical framework to argue that the political and social commitments of the US nation-state, its middlebrow culture, and Christian Americanists\textsuperscript{76} to transnational adoption was built on a fictive familial love relationship between the US and Asia that portrayed the ability of the US to transcend the boundaries of race, nation, and culture. They argue that this gesture of inclusion into the US national body politic, however, was necessarily premised and founded on characterizations of the US as morally, economically, and politically superior to China and Korea. Transnational adoption, i.e. rescue, was based on notions of extreme poverty and the overshadowing presence of communism in both situations.\textsuperscript{77} For Klein, middlebrow Americans were not only saving children from poverty through sponsorships, but they were simultaneously ensuring collective security by undermining communism.

In Oh’s analysis, the transnational adoption push was spurred by both the white Christians, but more importantly, by the less religious and more patriotic Christian Americanists. For the Christian Americanists there was a sense of American duty to save

\textsuperscript{75} Briggs 2006: 361.
\textsuperscript{76} Oh uses the term Christian Americanist to describe the twin pillars of secular Christianity and American patriotism. Arissa Oh, “A New Kind of Missionary Work: Christians, Christian Americans and the Adoption of Korean GI Babies, 1955-1961” Women’s Studies Quarterly 33:3-4 (2005) 162.
\textsuperscript{77} Christina Klein, “Family Ties and Political Obligation: The Discourse of Adoption and the Cold War Commitment to Asia” in Cold War Constructions: The Political Culture of United States Imperialism, 1945-1966. Ed. Christian G. Appy (Amherst: Univ. of Mass. Press, 2000) 49. Klein describes how Christian Children’s Fund advertisements did the work to produce these images. While readers of one advertisement were offered a box in which they could check, “Yes! I want to do what I can to help the starving, homeless children of the world,” the text of the advertisement always underscored the threat of communism (Ibid., 49). Another advertisement’s text read, “The hungry children of the world are more dangerous to us than the atom bomb” (Ibid., 46).
the world, Korea, and the GI babies of Korea. They had to protect democracy and save the world from Communism; help care for and rebuild Korea; and take responsibility for the outcaste mixed-raced GI babies. In addition to the notions of saving Koreans from communism and poverty, the implicit necessities for inclusion in Oh’s analysis were that the GI babies were understood as savable because of the “superior” American and Christian upbringing practices in the US and that they were partly white in the case of Korean-white babies and were partly Korean in the case of Korean-black babies (as opposed to fully black). Oh and Klein’s accounts of transnational adoption are critical examples that underscore how historical contexts reveal the contradictory political and social actions of the nation-state and its citizenry.

A Global/historical Framework

While arguments of critics and opponents help to reveal the limits of inclusion and universality by using critical socio-historical, economic and political frameworks, they stop short of linking the global with the historical. What these critiques elucidate is that most adoption supporters implicitly or explicitly ignore societal context. Critics and opponents frame the issue beyond the individual and in the context of society. In other words, transracial and transnational adoptions are not just about the adoptee, but they also about the birth parents and their communities—whether in the US or abroad. In addition, they provide greater economic- and political-historical contexts that allude to the histories of racism in the US, war, imperialism, and tropes of extreme poverty and need for rescue. And here, I am impelled to mention necessary and important works of a growing number

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78 Oh 2005: 170 and 171.
79 Ibid., 180.
of adult adoptees from Korea, Vietnam and the US who have reached a critical mass. Their self-told narratives shift and reframe the subjects from adoptive parents to adoptees, giving them a voice and space that allows them to tell their experiences. In a similar vein, birth mothers who still feel the pain of separation that was, in many cases, coerced or beyond their control are also telling their stories and writing about their perspectives. Web sites such as “‘birth-’ Mothers Exploited by Adoption” and “Transracial Abductees” illustrate the immensity of breadth and depth of voices that exist. Still, these works often fail to examine the global and how it works in concert with historical and helps to determine how modern subjects emerge differently and relationally. So while transracial/national adoptions suggest individual transgressions of race through the very simple notion of love, a global and historical framework would enable us think about these adoptions in a more productive way.

Two studies by Sara Dorow and Patricia K. Jennings have—not explicitly but in essence—interrogated how globality operates in transracial and transnational adoption. Literature has pointed to the ways in which transracial and transnational adoption are both similar and alike, but few works critically examine them together, that is, the relationship between white parents and the mostly Asian transnational adoptees (who are being adopted at an high rate) and the mostly black transracial adoptees (whose rate of adoption from foster care has not improved, even after the passage of MEPA-IEP).

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80 Outsiders Within (2006) is striking and recent example of adoptee produced work.
Dorow explores a disturbing triangulation of the cultural commodification by white adoptive parents who adopt desirably different (Asian) babies for “cultural enrichment” vis-à-vis the negative stereotypes of black children who are associated with abject culture.\textsuperscript{83} Some literature has critiqued the dismal status of black children\textsuperscript{84} in the US who are not being adopted, but few have examined the comparative and relational aspects of black and Asian children adopted by white parents. Dorow is one of the few who has engaged in such critical analysis. She looks at adoption choices and post-adoption experiences to demonstrate the social realities of racial formations, that is, Asian babies are considered “baggage free,” desirably different, and savable in relation to black babies who are none of the above.\textsuperscript{85} Dorow’s argument, then, is generative in revealing the ways in which differential racial ideologies materialize in transracial adoption choices.

Patricia K. Jennings is another critic who argues that ten years after the passage of the MEPA-IEP black children still languish in foster care not because of race-matching policies but because the issue of race is still present in both positive ethical ways and overtly racist ways. As her study suggests, even as options narrowed for her group of white, economically privileged, infertile women, they were more inclined to adopt transationally. She, too, argues that children of color would be better served by the recruitment of parents of color (a stated goal of the MEPA-IEP, but, as Roberts points out, one that never materialized) and through education on racial issues.\textsuperscript{86}

\textsuperscript{83} Dorow 2006: 360 and 362.
\textsuperscript{85} Dorow 2006: 360.
\textsuperscript{86} Jennings 2006: 557-578.
Unlike the previous authors, Jennings and Dorow examine transracial and transnational adoption relationally. They illustrate the differential value among white, Asian, and black children, but they neglect to demonstrate and link how the historical informs their global framework. Additionally, the argument that I make is slightly more nuanced: following Silva, it says that modern subjects already emerge as relationally different (racial) because of how historically the racial and more recently the cultural has imputed difference to specific global geo- and demographic regions.\footnote{See Henry Yu, \textit{Thinking Orientals: Migration, Contact, and Exoticism in Modern America} (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 2003) Chapter 3, “Orientalism and the Mapping of Race” for more on how the cultural replace the biology of race as the key signifier of difference of regions and bodies.}

While almost all critical discussions of race usually center on its social-historical constructedness, I follow Silva’s characterization of race not as a thing that is merely constructed with the corollary being that race could be “deconstructed.” The racial I and the racial Other are not merely constructed, but because of globality specifically, and historicity as well, these relational subjects “emerge in signification.”\footnote{Silva 2007: 27.} There is nothing that inherently precedes signification, that is, the racial I and the racial Other are not biologically a certain “race,” nor is “race” a sociological independent variable that when removed from the equation will yield spectacular futures. The racial I and Other are not pristine subjects whose construction could be easily be deconstructed. They are in fact subjects who emerge in signification, and in that emergence, globality assigns them as an already “proper” representation. In other words, in the case of Jennings and Dorow, I am suggesting that the “various groups” of children were not suddenly “unequal” or “racialized differently” after adoptive parents attributed racial traits to them “accordingly,” but signifiers (usually moral, political, and cultural ones, which all
describe racial signifiers) were already attached to the spaces from which they emerged (because of historical events and statements), making them differently “predisposed” and their futures more certain to be either adopted or not adopted. This is important because communities of color are not merely socially constructed throughout history, but the “social constructions of race” precede people in a way that they emerge already as differently and relationally racial modern subjects. We have been using “racial construction” as a guiding principle in our critiques of racism and power, and while it is useful on many levels, it often fails to account for the necessary triangulations that recalibrate our understanding of transracial and transnational adoption.

Examining the effects of raciality decenters historicity and rewrites modern subjects, and more specifically adoptees, adoptive parents, and birth parents, as global/historical figures. Historicity, defined by interiority and temporality, describes the Subject as self-determined and producer of history. That Subject of historicity generated new domains of knowledge (from history and science), what Silva calls the “analytics of raciality,” in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries that produced categories of racial difference, e.g. whiteness, blackness, etc. The analytics of raciality, as a strategy of power, produced categories of racial difference “connecting place (continent) of ‘origin’, bodies, and forms of consciousness.” These categories of racial difference – such as blackness and whiteness – refer to fundamentally different modern subjects, “[T]he white body and social (geographic, economic and symbolic) spaces associated with whiteness have been produced to signify the principles of universal equality and freedom informing

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our conceptions of the Just, the Legal, and the Good.\textsuperscript{90} The black body and its associated social spaces, however, have been produced to signify the opposite, that is, a “departure from modernity”\textsuperscript{91} and the “domain of social degeneracy, pathology, and illegality.”\textsuperscript{92}

These new domains of knowledge, the analytics of racinality, do not belong in the domain of historicity because – as products of scientific tools they produce things and subjects as effect of exterior determinants – that is, they lack self-determination, the distinctive quality of the subjects of historicity. Instead, globality—\textit{with} historicity—became a more encompassing onto-epistemological descriptor for both the Transparent I, who is also the Racial I, and the Racial Other (or the affectable other). Globality, characterized by exteriority and spatiality, describes the affectable racial Subject who relationally affirms but is also negated by the “self-determination” of the transparent (racial) Subject. Globality, in this sense, is neither about economic globalism nor global capital, nor does it require empirical evidence from a representative cross-section of the globe. Rather, globality has more to do with representation, the domain of the symbolic, that is, how certain bodies, cultures, and consciousnesses are linked to certain spaces and regions that are signified and represented differently. In my project, I am specifically looking at how Asian and black American adoptees and birth parents are mapped in relation to white adoptive parents in the US. A critical position that privileges globality as modern context of signification enables us to address and bring forth what historicity and productive violence have erased; in other words, it situates historicity. It allows us to talk

\textsuperscript{90} Ibid., 423.
\textsuperscript{91} Ibid., 423.
\textsuperscript{92} Ibid., 441.
about the particular mode of deployment of power and violence, that is, the political/symbolic strategies sustained by the raciality.

I borrow Denise da Silva’s global/historical analytical perspective rather than merely a socio-historical framework because one based on the latter is what Silva calls the privileged ontoepistemological descriptor, where it is generally a story of progression and teleology and also desire for minor transparency or in other words, solely the desire to be included and to possess self-determination. The global-historical is a more accurate and complete descriptor, where globality (i.e., exteriority and spatiality) works with historicity (i.e., interiority and temporality) to determine being and meaning; that is they resolve the ways in which subjects emerge in difference as either the “Transparent ‘I’”/Subject (who is self-determined) or the affectable Other, who must be excluded and/annihilated.

In using a global/historical framework, I hope to complicate the narratives of progression and inclusion that are prominent in transracial and transnational adoption discourses. Moreover, this framework, I think, better supports critics of transracial and transnational adoption whose frameworks are either rightfully historical but limited by their tapered spatial context or solidly relational but less productive because of missing historical analyses. Drawing from Foucault’s notion of productivity and Derrida’s spatiality, Silva argues that the racial is a “modern political-symbolic strategy,” which allows her to interrogate, through the tracing philosophical and scientific statements from Descartes to Hegel, how the racial Transparent I and the racial affectable Other emerge.

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93 Silva 2007.
always in relation and opposition to each other.\textsuperscript{94} Thus, my project cannot exclusively begin with racial exclusion as the sole descriptor for violence and injustice. Rather, the point of departure is a reexamining of the role that the racial plays in adoption and the violence that is produced from it. Such a framework, I hope, will reveal how the past is infused into the present and future and how people emerge and exist relationally. In understanding this, we might work toward a more collective process rather than a solely individual endeavor that attempts to bring justice for all and not for some.

With this new global/historical framework that reexamines the racial’s role in determining how subjects emerge differently, we can look at transracial/national adoptions in a new light. While I am well aware of the possibilities of adoption and believe in its potential, I want to explore how adoption, which is usually thought of as an act of transgression, inclusion, and love also enacts various forms of violence. Thus, my primary research question restated is what are the ways in which violence plays out transracial/national adoptions? How would a global/historical framework disrupt our understandings of individualized and flattened narratives of inclusion and progression, specifically in the context of how adoptees continue to emerge differently in relation to each other and non-adopted subjects such as their birth and adoptive parents but also other people and communities of color in the US? How would it allow us to talk about the absence of transracial adoption in \textit{The Times} blogs? Consideration of both globality and historicity is important because together they elucidate how the racial (and later the cultural), as a political-symbolic weapon, is instituted and deployed for productive and other forms of violence. I am hopeful that such an examination and discussion about

\textsuperscript{94} Ibid., 30.
violence will enable the adoption debate to move in a new direction, where we rethink notions of love, family, and community to generate collective transformative change.

**Violence**

The first task is to explain what I mean by “various forms of violence.” By this phrase, I mean to suggest that adoption, and specifically transracial/national adoptions, enact multiple forms of violence—violences that are instituted by the global/historical reality or the raciality—that are rarely if ever address, which is one of the many reasons why we still fail to understand the dynamics of today’s adoptions. The topic of violence is immense, and this paper does not pretend to know this entire field. How I define and use the idea of violence is different than others, but I hope that it illuminates some of the greater but hidden complexities of transracial/national adoptions.

For infants and children, adoption is regularly seen as a way for them to escape violence, abuse, poverty, and homelessness and be placed into an environment of love, safety, permanency, and family.95 The series of moments, events, and life experiences that occur after “adoption” supposedly rejects violence. Indeed, they are the fundamental attempts to put the horrible memories of the past to rest, which means that after adoption takes place, violence is relegated to the past or forgotten completely. But what happens when the family and the state of the adoptee become places that produce and perpetuate

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95 For example, the home page of Holt International adoption agency says, “Every child deserves a home… Orphaned, abandoned and vulnerable children around the world need love; they need belonging and security.” *Holt International* (2008) <http://holtintl.org/>. In the annual “proclamation” of National Adoption Month, President George W. Bush says, “Although we have made dramatic advances in encouraging adoption, we must strengthen our efforts to find a safe, loving, and permanent home for every child awaiting one.” “National Adoption Month Proclamation.” *News and Policies: Proclamation Archives of the White House* (Released from Office of the Press Secretary, Nov. 5, 2001) <http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2001/11/20011105-2.html>.
further violence, when the new site of refuge becomes a space of various forms of violence?

I argue that there are various forms of violence that extend far beyond the tropes of violence that we associate with adoption—poverty, abuse, homelessness, etc. In adoption, one of the most notable moments (or tropes) of violence is the plenary/clean “break” (up) or “separation” between the mother (and in some cases the father) and child. For the birth mother, this “break” is described in various ways, as relinquishment, choice, surrender, loss, and the moment of social death. For the adoptee, it is more clearly understood as the moment of separation, loss, and despair. While the birth mother remains in the space of social death, some adoptees are “given” the chance for a new life, a new beginning, one that mends and heals the wounds of the severance. Thus, the “break” becomes the main reference point of violence for both birth parents and adoptees; it is the moment of marked violence and trauma. Once adoption takes place, however, that referent is replaced by a new one that attempts to finalize the break and cover that moment of trauma and violence.

What happens, though, after the moment of adoption, or as many in the adoption community refer to as “gotcha day,” is any non-marked violence and trauma is left by

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97 Gotcha Day, also known as Adoption Day, was officially made international by Margaret Schwart in 2005, when she declared September 15 to be the first International Gotcha Day. It is a controversial term, where many adoptive parents and adoptees believe it to be celebratory and more specific than Adoption Day, while some adoptive parents and adoptees feel it reeks of possession and disrespect for
the way side. In many ways the concept of adoption or “gotcha” day are fantasies of a blank slate; “You’re my child and you’re American. That’s all you need to know.”;

Locking out birth parents: “[I]t is safe to say, based on my scores of conversations with adoptive families, social workers, researchers, and adoption professionals around the country, that a sizable majority of Americans who travel this route are motivated at least partly—and sometimes entirely—by the desire to lock out biological parents.”

For transracial/national adoptions, they can unsuspectingly resurface through the form of racial (and/or adoption) discrimination on adoptive parents who embrace(d) colorblindness but were then rudely awakened, but as my entry example, discrimination is the only form of violence that must be overcome. All other forms of violence, such as the psychological violence of loss of familial ties, identity, history, and culture are ignored or suppressed. Granted, since the establishment of transracial/national adoptions more adoptive parents have addressed issues of identity, history, and culture, but regrettably, as my analysis will reveal, parents still embrace approaches and thinking that produce and continue violence for adoptees and related subjects.

The rest of my paper will examine the more discussed issues of “the break” and what I call successional violence, but I will also investigate violence that precedes the break, or precessional violence. Although the prefixes of precessional and successional suggest that the violence I am describing is tied to a strong linear temporality, I argue that many of the violences that I place under these categories actually defy time and space.

Under the rubric of successional violence I include how personal history of adoptees is

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98 Pertman 2000: 196.
negated and foreclosed by both the state and adoptive families by ignoring the multiple identities of adoptees, the birth parents, and communities of color who they might identify with. While successional violence is being addressed on different levels, it is still pervasive and hidden outside the lines of visibility. The other category of violence in relation to the break is what I call precessional violence, which can be broken into material and political-symbolic violence. Material violence encompasses war, black-market baby selling, failing political-economies, and state policies that do more for individuals and families looking to adopt rather than the families who need help the most. Critics of transracial/national adoptions cite material violence to demonstrate why adoption practices and policies need to change. Political-symbolic violence, on the other hand, is violence that is rarely examined in transracial/national adoption discussions. Indeed, this area is my most significant intervention that examines how adoptees and related subjects come into being and occupy spaces of legibility and illegibility.

My intervention into these multiply exclusive discussions of violence is to reframe transracial/national adoptions in globality and historicity. This necessarily requires that I examine how the racial affects adoption through the production and maintenance of various forms of violence. As Silva and Derrida’s examination of violence demonstrate, legibility of subjects is a violent process.

In the case of transracial/national adoptions, I argue the legibility of adoptees largely depends on the perceived resolution of the marked violence of the break. As adoption tries to resolve the unresolved it masks and ignores the violence and trauma.\footnote{For more on the linkage of trauma and adoption see Margaret Homans, “Adoption Narratives, Trauma, and Origins” \textit{Narrative} 14.1 (January 2006) 7.}
that are intimately tied to adoptees’ identities and personal histories. Edkins frames and relates trauma to the political rather than other scholars, who associate trauma mainly with the psychoanalytical.\textsuperscript{100} Trauma, as Edkins explains it, is a sort of betrayal:

\begin{quote}
What we call trauma takes place when the very power that we are convinced will protect us and give us security become our tormentors: when the community of which we considered ourselves members turns against us or when our family is no longer a source of refuge but a site of danger.\textsuperscript{101}
\end{quote}

Edkins argues that the state is the main apparatus that institutes this traumatic violence. Such violence, in fact, is a manifestation of state formation and maintenance:

\begin{quote}
The violence of wars and revolutions is necessary to produce the state. However, the state claims to be a banding together of individuals in a peaceable fashion to secure the greater well-being of all. For this claim to be sustained, the founding violence has to be hidden. It is not only the founding violence of course, that exists and is concealed, but the violence that continues to underpin the state. In order for this charade to work, for the fantasy of the democratic state to be believable, the visions of survivors have to be hidden, ignored, or medicalized.\textsuperscript{102}
\end{quote}

In other words, the state produces violence, and but it also has an invested interest in ensuring that the traumatized do not speak.\textsuperscript{103} There is an effort to return to the normal, the linear, and the state accomplishes this goal in part through the act of commemoration, which is instrumental for forgetting the past.

Thus, traumatic violence is situated in historicity or in what Jenny Edkins calls “linear time” of “social reality.”\textsuperscript{104} Edkins delineates between social reality of linear time

\textsuperscript{100} For example, see David Eng, “Transnational Adoption and Queer Diasporas” Social Text 21:3 (2003) 1-37.
\textsuperscript{101} Jenny Edkins, \textit{Trauma and the Memory of Politics} (Cambridge, NY: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2003) 4.
\textsuperscript{102} Ibid., 52.
\textsuperscript{103} Ibid., 42.
\textsuperscript{104} Edkins argues that time is axiomatically considered linear and constructed as a succession of past, present, and future, but that in reality time is not so absolute, giving examples of time travel, parallel universes, ghosts, and spirits. Ibid., 34.
and reality of trauma time, where social reality is constructed politics to maintain social order and the false notion that subjects are complete. Reality, however, is neither complete nor linear; instead, it is traumatic and acknowledges that social reality is constructed and temporary. The former is situated within and made possible by linear time and depends on purposeful and reoccurring forgetting that the fantasy of social order is constructed. The latter is within the realm of trauma time, which disrupts linearity. Edkins contends that trauma time is when “something happens that doesn’t fit, that is unexpected—or that happens in an unexpected way. It doesn’t fit the story that we already have, but it demands a new that we invent a new account, one that will produce a place for what has happened and make it meaningful.” In this way, the real, which is traumatic, has to be hidden or forgotten because it is a threat to the imaginary completeness of the subject and state.

The act of remembering and testimony, then, are threats to the coherency and stability of the family and the state. Edkins argues that while commemoration is superficially deployed by the state, the act of remembering “can be insurrectionary and counter-hegemonic” because “remembering is intensely political: part of the fight for political change is a struggle for memory.” Thus the traumatic can be resistant because power is diffused and not centralized. So while it appears that adoptees do not have power, remembering can be politically powerful.

Remembering can be a difficult process, however. Usually the traumatic is thought of as an event, and the traumatized, or the subjects of trauma, are unable to find

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105 Ibid., 12-4.
106 Ibid., xiv.
107 Ibid., 12.
108 Ibid., 54.
meaning in that event or to even know what happened; it becomes unspeakable.\textsuperscript{109} For this reason, trauma is a belated experience and returns in dreams or flashbacks or through the retelling to another person.\textsuperscript{110} But even recounting the traumatic is difficult because there is no language for trauma since language comes from and belongs to the family, community, or state that brought it in the first place.\textsuperscript{111}

Edkins’ exegesis of state violence, trauma, and linear and trauma time are important to my work because the family represents a microcosm of state formation. This is especially salient for adoptive families because of the way in which the biological is privileged and threatens the order of the new family. Just as nations have to be produced and continually reproduced and maintained (Edkins 109), so too do adoptive families. This includes attempts to normalize the experience of adoptees in order to more easily situate them within the linear temporality of the new family through the apprehension of language. There is an impulse to validate family through adoption, and this validation is produced and maintained by strictly defining family rather than engaging and embracing the uneasiness and the uncertainty and acknowledging our implication in the creation of a new family just as any other family. Paralleling the state, adoptive families strictly demarcate the family formation by obfuscating both successional and precessional violence. The concealed or ignored violence allows the social fantasy of historicity to continue uninterrupted.

The violence and trauma of adoption, like the violence and trauma produced by the state that Edkins describes, never go way, and the traumatized cannot speak about

\textsuperscript{109} Ibid., 39.
\textsuperscript{110} Ibid., 40.
\textsuperscript{111} Ibid., 7-8.
traumatic because language is hijacked by traumatizers. One reason this is true is because adoption has for so long tried to ignore the factors of the racial and violence. For adoption as a practice, these two concepts were not a part of the productive discourse. When they have entered the discussion, it has only been to argue that they should not be in it. This means that we need to insert them back in the conversation and framework from which we think about adoption. Only then can we begin to think about Edkins proposal of encircling the trauma and violence: “We cannot try to address the trauma directly without risking its gentrification. We cannot remember it as something that took place in time, because this would neutralize it. All we can do is ‘to encircle again and again the site’ of trauma, ‘to mark it in its very impossibility’. “112 Attempts to resolve trauma tragically fall back into the linear time of historicity. Encircling trauma, however, allows the traumatized, witnesses, spectators, and perpetrators to engage and embrace the uneasiness. Indeed, it insists and requires engagement and remembering.

Although Edkins does not discuss the utility of re-appropriating language, I contend that this is a crucial step toward encircling the trauma. Otherwise, the monopolization of language only allows for commemoration or a disingenuous engagement of trauma, where we may encircle trauma but only with our backs. The re-deployment of language, however, is only a part of the project. Indeed, this is what is

112 Ibid., 15. Edkins argues that the Cenotaph in London and the Wall in Washington, D.C. are instances of encircling trauma. The former was built in 1919 after the First World War means “empty tomb.” Its location in London brings the dead back to the capital, and its placement in the middle of traffic rather than an obscure park refuses closure and maintains everyday engagement by tourists, locals, and government officials. The Wall was built in 1982 as a memorial for veterans rather than a war memorial. Its open, v-shaped structure sharply contrasts other phallic monuments in a way that allowed it to encircle trauma. Although the names of the deceased on the Wall were placed in order of death, which suggests a linear temporality, it complicated the issue of linear time by having the first and last death meet at the intersection of the “v.” Since the names were not in alphabetical order, the Wall, similar to the Cenotaph, requires a purposeful and uneasy engagement. Edkins 2003: Chapter 3.
limiting about Edkins; she examines the role of the political-symbolic in trauma and state violence, but only in the framework of time. She does not examine why some people are situated within violence more often than others. Thus, also necessary is examination of the political-symbolic strategies within the framework of the global, together with the temporal/historical.

In this way, Edkins makes the similar mistake as Giorgio Agamben. For Agamben, state sovereignty and violences are expressed in the form of “the ban” of homo sacer by the sovereign—the “original political relation.” Although Agamben situates his conceptualization of the biopolitical as something that is historically in the city and the camp (for the twentieth century), which is of less importance for me, his articulation of sovereignty and bare life (or more specifically death) can, I think, be tied back to adoption. Agamben asks the question, are the structures of sovereignty and homo sacer connected? He says that they are indeed two extreme limits of order.113 The sovereign, Agamben argues, is both outside and inside (i.e. belongs to) the law and has monopoly of the final decision;115 the sovereign is the law and is both imminent and transcendent.116

Thus, the originary and distinguishing political relationship is between bare life and

114 Ibid. 84. While Achilles Mbembe, in his formulation of necropolitics, argues differently by saying sovereignty and death are not necessarily on different ends of the spectrum because in death there can be power, in the case of adoption, I would agree with Agamben. Achilles Mbembe, “Necropolitics,” Trans. Libby Meintjes *Public Culture* 15:1 (2003).
115 Agamben explains later that “the sovereign is the point of indistinction between violence and law, the threshold on which violence passes over into law and law passes over into violence.” Agamben 1998: 32. Randall Williams also argues that the state has a monopoly on violence in which it has the power to “first distinguish, and subsequently control, the terms of ‘legitimate’ and ‘illegitimate’ violence ....” Williams, in this sense, seems to be following Fanon’s belief (that decolonization is always a violent process because colonization always originates in and is maintained by violence) lead in reclaiming violence as a tool for resistance and decolonization and anti-colonial struggles. Randall Williams, “Appealing Subjects: Reading Across the International Division of Humanity” (PhD dissertation, University of California, San Diego, 2007) Ch. 1, p. 26.
political existence, that of exclusion and inclusion, which is determined by the
sovereign. This allows for a uniquely disproportionate power relationship in which
killing of the homo sacer amounts to less than homicide (one can kill him/her with
impunity) and killing of the sovereign (who is sacred and inviolable) is more than
homicide.

In order to tie Agamben back to adoption, however, the state cannot be the sole
possessor of sovereignty. Rather, sovereignty in transracial/national adoptions lies in both
the state and the adoptive parents and is glaringly absent in the adoptee because, unlike
the political situation that Mbembe provides, adoptees do not have that “choice” of death.
Thus, similar to Agamben, the adoptive parents and the state occupy an extreme opposite
position in relation to the adoptee. Again, one occupies the sovereign space and the other
resides in the space of death or exile. This space of death and/or exile is not identical to
that which Agamben describes; it is neither a literal space of death, nor is it a result of
“the ban,” but rather it is of the political-symbolic realm. Indeed, this is where
Agamben’s framework is very limiting. What his argument fails to do is to account for
the everydayness of violence, where the state of emergency is not the exception but
actually the rule. Agamben’s Euro-centrism hinders his ability to imagine violence as
something outside of the camp. While camp violence is particularly atrocious and deadly,
his formulation obscures the full spectrum of violence such as social, juridic and

\[\text{Agamben 1998: 102.}\]

\[\text{Similar to Agamben, Arendt only considers violence as state or individual physical violence. For}
\text{example, in her discussion of racism, she argues that violence is the consequence of racism. Hannah}
\text{Arendt, \textit{On Violence} (San Diego: Hardcourt Brace and Company, 1970) 76.}\]

economic forms. In other words, Agamben does not account for the onto-epistemological context of globality, where certain modern racial subjects emerge and exist always already outside, a priori any sort of ban. Denise da Silva calls this productive violence or the logic of obliteration—that which produces impossible subjects, ones who cannot live and must be eliminated.

**Negation and Foreclosure**

Crucial to my global/historical analysis of transracial/national adoption are my borrowing of the signifying strategies of displacement, negation, and foreclosure. In borrowing Lacan’s symbolic configurations of “displacement” and “negation,” i.e., articulation and disavowal, Silva demonstrates how these signifying strategies are used to establish and maintain that the Subject (and its mind) is indeed “affected by things other than itself, that is, exterior things” but at the same time is self-determined in such a way that “the latter play no role in the determination of its essence or existence.”121 In this way, the Subject maintains its interiority in the face of exterior determinants. Moreover, the Subject reiterates this displacement and negation with the racial other to maintain self-determination, where the Subject articulates or identifies the racial other, who is not defined by interiority or self-determination, but subsequently negates or disavows it as irrelevant.

Closely related to the signifying strategies of displacement and negation is foreclosure. I borrow the concept of “foreclosure” from Spivak’s Lacanian and Freudian synthesis as that which “embodies two complementary operations”—the ““introduction

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into the subject, and the … expulsion from the subject.”¹²² Negation requires a positive statement of irrelevance or disavowal, while foreclosure does not, and foreclosure takes place when something is present but there is an absence of engagement. The concept foreclosure can be explained further by looking to Jacques Derrida and his critique of Saussure as he describes the instituted “trace,” the supposedly unmotivated line that distinguishes the signifier and signified. The symbol or sign, according to Derrida, “is neither symbol nor sign but a becoming-sign of the symbol.”¹²³ In explaining the revelations of Derrida’s trace, Silva says that it exposes how the transparent I emerges “always already in exteriority and violence” in relation to the elimination of unintelligible “beings and meanings.”¹²⁴ Thus, there is no signification without the trace; it simultaneously connects the possible and erases the impossible.¹²⁵ The trace’s movement and existence are the conditions of possibility for the violent production of a sign. Its operation occults the silencing of other possible signifiers to the extent that they become illegible for the signified. Its existence and presence, however, also signifies originary violence and troubles what has become. Hence, the trace and the illegible signifiers are the ghosts that haunt the moment of violence and silence.

As I demonstrate in greater detail in chapter three, these productively violent signifying strategies often work in concert and play out in adoption discourse and practice. For example, adoptive parents can easily identify and say that birth mothers


exist, but articulate their irrelevance (through negation) by claiming the title of realness, which forecloses the violence and ways in which adoptees come into being in the adoptive family, and it additionally, forecloses possibilities of the future. In monopolizing “realness,” they make a positive statement that at once acknowledges the existence of the birth parents (because there is an implicit naming of the “unreal”) but simultaneously marks them as irrelevant and unintelligible because of the birth parents position as “unreal.” In these situations, the condition of possibility for adoptive parents is the foreclosure of anything outside of a linear narrative that Edkins describes.

The productive violence that encompasses the signifying strategies of negation and foreclosure and that is described by Derrida’s articulation the trace elucidates why transracial/national adoptions cannot be framed by the logic of exclusion, or in Agamben’s case, the ban. In this sense, the adoptee (before the act of adoption) emerges from and occupies the same space as the racial Other (i.e. those who are not adopted and left in exile and illegibility: the birth family, “illegal aliens,”126 children of color in the US foster care system and their respective communities of color) which is outside of universality and legibility.127 They, in other words, are the possible signifiers for universality and inclusion, but are illegible. Only through the act of adoption, does the adoptee become a privileged and legible signifier for “inclusion” and universality. Simultaneously, in concert with the inclusion of the adoptee, the trace operates still as a thing of violence that continues to erase those who are not adopted: the birth mothers in

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126 I am using “illegal alien” to denote and emphasize the unprivileged status of undocumented immigrants, undocumented migrant workers, trafficked laborers, and ineligible refugees and asylees.

127 In saying that they emerge and occupy the same space, I do not mean to imply that it is the exact same space for all of these groups, but rather that this space is the same in relation to the space of universality and legibility. Thus, a child of color in the US might be more privileged (because of citizenship status) than an “illegal alien,” but they both occupy that space of Otherness.
the US and abroad, “illegal aliens,” and children and communities of color. Thus, the originary political relationship that Agamben speaks of—the ban—does not operate here. Instead, subjects emerge differentially in relation to one another, as already legible or illegible/erased (but always present).

The trace or site/manufacturer of productive violence in the case of transracial/national adoptions is not just the state but is often adoptive parents who monopolize and hijack the signified “realness” of motherhood, where they themselves (as adoptive parents) are the only signifiers of “real” mother. The productive violence also requires a necessary “break” that is common in all types of adoption, where the birth parents (and by extension, their respective community) are separated from the adoptive family in social death. This break in fact enables the privileged adoptee to (violently) re-emerge as another subject, one whose ties to his/her the past are severed. Moreover, adoptive parents (similar to the state) also have sovereign power to decide who and where to adopt. This decision, often seen as a non-political and personal one, mimics biopolitical power to determine who will live (and alternatively who must die or be excluded) because a choice to adopt one person or from a specific geographic region is in essence an exclusive process, where that (conscious) choice necessarily means that adoptive parents ignore another choice. Thus, the fault of most articulations of violence and trauma of adoptees is that they limit the violence to an individual experience; when

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128 This brings us back to Agamben who says that killing of bare life is less than homicide. In this sense, we can see how those who are not adopted become bare life because chances of survival diminishes, and if a child does die in an institution, this will never be considered homicide—i.e. the adoptive parents who made a choice of one child over another would never be thought as at fault and would never be punished, even though the parents had the power to decide. Many critiques of adoption have argued that the money spent in adopting and raising a child would help keep families together and/or allow more children to benefit (rather than distributing all the resources to one child).
in fact, the violence affects birth parents, other “waiting children,” and communities of color in the US and beyond.

What I have tried to demonstrate is that it is we cannot think of violence solely as exclusion, or solely cultural, communal, evil, or as necessary for humanity/justice when up against a greater violence. Instead, we must also think about violence as a productive force that often precedes visible and physical violence. Thus this chapter has attempted to demonstrate the ways in which a global/historical framework would enable us to think about violence as productive and to examine its role in negation and foreclosure as continuing forms of violence.
Chapter 2

Love Is Thick, But Is It All We Need?: Beyond Liberal Multiculturalism

History Lessons and Historicity’s Conundrum

The problem with transracial/national adoptions being approached from the perspectives of love and progress is that these frameworks do not begin to address the messiness of history. One of the main goals of this paper is to elaborate how transracial/national adoptions have been historically narrated. History and literature suggest that they are numerically increasing and shifting away from problematic practices of the past, but the realities reveal stark contradictions. This begs the question, are the contradictions clarified if we take into account how globality and historicity inform transracial/national adoptions? In this chapter, I identify how the limits of love and liberal multiculturalism are connected to the presence and power of the racial. In addition, I explore the ways in which the existence the racial is deployed in reiterations of rescue for transnational adoptions. At the same time, I explicate how this specific language is not wholly present for transracial adoptions because it does not conveniently fit pre-existing racial grammar.

Although adoption in the US formally began in the mid-19th century when states first instituted adoption laws, the history of transracial and transnational adoptions usually begins with World War II or even later during the 1950s. Similar to other social institutions and areas of society adoption for children of color was segregated or completely ignored. In 1939, the New York State Charities Aid Association expanded its
adoption services to African American children. Within the next decade, adoption practices shifted to more generally address all children in need of families and homes. In 1948, *Child Welfare*, a prominent journal for social workers, declared: “We find over the country a growing conviction, translated into practice, that the color of a child’s skin, the texture of his hair, or the slant of his eyes in no way affects his basic needs or the relation of his welfare to that of the total community.” Following WWII, from 1946 to 1953, organizations such as International Social Services and American Branch began the first wave of transnational adoption, bringing 5,814 orphans, mainly from Greece, Germany, and Japan, to the US. The “second phase” began after the Korean War in 1953 to 1962 in which 15,000 children were adopted, about one-third of them were from Korea. In the following years of 1966 to 1976, transnational adoption increased even more to 32,000 children of which 65 percent were from Korea.

During this same period of the late 1960s, transracial adoption, which were also and still are categorized as special needs adoptions, in the US also began to gain popularity as well. The first known domestic transracial adoption happened in Minnesota in 1948. As the number of African American children needing adoption grew,

130 Pertman suggests the 5,814 adoptions occurred between 1948 and 1953 and that they were from Europe, with another 2,418 children from Asia. Pertman 2000: 72-3. Strangely, numerous sources cite adoptions happening after the war, for which the children are generally referred to as “occupation babies,” but none goes into detail about who adopted these children. One relatively unknown episode in this era is the adoption of “brown babies.” Former journalist and civil rights activist, Mabel Grammer, and husband, Oscar Grammer, a US army officer, both of which were African American, adopted 12 mixed-race children from Germany in the early 1950s because of the stigma placed on Black European children. Mabel also helped facilitate, through her previous journalism employment with the *Washington Afro-American*, approximately 500 more adoption by middle to upper-class African Americans. Claudia Levy, “Mabel Grammer Dies-Arranged Adoptions” *Washington Post* (June 26, 2002) B6.
131 Carp 2002: 14.
campaigns began in the 1950s to promote “Negro” adoption. In 1955, a coalition of interracial and interfaith adoption agencies began the “Adopt-a-Child” project in New York, which encouraged the adoption of “healthy, normal Negro and Puerto Rican children.”

Harriet Fricke, Case Director for Lutheran Children’s Friend Society in Minnesota, explained that the implementation of a united publicity campaign to increase adoptions for Mexican, Indian, and especially “Negro” children garnered interest from white families who wanted to adopt black children. There was plenty of anxiety surrounding this practice, but anticipated public and agency misgivings for such adoptions never appeared, and “Negro-white adoption” had obtained “relatively wide acceptance, publicly and professionally.” For a short period, between 1965 and 1972, placement of African American children and domestic transracial adoptions increased significantly, sparking a “little revolution” that peaked in 1971. Adoption in general coincidentally peaked that year too at 171,000 children. Eight percent or about 14,000 were African American children, and 2,574 were transracial adoptions in which black children were adopted by white parents.

Domestic transracial adoptions, however, decreased in the following years, and nearly every historical narrative of transracial adoption attributes this decline, and

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eventually a near stop, to the National Association of Black Social Workers’ position paper against transracial placements. 137 While this was indeed a historical moment that must be discussed, these narratives focus primarily on the section that claims such adoptions are a form of “cultural genocide” or a “particular form of genocide.”138 The subsequent explanation for the decline of transracial adoption is categorically attributed to this claim and to the swath of “duped” followers, including adoptive parents, adoption agencies, and the federal and state governments.

During this period of inactivity for transracial adoption, transnational adoptions flourished because of the continued adoptions from Korea but also because of new adoptions from Vietnam in which thousands of children were adopted after the war ended in 1975. As transnational adoptions sustained their popularity, another form of transracial adoption came to halt. The federal government passed the Indian Child Welfare Act in 1978, which gave greater sovereignty to Native American tribes in dealing with foster care and adoption.139

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137 Carp says that the NABSW was influenced by the “militant” power movement. Carp 2002: 15; Herman, The Adoption History Project; Pertman 2000; Simon and Altstein 2000; Bartholet 2006, Kennedy 2003: 393-4.

138 Simon and Altstein 2000: 2

139 The ICWA was and still is controversial. It was passed in response to protests by Native American activists and allies who condemned the Indian Adoption Project, which began in the 1950s, as a genocidal practice toward their communities and cultures. The project removed of hundreds of Native American children from their homes. While it was in many ways was seen as a liberalization of racial attitudes that before would not have even considered transracial adoption, it was also a continuation of late 19th century federal policies and practices that removed Native American children from their homes and put them into boarding schools to encourage and promote “cultural assimilation.” Estimates vary, but approximately 25-35 percent of Native American children were taken from their homes, and 90 percent were adopted by white families. Pertman 2000: 222-226; Ellen Herman, “Indian Adoption Project” The Adoption History Project (July 11, 2007) Date Accessed: Sept. 5, 2008 <http://www.uoregon.edu/~adoption/topics/IAP.html>. For a perspective critical of the ICWA see Kennedy 2003: Chapter 12. For more details about the goal of ICWA see “A Report to Congress on Interjurisdictional Adoption of Children in Foster Care,” Children’s Bureau, Administration on Children, Youth and Families Administration for Children and Families, US Department of Health and Human Services (2006).
In the 1990s the issue of transracial adoption resurfaced. After relentless efforts and numerous testimonies by transracial adoption professionals and academics such as Bartholet, Kennedy, and Simon and Altstein, Congress passed the Multi-Ethnic Placement Act (MEPA), which rejected all race-matching policies and practices and determined that federally funded adoption agencies may not “categorically deny” or delay either a person’s opportunity to be an adoptive or foster parent or the placement of a child in adoption or foster care “solely on the basis of the race, color, or national origin of the adoptive or foster parent, or the child, involved.”\textsuperscript{140} Two years later, Congress passed the Interethnic Adoption Provisions (IEP) in order to better enforce the explicit abolishment of racial provisions concerning foster care and adoption placements.\textsuperscript{141} In addition to the MEPA-IEP, Congress passed the Adoption Safe Families Act (ASFA), which among other things, repositioned adoption as a higher priority by allowing adoption to be an option earlier, shortening the time allocated for attempts at family reunification. It also provided financial incentive to states to increase the number of adoptions.\textsuperscript{142} These three pieces of legislation were supposed to increase adoption, specifically adoption of the vastly overrepresented children of color in foster care, but as statistical/numerical evidence suggests only certain adoptions increased.

Statistics of domestic transracial adoptions to determine their success, and domestic adoption in general, are difficult to find because from 1975 to 1995 the federal

\textsuperscript{140} Askeland 2006: 142.
\textsuperscript{141} Carter-Black 2002: 338.
\textsuperscript{142} The Adoption and Safe Families Act (P.L. 105–89) placed greater emphasis on reducing time limits and delays in foster care; decreased previous emphasis and efforts for family reunification; increased financial incentives to states to promote adoption; and promoted adoption as the preferred alternative to foster care when reunification could not be achieved. Brooks et al. 2002: 576; Carp 2002: 17; and Pertman 2000: 240.
government did not collect data. During the mid-1980s to 1995 information was sparsely gathered by some agencies and associations but none contained comprehensive or consistent data, and none looks at transracial adoptions.\textsuperscript{143} Even information gathered in 1995 and 1996 is limiting because not all states complied with reporting mandates and some states submitted incomplete data.\textsuperscript{144} What is known, however, is that transracial adoption in 2001, in which 2,442 transracial adoptions took place, looks almost identical to what it did in 1972 (2,574),\textsuperscript{145} and in fact is slightly less.\textsuperscript{146}

The recently implement Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System\textsuperscript{147}, required states, for the first time since 1975, begin collecting data concerning public adoptions through the foster care system. Analysis of AFCARS data from 1995 to 2006 indicates that adoptions in general increased significantly the first six years but then leveled at about 51,000 adoptions per year from 2000 to 2006.\textsuperscript{148} One research report, examining the same AFCARS data, interrogates the effectiveness of AFSA on transracial adoptions from 1995 to 2001 and finds that the percentage of transracial adoptions

\textsuperscript{143} Mary Hansen and Rita Simon, “Transracial Placement in Adoptions with Public Agency Involvement: What Can We Learn from the AFCARS Data?” Adoption Quarterly 8.2 (2004) 46-7. Estimates of transracial adoptions for black children suggest the number was about 1,200 adoptions per year. Fenster 2002: 36.

\textsuperscript{144} Hansen and Simon 2004: 48-49.

\textsuperscript{145} Even after Hansen and Simon estimate the remaining amount total from missing data, the total is still only at 2,850. Hansen and Simon 2004: 52. They also claim that this number represents almost 17 percent of adoptions of African American children, but in reality the percentage is about 14.5 percent. If we used the extrapolated number of 2,850 it would be 16 percent.

\textsuperscript{146} One estimate suggests that transracial adoptions of black and biracial children by white parents was as high as 50,000 from 1968 to 1972, which is about 10,000 adoptions per year. “Transracial Adoption: A Brief Overview,” First Person Plural: Adoption History (PBS.org) (2000). <http://www.pbs.org/pov/pov2000/firstpersonplural/historical/transracial.html>.

\textsuperscript{147} The AFCARS is a federally guided program under the Administration for Children and Family of the US Department of Health and Human Services that collects states’ case level information of all foster care children.

overall increased during this time period from about 11 percent to 15.5 percent. Similarly, it suggests that transracial adoptions of African American children have slightly increased, from about 15 percent to 17 percent. This percentage, however, does not give any indication on whether the actual number of transracial adoptions for African American children increased, and for some unknown reasons, the authors do not provide this information. In addition, Hansen and Simon say that at the national level “there is no evidence” that transracial adoption increased since the passage of AFSA. In their concluding statement though, they contend that extrapolated 2,850 transracial adoptions of African Americans are a “historical high.” Thus, while this longitudinal study argues that transracial adoptions have increased minimally from 1997, others, such as Dorothy Roberts and I, argue that it has decreased.

In any case, the United States is sending an estimated 500 black children to other countries for adoption each year because of the shortage of families in the US willing to adopt black children. One agency alone, Adoption Link in Illinois, has placed over 700 black children in other countries such as Canada, Germany, Switzerland, and England.

With the passage of the 1993 Hague Convention on Intercountry Adoption and its

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149 Although it could be because their report focuses on the six states that saw significant increases in transracial adoption rather than focusing on the national trends, which were not as promising.
150 Hansen and Simon 2004: 46.
151 Ibid., 54.
adoption by the United States in 2000, this technically means that domestic adoption for these black children was not an option because the convention declared that domestic adoption should be prioritized above transnational adoption.

Thus, examining domestic transracial adoption with transnational adoption in the US presents a confounding picture, where first, transracial adoptions of black children in the US have stayed relatively stagnant since the introduction of multiple pieces of legislation that outlawed race-matching and provided financial incentives in attempts to increase adoptions. This stagnation is buttressed by the fact that all adoptions of African American children in foster care are declining steadily even while all adoptions of Latino and white children in foster care have both been gradually increasing during this same period. Second, the United States, one of the wealthiest nations in the world, is sending hundreds of black children overseas or across the border to Canada, which is in stark contrast to the last point—that transnational adoption, where specifically growth of adoptions from Asian, African, and Latin American countries, has increased significantly to an all-time high in 2004.

Claims of inclusion, progress, and revolution have increased in tenor, but the historical account of transracial versus transnational adoptions suggest otherwise. Adoption discourse has provided reasons to explain the current situation with transracial/national adoptions, where there are fewer adoptions in general and

155 Although the Hague was passed in 2000, it was not actually ratified until 2008.
156 Again, I am not suggesting that increased transracial adoptions is necessarily the desired outcome; rather, I am attempting to get at the conditions of possibility for increase and stagnation, i.e. how the racial and cultural work simultaneously to violently help determine adoption decisions.
disproportionately low number of transracial adoptions versus disproportionately high figure of transnational adoptions. On top of this, healthy white infants are still the most desirable. The explanations range from the decline of healthy white infants because Roe v. Wade (1973), the development and increased usage of birth control, and the decrease in stigmatization for single and unwed mothers. Further, factors such as length of adoption process or bureaucratic hoops supposedly pushes people to adopt transnationally, and age is the consensus variable that determines who was adopted or not. Lastly, one of the most common references to the troubles of transracial adoptions is explained as “reverse discrimination,” where social workers and adoptions agencies give preference to perspective black adoptive parents or where the state and judiciary favor reunification efforts or foster care with black families rather than adoption by white families.

The purpose of this tedious presentation of confounding statistics is to begin a relational and comparative investigation of transracial and transnational adoptions in the US. This is to say that I do not mean to give a strictly historical and statistical review of transracial/national adoptions, but rather my intentions is to present what is has not been

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159 Carp 2002: 16.

160 More than a few of the respondents to the blogs expressed bureaucracy as a reason many adopting parents go overseas. “American laws are very tough in removing a child from his/hers parents, and there is a very limited number of children for adoption in here” Ulla, comment #42 in “Tracing My Roots Back to Korea” (Nov. 6, 2007); “and too many parents have the option of learning to be better parents and proving that to the courts when they shouldn’t have that option at all. you have to be a part of a certain age demographic (typically 25-35), have a set middle class income for your area, MARRIED, etc before even being CONSIDERED for parenthood via adoption or the foster care system.” Devynn, comment #35 in “Blind Date to Addis” (Nov. 8, 2007).

161 Pertman 2000: 32. While much of the published literature suggests age is the primary concern when considering adoption, according to a 2002 national survey, health and behavioral issues are larger concerns for those in the US considering adopting from foster care, more so than age and race. As a note, however, this was not a survey of only adoptive or prospective adoptive parents. “National Adoption Attitudes Survey” Research Report by Dave Thomas Foundation for Adoption and The Evans B. Donaldson Adoption Institute (June 2002).
presented before (at least not to this degree). I will do so by approaching transracial/national adoptions from a global/historical perspective by examining how the racial, as a political-symbolic tool, institutes various levels of violence, one of which is producing superior/desirable and inferior/undesirable adoptees. This historical narrative and these statistics provide brief insight into the complexity of transracial/national adoptions in the U.S., and they will be helpful later as more concrete examples of how violence plays out in transracial/national adoptions. With this insight, I explore the limits of love and liberal multiculturalism in a society in which globality and the racial still govern how subjects emerge differently and in opposition.

Ultimately I want generations after me to know this about the culture of blood and the culture of adoption: That blood is thicker than water, but love can be thicker than blood.\textsuperscript{162}

—Hollee McGinnis, Transnational Adoptee

Today I believe in the possibility of love; that is why I endeavor to trace its imperfections, its perversions.\textsuperscript{163}

—Franz Fanon, Black Skin White Mask

Limits of Love and Liberal Multiculturalism

On December 4, 2007, the New York Times Online ended its engaging month-long blog series on transnational and transracial adoption. The first quote by Hollee McGinnis was the last sentence of the final blog. There were nineteen entries by eleven different authors, and this was the last sentence. It is a powerful one to say the least because, for most, it encapsulates the meaning of adoption. In many ways it speaks to the belief in the power of love as the ultimate and enduring solution, especially for adoption.


\textsuperscript{163} Franz Fanon, Black Skin, White Mask (New York: Grove Press, 1967) 42.
The second passage is one that is not often cited, despite Fanon’s vast popularity. It is equally if not more important than the first because it says that love is so powerful that we must interrogate love and not take it for granted.

In this next section, I present a critique of love and liberal multiculturalism as weak frameworks that depoliticize and hide the continuing role and effects of raciality. Love, I argue, is taken for granted by many adoption supporters as an unshakable and timeless strategy for adoption.\(^\text{164}\) Adoption gets reduced to a grand theory of love that replaces every other consideration and complexity.\(^\text{165}\) Moreover, the love that is championed is of the individual type. It rejects the political because love is not supposed to be political, it is from the heart. Thus, the mantra that feminists have espoused from the late 1960s and still today, that the “personal is political,” is refuted by many adoption advocates. Ardent supporters, such as Randall Kennedy and Elizabeth Bartholet, argue that adoptive parents’ choice to adopt is an “individual or family choice.” In regards to these (“apolitical”) decisions based on race, Kennedy says, “[I]t is essential that people be allowed an ambit of privacy within which they may form intimate relationships, even if those relationships are based on considerations that are properly thought to be silly or

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\(^\text{164}\) Adam Pertman, author and director of the Evans B. Donaldson Adoption Institute, says that “virtually every piece of current research agrees that stability and love during children’s youngest years play critical, lifelong roles in their psychological development, their emotional well-being, and their ability to learn.” Pertman, 2000: 33. Harvard Law professor and strong transracial adoption advocate Randall Kennedy argues that “personal commitment” is more important than “racial knowledge”: “[W]hat parentless children need most of all is not someone who looks like them but someone who loves them.” Kennedy, 2003: 457-8.

\(^\text{165}\) Even Pertman suggests that love plays a crucial role in adoption, “At any age, adoptees benefit from reassurances that their anger, guilt, and grief are normal, that they are unconditionally loved, and that their families are theirs forever....” Additionally, love plays a role in relinquishment too, “It can take years for adoptees to internalize the notion that an adoption placement itself is an act of love, a selfless decision intended to do what’s best for the child.” Pertman 2000: 114-5.
even pernicious.” Likewise, Rita J. Simon and Howard Altstein argue that adoptive parents emphasized adoption should be a personal choice not a political one:

Most of them also emphasized that the parents’ decision must be made on the bases of how much they wanted a child and because they believed they could offer the child a good home. “Slogans, causes, and political ideology should have no place in their decision.” Most of the parents mentioned bad motives such as “proving you are liberal,” “wanting to do something noble,” or “taking a stand against the population explosion.” The good motives were the “selfish ones, including wanting a child very badly.”

Thus, for adoption supporters, transnational adoption is not transnational adoption (a social, political, economic, and cultural exchange between two countries that emerged in global and historical contexts and that affects global relations and subjects). Instead, it is an adoption that happens to be from China—it is “apolitical adoption.” This is often maintained in the face of and to deflect allegations that such adoptions are a form of imperial, colonial, paternalistic exploitation.

For those who do see adoption as a political act, they often relegate it to the level of individual transgression (e.g. choosing to have a multiracial family) or to false social claims, such as, transracial and transnational adoptions are a continuation of Dr. King’s

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168 In explaining why transnational adoption is on the rise, Simon and Altstein contend that carries less historical “baggage” than transracial adoption, “Curiously, adding an international component, in which non-U.S.-born non white children are adopted by white American families, does not make adoption more complex. In fact, in some ways the reverse maybe true: It simplifies matters. Why? Because adopting a foreign-born child generally does not carry the historical ‘baggage’ of the relationship between African Americans and whites in this country. True, there are other issues of wealth, power, race, deception, kidnapping, class exploitation, colonialism, and imperialism, but these conditions are not as ‘close to home’ as the troubled and at times violent history of race in the United States.” Ibid., 144. In essence, Simon and Altstein are depoliticizing and simplifying the choice of adoption by diminishing the global and historical role of violence in transnational adoption, even as they, ironically, point to various processes that make their statement untrue.
dream or that it is has been one of the most effective forms of affirmative action.\footnote{169} Bartholet adds further affirmation, suggesting transracial/national adoptions contribute to the “enrichment of our understanding of the meaning of family and community” and they build “across lines of racial and cultural difference” in which family members “must learn to appreciate one another’s difference while experiencing humanity.”\footnote{170} For Bartholet such adoptions and the adoptees themselves become tools to celebrate cultural and racial difference. What she does not acknowledge is that the celebration of diversity is dependent on the very foreclosure of “difference” ascribed to the birth mother and often the culture or community from which the adoptees came from. Thus, these adoptions are largely framed in liberal multicultural rhetoric.

As David Theo Goldberg suggests, “[A]ny contemporary invocation of race for policy purposes, affirmative or not, comes to be equated with the horrors of racist histories.”\footnote{171} Lowe argues that the U.S. instrumentally deploys the concept of the “cultural” to reconcile inequalities and injustices that the economic and political terrains

\footnote{169} Kennedy says, “After all, what could better embody Dr. King’s dream of interracial brotherhood and sisterhood than the creation of interracial families through adoption?” Kennedy 2003: 452. He also cites a news article: Janice Gilmore, “Interracial Adoption Furt hers King’s Cause” \textit{Omaha World-Herald} (January 12, 2001). Also, in a \textit{New York Times} story, Kirsten Albrecht, head of the Los Angeles based advocacy organization, Transracial Adoption Group, proclaimed, “There’s a real aspect of transracial adoption being the most successful affirmative action program of the 1970’s, putting a large number of black and biracial children into middle-class families in suburban settings…. I don't see it as a second-best alternative, but as an inherently good thing.” Tamar Lewin, “Two Views of Growing Up When the Faces Don’t Match” \textit{The New York Times} (Oct. 27, 1998).


\footnote{171} David Theo Goldberg, \textit{The Racial State} (Malden, Mass.: Blackwell Publishing 2002) 201. For example, Elizabeth Bartholet, Harvard Law professor and passionate adoption supporter, argues that race-matching policies are racist: “So, it seems to me clear that MEPA serves the interests of children, by helping black children in particular to find placements in loving homes of whatever color as promptly as possible. MEPA also seems to me to serve the interests of the larger society, but combating in a small but significant way the notion that race should divide people. Race-matching is the direct descendant of white supremacy and black separatism.” For Bartholet, state promotion of race matching is similar to anti-miscegenation laws, which created barriers and prohibitions of interracial marriage. Elizabeth Bartholet, “Commentary: Cultural Stereotypes Can and Do Die: It’s Time to Move on with Transracial Adoption” \textit{J. of the Amer. Acad. of Psychiatry Law} 34.3 (2006) 320.
cannot resolve. The cultural, in this function, separates and subsequently hides the violent history or the “history of development” of “non-Americans” in favor of the more non-threatening, aesthetic form of ethnic differences.\textsuperscript{172} Transnational and transracial adoptions, in other words, are apolitically aesthetic rather than complex and nuanced. Unlike European countries that could imagine culturally homogeneity, the US has resolved its contradictory past and present by deploying the cultural as an equalizer. The imagination that the US is a melting pot of immigrants, for example, is one way in which histories of violence are separated from aesthetic signifiers. Indeed, Pertman suggests that adoption is reducing prejudice: “Still, adoption is inculcating our society with more and more children who don’t look like their parents, and by doing so, it is playing a small but important role in alleviating bias on a personal level. There are innumerable white grandparents, uncles, aunts, and cousins, for example, who have surprised themselves with the unconditional love they feel for their new black or Asian or Hispanic relatives, and who have learned critical lessons as a result. Adoption is helping to crack the walls of prejudice and intolerance on a broader scale, too. …”\textsuperscript{173} This new “multiculturalism,” in essence, is a new “universalism” that superficially integrates difference and culture, and it must be distinguished from previous and current movements that use multiculturalism not as a tool for obfuscation but as a political tool to build coalitions and address erased histories of people and communities of color in the US and across the globe.\textsuperscript{174} Thus, this strategic multiculturalism used by civil rights activists during the 1960s and 70s that tied culture to material relations promoted exactly what the new liberal multiculturalism tried

\textsuperscript{173} Pertman 2000: 75.  
\textsuperscript{174} Lowe 1996: 29-30.
to suppress, and the aesthetic components that replaced the historical and material relations operate merely as tokenized actions and moments of inclusion.

Liberal multiculturalism’s embrace of cultural “adjacency and admixture”\textsuperscript{175} for adoption supposedly demonstrates progress, but it fails to address broader social and material conditions for not just individuals who are adopted but those who are not adopted: “Although the concept of multiculturalism registers the pressures that increases of immigrant, racial, and ethnic populations bring to all spheres, these pressures are expressed only partially and inadequately in aesthetic representations; the production of multiculturalism instead diffuses the demands of material differentiation through the homogenization, aestheticization, and incorporation of signifiers of ethnic differences.”\textsuperscript{176}

Consequently, the multicultural move flattens and decontextualizes differences and contradictions by employing pluralism, which supposedly equalizes and democratizes US cultural terrain because its “inclusive” and “proportional” representation but really in fact hides and/or “forgets” historical, political, economic violences.\textsuperscript{177}

Interestingly, however, there has been a constant resistance against colorblind policies and liberal multiculturalism.\textsuperscript{178} These views have been articulated in the face of

\textsuperscript{175} Ibid. 68.

\textsuperscript{176} Ibid. 86.

\textsuperscript{177} Goldberg discusses this too, saying that in the US, Brazil, and South Africa commitment to colorblindness is a reiteration to the commitment of whiteness because silences discussion about everyday racism; it forgets how historical racisms (such as colonialism) affect us today; and it displaces racism solely to the private sphere. Goldberg 2002: 221. Similarly, Howard Winant argues that we are not beyond race. Rather, according to Winant, it has taken on new, “cleaned-up” forms of racial ideologies such as color-blindness, multiculturalism, race neutrality, and post-raciality. Howard Winant, \textit{The World is a Ghetto: Race and Democracy Since World War II} (New York: Basic Books, 2001) 2, xiv. Guinier and Torres also articulate strong arguments against color-blind ideology, suggesting it is impossible to be color-blind in such a color conscious world. Lani Guinier and Gerald Torres, \textit{The Miner’s Canary: Enlisting Race, Resisting Power, Transforming Democracy} (Harvard University Press, 2003) 42.

\textsuperscript{178} This resistance began in the early 1970s when the National Association for Black Social Workers wrote and circulated a position that argued transracial adoptions was harmful to black children and to the
“empirical evidence” and state and federal laws, which purport that such policies are in
the best interest of the children. Most recently, the Evans B. Donaldson Adoption
Institute, the foremost adoption research institution in the U.S., published a report that
argued that the laws passed in 1994 and 1996, together known as MEPA-IEP, with their
explicit colorblind policies, are “ill-serv[ing]” children of color in foster care. While
authors and academics such as Simon and Altstein lament that most social workers have
run against its social activism “roots” and “its historic raison d’être” by going against
empirical studies and the law, this report reaffirms many of the critics who argue that
adoption is indeed political and thus needs to be rethought.

black community. The NABSW and Briggs argue that ultimately the position paper had more to do
with preserving black families. Laura Briggs, “Communities Resisting Interracial Adoption: The

See Bartholet 2006: 315-320; Simon and Altstein 2000; and Kennedy 2003. Simon and Altstein fervently argue that their objective, unmotivated, depoliticized scientific inquiries and studies demonstrate that transracial adoption is best for the child and society: “After three decades and several volumes of research, this is our final examination of transracial adoption. We enter this area of inquiry with no social or political agenda. We exit with none. We were interested in looking at how races could live together in so intimate an environment as the family at a time when we thought the races could not get much further apart (mid-1960s). To the best of our ability we sought the truth. We think we found it, as far as that abstract can be found. ... What we have found is that in the overwhelming majority of cases, transracial adoption is a win-win situation.” Simon and Altstein 2000: 149-150. Pertman, however, critiques the methodology of some studies that preselect respondents that composed of families who were better educated, earned higher incomes, and adopted younger and healthier children. Additionally, children filled out questionnaires in the presence of their parents, which could have influenced their answers. Pertman 2000: 116.


The very fact that there are numerous laws that concern adoption point to its political disposition.
Wayne Carp underscores the government’s ubiquitous role in adoption: “A host of state laws govern
every aspect of legal adoptions: who may adopt, who may be adopted, the person who must consent to
The Adoption Revolution?

The general thesis of the “adoption revolution” is that adoption has changed for the better. In the second half of this chapter, I trace this claim and the evidence that might be presented to support this assertion. Lastly, I interrogate the unaddressed effects produced by these contentions that adoption has changed and specifically how the violence of adoption is effaced. In the larger stage of adoption, Pertman has argued that the open records movement is the most significant and “revolutionary” change. With transracial and transnational adoption, however, change has come in other areas. Until recently, the primary procedure for transnational adoption was to bring children from abroad home and make them “American.” This was evidenced in the films *First Person Plural* and *Daughter From Danang*. Today, adoptive parents take their children to cultural festivals and cultural camps; adoptees befriend children from similar and various backgrounds because more adoptive parents are relocating to more diverse neighborhoods as opposed to isolated rural and suburban areas; and many adoptees are encouraged to (and some do) make contact with their birth parents. One adoptive parent, Mr. Doug, expressed how things have changed:

As a father to two adopted children (China and Korea) I understand the issues that my children face each day of not “looking like me”. To this end we have encouraged them to explore there [sic] culture and celebrate these differences to give them the self confidence to succeed in life and to answer any questions they have. We lead local groups to assemble

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183 While this thesis is a strong critique about how adoption has been practiced and is political-symbolically framed, I want to acknowledge that some practices and attitudes of adoption in the US have changed in ways that have address previously ignored issues, and it would be wrong and misleading to suggest otherwise.

internationally adopted kids, to go on picnics, outings, campint, get
togethers etc [sic] … . We have created a [sic] entire community that has
not existed in the past. We feel that we have learned from the past and the
stories that have been told, and from stories like the above to better help
our children adapt and learn what it is to be different and to be Asian in an
American family.\footnote{Mr. Doug, comment \#33 in “Tracing My Roots Back to Korea” Relative Choices: Adoption and the
American Family in The New York Times: Opinion (Nov. 6, 2007).}

The statement by this father underscores the extent that some adoptive parents have
attempted to provide a comforting, safe and nurturing environment that acknowledges
adoptees’ multiple and fluid identities. Whereas before the tendency with transnational
adoption required what I call assimilation overdrive—that is the method in which
adoptees must demonstrate 100-110 percent “Americanness” in order to be legible
subjects—now adoptees are encouraged to explore their (non-US) cultural identity and to
ask questions. One poster, Michael, in response to “Being Adopted and Being Me,”
written by Adam Wolfington, a young African American transracial adoptee, who wrote
about his joys and difficulties of growing up adopted, replied: “An excellent article.
Thanks for sharing. … I hope that you can also find, if you haven’t already, a community
of African-American and interracial youth who can help you grow into all the cultures
that are inside of you.”\footnote{Michael comment \#1 in “Being Adopted, and Being Me” Relative Choices: Adoption and the American
Family in The New York Times: Opinion (Nov. 16, 2007).} Michael’s comment is quite in sync with Mr. Doug. It suggests
the necessity or at the very least the prominent desire to be with people share similar
backgrounds is not something to be ignored but instead embraced. Not only this, his
statement that the author “grow into all the cultures that are inside of you” also implies
that identities are multiple and changing.
Another respondent, David Conrad, to the same blog was from a father who was about to adopt an African American baby. Rather than share his advice or thoughts, as most commenters do, he solicited help:

Thanks for sharing your story. We are in the process of adopting an African American baby right now and trying to prepare ourselves for the challenges we’ll face. I am curious to hear your perspective on how you have - or have not - stayed connected to your African American heritage, or if that is even something you have cared to have thus far in your life. As a white family, my wife, birth-daughter, and I may never know the struggles and emotions our black son, or daughter, will face. From your perspective, what has made it easier for your family to be helpful and understanding?187

Amazing to the this response is the fact the Conrad acknowledges not only his own racial identity as white, but he does so in a way that acknowledges his own limits, his own finitude as an white adoptive parent adopting a black child.188 His statement counters the position that many adoptive parents, and persons in general with high privilege, have taken in terms of being “self-determined” and “capable” of dealing with the difficult issues that face transracial and transnational adoption. Historically, adoptive parents were considered the saviors, the subjects who acted upon the “orphaned” objects. Conrad, however, provides a response that acknowledges the family that he will create will be multicultural rather than solely “white American.” In a similar vein, another commenter, V. Irwin, who has an adopted son, knows and espouses that their family came together differently:

187 David Conrad, comment #37 in “Being Adopted, and Being Me” (Nov. 16, 2007).
188 Many supporters of transracial/national adoptions argue that there is nothing inherent about being black that would allow that person to be more prepared to raise a black child than a white parent. This is the outcry in opposition to cultural competency classes or the like, which presume a level of inadequacy. I would argue any parent(s) should acknowledge this finitude no matter if it is a transracial or intra-racial adoption and that all adoptive parents should receive training.
[H]is beautiful brown skin and handsome Latin looks are there everyday as a reminder that we came together as a family in a different way. I want him to know and be proud of his heritage. It is up to him whether or not he wants to contact his birth mother someday, but I am happy that he acknowledges her every year in his Thanksgiving “grateful” list. It is sometimes a dual life — we are a very normal family day to day, like yours: sports (instead of music), fun vacations, admonitions to do homework, cell phone taken away for family infractions. But we are also the bicultural family with a brown son and a white daughter, and it would be harmful to try to deny that reality. I’ve talked to adoptees whose loving parents tried to raise them solely “as white kids,” and they felt great upheaval as young adults when they came to define who they were.¹⁸⁹

Like Doug, Irwin articulates a wisdom gained by knowing the experiences of past adoptees whose parents had raised them as entirely “American.” While Irwin does not necessarily address the issue of power that is associated with “brown” versus “white” skin, there is a level of understanding that families through transracial/national adoptions are not monocultural and can include the birth parent.

Other indicators of transformations in transracial/national adoptions are the prevalence in culture or heritage camps. These are usually week-long summer camps that provide adoptees (and even adoptive parents) the opportunity to meet, have fun and create social networks. One camp in fact, the Holt Adoptee Camp, has been restructured in a way that is both more inclusive to the diversity of adoptees who might attend camp, rather than the more common mono-ethnic heritage camps, and less essentialist by focusing on issues of identity, adoption, and race instead of static ideas of culture. In addition, some agencies both private, such as Holt International Children’s Services, and public encourage or even require prospective adoptive parents to attend cultural competency or racial privilege workshops and classes.

¹⁸⁹ V. Irwin, comment #11 in “Being Adopted, and Being Me” (Nov. 16, 2007).
Certainly, my analysis of the comments from the blog series suggests that amendments have been made that attend to issues previously ignored in part or in their entirety. I provide such a cross-section of some of the “positive” statements of change and advancements not so much to attempt to be objective, distanced, and unbiased but to acknowledge (unlike other critical academic pieces on adoption) work being done and try to demonstrate what people in this forum are saying. To stop at this point would be imprudent though. We must alternatively engage the competing, overlapping, and contradictory narratives that exist hidden underneath the banner of liberal multiculturalism and incremental improvements.

Pertman and others have suggested that transracial/national adoptions have moved along a linear development from bad to good to better. Silva, however, argues that one of the dangers in liberalism’s apprehension of multiculturalism rests in that it “embraces the sociohistorical logic of exclusion as the correct account of social (racial, ethnic, gender) subjection”\(^{190}\). Thus, my move, in providing instances of “change,” is a subjective one that allows us to ask: Despite these inroads of change, progression, and inclusion, how are the politics of adoption continuing as usual in some ways and how are there in fact new, continued, and disguised forms of violence and social subjection being produced? I argue that seeming shift from assimilationist and colorblind rhetoric of the past to a more inclusive and progressive language of the present is a false separation, but in fact there is still much overlap. While adoption no longer seems contingent on anything and is instead

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\(^{190}\) The other reason is that it “accepts the emergence of claims for recognition of cultural difference as proof of the failure of assimilation.” Silva 2007: xxxiii. Thus failed assimilation, and thus exclusion, is blamed on cultural difference.
considered a depoliticized action in its own isolation, I contend that these advancements should not and cannot be taken out of context.

**Learned Lessons and “We Know Now”**

In one example, an adoptive parent, who speaks for all adoptive parents who have adopted transnationally, expresses gratitude to Sumeia Williams, a blog author, for her stark but compelling entry about her difficult relationship with her adoptive parents and her adoption experiences. She goes on to say that adoptive parents have learned from such stories:

We parents who have adopted internationally over the past few years are grateful to adult adoptees like you, Sumeia, who have spoken out about your experiences. Because of your willingness to share what it’s like to grow up as a child who was adopted, and from another culture, we can know how to ease the way for our own children. Now we know to search for information while our children are still babies, as I did when I was in China adopting my son and daughter, and to share it with them. We know not to wait until they ask about their adoptions, but to bring the subject up ourselves so they’ll know they can always talk about it. And we know that their stories are absolutely their own, not at all just an extension of ours. … Thank you for sharing your story.\(^{191}\)

Julia’s comment speaks to the common refrain that adoptive parents have “learned” and now “know” what to do. She points to ways in which adoptive parents can consider the complexity of their children’s circumstances, understand the initiative needed to engage difficult issues that adoptees might not want to discuss, and acknowledge their own finitude. Indeed, adoptive parents must know this racial grammar in order to be legible and legitimate adoptive families. This new racial grammar that includes liberal multiculturalism, however, continues to negate and foreclose productive violence. Julia’s sweeping statement also fails to address the reality that many adoptive parents still do not

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\(^{191}\) Julia, comment #47 in “Reclaiming Ownership of My History” (Nov. 11, 2007).
“know.” Statements of colorblindness, rescue, individual savior, luck, and gratitude still abound. Some adoptive parents have taken steps to put forth a competing ideology of transracial/national adoption that centers more on the adoptee rather than the adoptive parent, but I will demonstrate that problematic views pervade adoption discourse alongside new liberal multicultural statements and practices that can be just as dangerous because they miss how adoption must be resituated in order get at the violent political-symbolic signifying strategies that institute the differential and oppositional emergence of racial subjects.

**Colorblindness**

Embraced by liberal multiculturalists, the idea of colorblindness still permeates within the adoption discourse, community, and wider public. As an initial response to the earlier assimilation structure, colorblindness was and still is purported as a “progressive” way of seeing the world, where color “should not” and “does not” affect people, experiences, and outcomes. An adoptive parent of two children from Ethiopia expresses this idea, “I love them as if they came from my own body, and I’ve like to think they love back in the same way. Skin is just skin it means nothing. I have tried to help my children feel that ‘it’s in the inside of the cookie that counts.’”

Another poster responds condescendingly to Hollee McGinnis, a Korean adoptee and blog author who wrote about her feelings on having a baby, someone who she can physically resemble for the first time in her life:

> You are still young and unformed. This is not to say that you immature and ill-educated or lacking maturity. You are yet unaware of many other factors which you may not have considered up until this point. … Now,

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192 Helen Jimenez Ulloa, comment #50 in “Being Adopted, and Being Me” (Nov. 16, 2007).
though, I have lived and traveled elsewhere in this world. What I have seen is that there is no difference in people, regardless of where they are from, what their religion is, or how old they are. ... What I am trying to say; it doesn’t matter if your [sic] Korean or Catholic, Jewish or Arab, Black or White. What matters, when you are at the end of your life, is whether you have been able to love well.\textsuperscript{193}

Both of these responses vividly illustrate the feelings of individuals who embrace colorblindness. There seems to be little doubt that the adoptive parent loves her two children, but her adhesion to the notion that “skin is just skin[;] it means nothing” stems from the assumption that we emerge into this world as equals and are subsequently judged as equals. Similarly, the second response suggests that there is a fundamental sameness about individuals that revolves not around appearance or religion but around the concept of love. Both respondents imply that there is an interior aspect of individuals that allows them to overcome exterior obstacles or differences, but what this explicitly conceals is the complex role that globality plays in determining how people emerge differently in relation to each other. While it is a positive ideal for many, the limits of colorblindness reveal themselves in the material reality of being an adoptee of color.\textsuperscript{194} Colorblind rhetoric not only negates the positive experiences and components of identity relating to ethnicity and religion, but it also ignores the historical and global components of transracial/national adoptees and related subjects that distinguish their emergence from others.

**Rejecting and Reiterating Rescue**

Also contributing to this perception of revolution is the amount of statements by respondents of the blogs who repudiated deep-rooted beliefs of luckiness and rescue, but

\textsuperscript{193} Susannah, comment # 17 in “Blood Ties and Acts of Love” (Dec. 4, 2007).
\textsuperscript{194} Jeni Wright talks about how her mother stitched a quilt that read “Love is Colorblind,” but that motto did not help her when she left her house. Outsiders Within (2006) 28.
again, this disavowal of rescue is the reformulated racial grammar that allows adoptive parents to fully legible. It, however, like previous and continuing statements of rescue, still fails to address violence in a meaningful way. The tropes of paternalism and rescue have pervaded adoption discourse in the U.S. since the mid-1800s. They were reformulated, condensed, and more dominant with the emergence of transracial/national adoptions since the early 1900s during the removal of Native American children from reservations and subsequently continued and increased in rhetoric and tone after the Korean and Vietnam wars. More recent statements, however, have tried to steer away from the previous discourses of rescue and luck. Many examples of this are demonstrated by statement by adoptive parents who claim that both the adoptee and they are “lucky.” For instance, in the comment section following the “Finding Zhao Gu” blog, one respondent, Susan, replied to another poster who claimed that Mr. Gammage’s child, and children from China in general, was lucky to be adopted, “As for the comment that the children adopted out of China are the luckiest kids in the world—wrong. Any child who finds a loving home is a lucky kid. But I’ll tell you who the luckiest parents in the world our [sic]—me and my husband.”195 Another adoptive mother says comments that her daughter is lucky are very common and are even espoused by family members, and similarly, she refutes these claims by stating that she is the lucky one.196 In a slight variation, one adoptive mother professes that “we didn’t rescue them, they rescued us.”197 Indeed, there are at least ten statements made that by mostly adoptive parents that explicitly claim that they are the lucky ones. Another person in the process of adoption,

195 Susan, comment #59 in “Finding Zhao Gu” (Nov 2, 2007).
197 Laura, comment #51 in “Tracing My Roots Back to Korea” (Nov. 6, 2007).
Luna, jokingly explains that she is not interested in saving a child but raising a child, “I am simply fulfilling my longing to raise a child—not competing for sainthood. Actually, if I can just be adequate I’ll be happy. So perhaps the notion that adoptive parents are ‘saving’ a child is fading. Let’s hope so.”\textsuperscript{198}

One mother, Lisa, stated her opposition to the ideas of luck and rescue more bluntly, “As an adoptive mother, the lucky comment is one of the most annoying. No child is “lucky” to be loved and raised in a safe home. This is the birthright of every child. This is what everyone deserves. No parent is a savior of a child, no matter how that child entered their life.”\textsuperscript{199} Another response by an adoptive mother touches on the issues of personal history, luck, and gratefulness:

In response to Adopted One, who suggested Adam should be grateful to his adoptive parents and not think about his birth parents: I say hogwash. … I have kids through adoption, and they don’t owe me anything. … [T]hey don’t need to be “grateful” to me for anything. I recognize that their lives did not begin with me, but rather, a year or more before I saw them. I am lucky to have them, but they’re not lucky to have suffered the tragedies they did so early in life. I won’t deny them access to any information they want about that time. Frankly, I’d be surprised if they weren’t curious.\textsuperscript{200}

Congruent with the statements earlier in the chapter, these ones also demonstrate slight or moderate changes in attitude toward these historically rooted themes of rescue and luck. Of course, many of the statements that “modestly” say that “we are the lucky ones” can be just as problematic. They can in fact be more obscuring than revealing because they still fail to interrogate power and violence; rather, they simply superficially shift the luckiness to themselves. As Luna demonstrates though, adoptive parents are shying away

\textsuperscript{198} Luna, comment #5 in “Blood Ties and Acts of Love” (Dec. 4, 2007).
\textsuperscript{199} Lisa V., comment #4 in “Blood Ties and Acts of Love” (Dec. 4, 2007).
\textsuperscript{200} Egypt mom, comment #42 “Being Adopted, and Being Me” (Nov. 16, 2007).
and even problematizing political and social justifications for adoption; they just want to create a family. Further, this last response underscores the importance of history and subjectivity prior to adoption, and while framing children’s lives as tragedies can be another form victimizing (for which they then need rescuing), her usage here speaks more to the personal violence that children experience, which then gives reasoning and validation as to adoptees would want and should be able to access information about their birth and early years.

Yet, at the same time, there were numerous statements that claimed adoptees should feel lucky or grateful. One telling instance involves a respondent who appears to be an adoptive parent because she says Hollee McGinnis’ blog addresses the same issue that she has been thinking about in terms of her daughter, which is whether her daughter will give birth or adopt. She characterizes the discussion as an “annoying” two-sided debate:

It’s strange how many people carp on the theme of gratitude. The two sides are equally annoying: the disgruntled who project their anger on to all adoptive parents, seeing them as privileged white folks bent on a course of poisoning the life of a (brown) child; and the adoptive parents who are, like, please, I just want to love, don’t mind me, I’m the one who is grateful to my so remarkable child. This is such a silly debate. Can’t we just step back and recognize adoption on a less emotional level, for what it is?–namely, a good deed. I use this word deliberately, because “deed” implies action, and agency, and as anyone who adopts a child knows—you have to work at the process every step of the way. The industry is guilty of some gross abuses, and adoptive children do suffer from problems of identity. But the bottom line remains the same: children are better off in loving families, and adoption gives thousands of kids that chance. And quite frankly, I think gratitude should rightly be extended to those who adopt, for whatever reason, rather than adding to the global population. Adoption is good for our collective global future—which is coming right at us whether we like it or not—an argument I have yet to see
made in this very self-reflective series of essays, in which everyone tries to outdo everyone else in the caring game.\(^{201}\)

While this commenter, like many of the other respondents, writes a lot, she reduces the complexity of adoption to a “bottom line,” which is “children are better off in loving families, and adoption gives thousands of kids that chance.” This reductionist or “bottom line” approach makes suspect her acknowledgment that adoptees have “problems with identity,” and her characterization of one side as “disgruntled” and the other as über-conscious or over-compensatory, again, ignores the social, economic, and historical bases of critical critiques. It also does not call into question why more adoptive parents are making these seemingly progressive claims. For this respondent, what matters most is a specific type of action that she ties to the future—adoption. What it does not consider is numerous forms of violence that adoption institutes and how the past is very necessary and at hand in the present and the future. If we were to consider violence, suddenly the “bottom line” is ruptured and its placement and even relevance is questioned. In its place we have openness to consider global and historical contexts and members of adoption beyond the adoptee. In other words, “bottom lines” obscure the reality that adoption is complex and cannot be reduced to simplistic reductions.

More than a few commenters replied to McGinnis’ specific statement in her “Blood Ties and Acts of Loves” blog in which she expresses her thoughts on the themes of luckiness and gratitude that her expected child will not have to face: “I am glad that my child will not be told by well-meaning strangers he or she is “lucky” to have been born. And I certainly won’t tell my child to be grateful because I brought them into the

\(^{201}\) Valerie, comment #71 in “Blood Ties and Acts of Love” (Dec. 4, 2007).
world.” Their response is that any child would be lucky to receive love by a family.²⁰²

One parent, Annick, of both a biological and an adopted child, after thanking McGinnis for her blog, says that many children are unlucky, so those who are should acknowledge it:

I just have a comment regarding “lucky” and “gratitude”. What’s wrong with these words and these feelings? Some children are born in families where violence replaces care and love - I think they are very unlucky. Doesn’t this make the other children lucky?? … Yes it SHOULD be a birthright for every child to feel loved and to be cared for but the reality is different and a lot of children in this world - biological or adopted - are pretty unlucky. And yes it can be annoying to hear this comment over and over again but still I can’t see why it should be wrong for our children to feel gratitude for having caring parents.²⁰³

Annick statement can be well taken, especially her point that violence occurs in non-adoptive families as well. To be sure, many foster care situations are caused by this. Statements of luck and gratitude, however, go beyond the expression of “tiresome”; they instead reiterate a historical trope of rescue that has been applied to certain bodies and regions such as Native Americans in the US and people of color in Third World countries. This trope has become entwined with what McGinnis refers to as the culture of adoption, and it is problematic because the gesture, again, individualizes the situation of adoption. Additionally, these statements certainly do not take into account how globality and the racial help determine who most often has the “proper” racial particularities and signifiers that can interpret the language of luck, which are usually non-black babies and children. And again, it places the luck and gratitude squarely upon the adoptee without

²⁰² See Hollee McGinnis, “Blood Ties and Acts of Love” comments 21, 22 and, 47, 62, 74, and 90. One example is a parent who says, “My daughter is often told that she is lucky to have us as her parents. She is not adopted. I think this is a kind thing for someone to say, and not necessarily a reflection that adoption is an act of saving.” Capri, comment #8 in “Blood Ties and Acts of Love” (Dec. 4, 2007).
²⁰³ Annick, comment # 35 in “Blood Ties and Acts of Love” (Dec. 4, 2007).
mention or thought of birth parents and other people of color who do not have the privilege of adoption.

In many examples the trope of rescue appears in subtle ways. A teacher, for example, says she plans to share Adam Wolfington’s story of “Being Adopted, and Being Me” to her students to demonstrate the diversity of American families and “how one of our strengths as a country is the generosity [of] people like [his] parents,” which allows him to be “so lucky.”204 The teacher’s comment not only speaks to how adoptees should feel but reiterates the notion that adoptive parents ought to be thanked for their humanitarian considerations and actions in which they become symbols for an exceptional nation. This trend of individual praise continues with other respondents. One person says, “The happiest outcome once again revolves around the single individual who rises to their personal best.”205 Another proclaims, “…you have done your life’s work!”206 These statements of individual praise demonstrate how adoption is still connects with notions of rescue.

The trope of rescue can also present itself more explicitly. In two examples it does so in tandem with statements of cultural difference, which simultaneously heightens the “need” and justifies the action. To be sure, statements of cultural difference, usually based on political, moral, and/or economic bankruptcy, have supplemented—and in some instances replaced—statements of racial difference that were first instituted by globality

204 Maria, comment #15 in “Being Adopted, and Being Me” (Nov. 16, 2007).
205 Linda, comment #18 in “Finding Zhao Gu” (Nov 2, 2007).
206 Manick, comment #25 in “Finding Zhao Gu” (Nov 2, 2007). Others extrapolate such actions as proof of the compassion of humanity. For example, one commenter says, “It clearly proves that humanity does exist anywhere in the world. I am thrilled for the child who found a loving home. It restores my faith in humanity” (Nora, comment #72 in “Finding Zhao Gu” (Nov 2, 2007). Yet, another person says, “I am still crying. Anyone who could read this and not feel the empathy needs to rejoin the human race.” Randy Koonse comment #143 in “Finding Zhao Gu” (Nov 2, 2007).
and maintained historically. These statements of cultural difference are indeed the ones that most prominently engender social and political commitment to adopt transracially and transnationally in the first place. For example, one respondent, who is neither an adoptive parent nor an adoptee, says adoption is rescue and expresses her gratitude to those make the sacrifice:

> Being adopted IS synonymous with being saved and rescued. What is the fate of those who are not adopted, fostered, cared for by strangers or family members? …One sweet little girl who was adopted from a country in Asia with physical issues—she was not growing or talking or walking at the rate she should for her age—upon being brought to the US with her new family, received proper medical care and therapy, is now on track—growing and thriving. She was rescued from a fate unknown. So many children in orphanages throughout the world languish. Thank God for the people who have the means and presence of mind to go an [sic] get some of those babies. … People who take someone else’s child into their home and arms and care for them as their own child are high on my list because they really don’t have to do so. Love is thicker than blood…

Aside from making her claim explicit, Barbara’s statement implies cultural difference in terms of other countries’ ability (or inability) to properly care for their children. Without a strong rebuke of the U.S. or of parents who do have the means but not the “presence of mind,” her statement conflates those willing to “take someone else’s child into their home” with the U.S. and situates them together, as rescuers. The U.S. becomes the main site of refuge and the leading place for potential individual growth. Barbara’s inability or choice not to specifically identify the country that she is speaking about makes her point more generalizable to all of Asia and eventually “throughout the world.” For her, these other countries paradoxically embody the abstract conditions of cultural difference, poverty, and ineptness. While the U.S. is extremely wealthy compared to most Asian

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countries and nations worldwide, Barbara’s statement presupposes the cultural difference as a priori and fails to historically contextualize how both regions and subjects emerge differently in relation to one another often because of the very statements such as hers that construct and maintain difference.

In a related example, a person, who does not appear to be an adoptive parent or an adoptee, provides very telling remarks in response to Jeff Gammage’s “Finding Zhao Gu.” Gammage’s entry recounts the story of how his daughter was found by a Chinese man and taken to an orphanage. He then explains the effort to locate and joy of talking to that same person over the phone and being able to fill a “blank spot” in his daughter’s past. Pamela, the respondent, completes what Gammage began in terms of talking about China’s “cultural difference” through abandonment:

I cried too, as many have while reading your post. While we find it mystifying how Chinese people can so easily give up their little girl babies to providence, we also find that our common feelings about these defenseless little babies with the man who found this little one, assure us that we share his basic Chinese sensibilities about this little girl’s welfare and fate in life. This unspeakable practice of casting off unwanted girl babies because of the Chinese one child policy and the tradition of valuing the boy babies over the girls is a horrible legacy of man’s inhumanity to man. What it does for many of us here, in the United States and elsewhere, is provide opportunities for every [sic] greater diversity in our homes and communities.\(^{208}\)

Similar to Barbara, Pamela reiterates racial difference through national and cultural descriptors. In framing transnational adoption in terms of abandonment and rescue, Pamela reiterates global cultural binaries. The individual man who found and took Gammage’s daughter to the orphanage represents the exception in a culturally deficient nation, and he possesses the “basic sensibilities” that his nation lacks. Simultaneously,

\(^{208}\) Pamela Fisk, comment #84 in “Finding Zhao Gu” (Nov 2, 2007).
the West, and specifically the United States, represents the opposite of China, and it becomes the beacon for diversity. Unequivocal support for diversity enables the US to claim racial exceptionalism. Thus, while the individual in China is a laudable exception, the people of the US represent humane rule. Pamela’s framework of abandonment and rescue erases the ways in which the US state and US adoption policies and practices produce and perpetuate their own violences in regards to adoptees and related subjects. Statements such as these support the moral pedestal that provides ammunition for later assaults on adoptees, which manifest themselves in constant articulations of feeling different. Transracial/national adoption is supposed to represent the transgression of racial difference, but reoccurring tropes of abandonment and rescue in fact reiterate cultural difference, hide other forms of violence, and help produce and perpetuate their own forms.

In another example, Tama Janowitz, one of the blog authors, explains that the cultural and ethnic diversity of people and within families in New York City has made it easier to raise her daughter who was adopted from China. “[W]e haven’t attracted too much attention,” she says. Instead, she focuses on the more “universal” issue that nearly every parent has, which is resentment from children, but in doing so she evokes themes of rescue, gratitude, and cultural difference:

So in a way it is kind of nice to know as a parent of a child, biological or otherwise – whatever you do is going to be wrong. Like I say to Willow: ‘Well, you know, if you were still in China you would be working in a factory for 14 hours a day with only limited bathroom breaks!’ … Sometimes I think, Well, maybe I should be more of a disciplinarian. But what am I going to do, lock her in her room? She has an ensuite bath, a
Janowitz’s blog attempts to deploy sarcastic and witty humor as a productive means to deal with the issue of child resentment toward their parents, which she perceives as more simple than many parents think. She says, “Hate me or love me, I am her mother and she knows it and since she is not getting a reaction out of me she almost immediately revises her opinion.”

Janowitz’s blog elicited 128 comments during the time that comments were allowed. There were both praises and critiques of Janowitz. Those who voiced their approval stated that her “thoughts are trenchant and humane”\(^\text{209}\); she “should give lessons in Flushing” on how to parent\(^\text{211}\); and “kudos to you for ‘keeping it real.’”\(^\text{212}\) One proclaimed that he would send the blog “far and wide.”\(^\text{213}\) Another said, in a similar hipster tone like Janowitz, “Fabulous post, darling. But like, who cares? Go brush your teeth! In all seriousness, I think some of my fellow commentators might not have totally appreciated the gist of your column. But don’t let it stop you!”\(^\text{214}\) Despite all of the positive feedback, support, and agreement, some respondents disagreed saying that not all children resent their parents.\(^\text{215}\) A few went further and criticized Janowitz’s comments, especially the one about being a child laborer in birth country, China.\(^\text{216}\) One of the

\(^{209}\) Tama Janowitz, “The Real Thing” (Nov. 12, 2007).
\(^{210}\) Young Ha, comment #2 in “The Real Thing” (Nov. 12, 2007).
\(^{211}\) toughttid, comment #1 in “The Real Thing” (Nov. 12, 2007).
\(^{212}\) Suzi, comment #76 in “The Real Thing” (Nov. 12, 2007).
\(^{213}\) Michael James Hawk, comment #77 in “The Real Thing” (Nov. 12, 2007).
\(^{214}\) Jennifer, comment #112 in “The Real Thing” (Nov. 12, 2007).
\(^{215}\) Comments #4, 27, 31, 51, 74 in “The Real Thing” (Nov. 12, 2007).
\(^{216}\) Comments #83, 93, 114, 118. Another adoptive parent made a similar statement about being rescue and the possibility of child labor in China, “This story must be similar to that one that describes how my daughter was rescued 15 years ago. Thank you for it. As Ling Jin gets older she listens with greater understanding to stories of Chinese near-slave labor making clothes she may be wearing today! They
strongest rebukes, however, came from Cynthia Callahan who agreed with Janowitz’s overall points but was strongly offended by the child labor comment:

I—a person who possesses a good and quite dark sense of humor, just for the record—took issue with the author’s “sweat shop” joke. For me, it seems to perpetuate an attitude that has been evident in many of the comments and some of the entries in this blog: that adoptive parents have rescued their children and delivered them into a better a life. This entry, for instance, suggests with tongue in cheek that the child’s alternatives were “ensuite bathroom” or “factory” (sweatshop?), and who wouldn’t take the nice bathroom? Put in these terms, international adoption seems like a no-brainer, but the author’s language also implies a whole set of cultural and economic values that oppose one another. Chinese culture=oppression, economic deprivation, and exploitation. American culture=affluence, material possessions, and the personal freedom to tell your parents off, if you want to. Like the language of rescue surrounding international adopters, these assumptions do not do justice to the complexity of adoption or of the cultures involved.217

While the most of the other critiques of Janowitz’s blog entry were more based on being offended, Callahan addresses the issues of implied rescue and cultural difference. Indeed, Callahan’s response speaks for itself. Although Janowitz maybe using humor to get her point across, Callahan demonstrates that this issue of “resentment” and adoption are complex, and certainly, the manner in which Janowitz speaks to them denies that complexity by simplifying the context to “universal” child resentment of the parent and deploying cultural difference. The articulation of these statements is a multicultural move that at one the one hand reduces negates difference to aesthetics, i.e. to the level of irrelevance, but on the other assumes difference, inferiority, and inability as complete givens. We must consider these comments seriously and not brush them off as remnants of the “old adoption discourse” because to do so would ignore not only their force and

understand they are lucky, but I remind them that so am I, who against even greater odds, was born into a resource rich culture that allowed me to take them into my home.” Margaret comment #32 in “Finding Zhao Gu” (Nov 2, 2007).

217 Cynthia Callahan, comment #50 in “The Real Thing” (Nov. 12, 2007).
violence but also the violence that still exist in statements of multiculturalism and inclusion. To be sure, perceptions of rescue, luck, and innate cultural difference pervade and compete in the larger adoption discourse. As one commenter says, “I make no apologies for being an American adoptive parent, pardon me, a distorted arrogant imperialist for US values, because if it hadn’t been for us or somebody else like us, our particular kids would have been almost foredoomed to an ugly fate that is very much different from the lives they enjoy. I would only ever say this on an anonymous forum, but the fact is that we were their saviors.” Assertions of rescue and cultural difference must not be seen as discourse of the past; instead, we must understand the role globality plays in determining how subjects emerge differently as “innately” inferior or superior. While globality was initially founded on the biological, its effects have been maintained and reiterated through statements that attempt to prove cultural difference. Less apparent in my analysis is where black children and adoptees fit in. While Asian children fit into the existing racial grammar of the US that posits Asian Americans and immigrants as the model minority, quiet, hard working, smart, and law abiding, the translation for black American children is much more difficult. As Dorow suggests, Asian babies are desirably different and relatively baggage-free, but black babies remain baggage laden tainted with abjectness, illegality, and criminality. Thus depending on the racial particularities, the projects of rescue, adoption, and family creation are seen as either possible or impossible. Again, my intention is not to single out adoptive families, but it suggests that underlying ideologies of the racial that have been informed by the global/historical have material effects on the structures and outcomes in adoption.

218 “Imperialistic Parent,” comment #23 in “Tracing My Roots Back to Korea” (Nov. 6, 2007).
What I have tried to demonstrate is that some of the statements that critique old notions of rescue and cultural difference seem encouraging, but this new liberal multicultural rhetoric, along with the “old” statements and practices of assimilation and rescue, is still a tool of raciality. Presenting adoptive parents and families with supposedly new tools, liberal multiculturalism has merely apprehended the previously violent racial grammar of assimilation and applied it to the new model. Raciality continues to inform transracial/national adoption, and the local/present framework maintains the obfuscation of violence. The statements that disavow the notions of luck and rescue, which are often bestowed onto adoptees, are merely simplifying the conditions to asocial and apolitical in order to deflect these critiques. Statements that address historical conditions and context certainly give signs of relief, but they also stop short of justice for people beyond the adoptee. These two types of statements, along with explicit ones that practice “old habits,” are all competing narratives in current adoption discourse, thus, the separation or shift from old politics, rhetoric, and practice to new ones is false. The traction that “new,” “reformed,” and “inclusive” statements have received though is dangerous because the illusion of a revolution or dramatic shift effaces the real presence of continuing statements that deny the role of the historical and individualize and simplify adoption, which is one main reason why the adoption debate is stuck in a binary mode of either/or. Reshifting the framework of the adoption debate from apolitical individual choice to a global/historical context that acknowledges personal decisions but also recognizes the very political nature of adoption will be a first step in reducing violence that adoption produces for adoptees and other people affected by adoption.
Chapter 3

The Violence of Adoption

We are getting along fine now; we expect to have many satisfactions in the future. At the same time, we know that our son may meet prejudice, particularly when he reaches adolescence. But should that happen, he will have two things in his favor. He will have had his mother and me during all the years before adolescence. And he will have us then.219

—Adoptive Father

One perspective that has historically stayed with transracial/national adoptions is that the only possible issue (i.e. violence) that an adoptee will face is discrimination, especially during the beginning years of transracial/national adoptions. In other words, the main obstacle that transracial/national adoptions must overcome is that of exclusion. When working with Minnesota social workers in the 1960s, Harriet Fricke noted that the introduction of such adoptions engendered an “I’m-not-prejudice-but-everyone-else-is” mentality that spoke to reasons why some “liberal” white Americans would not adopt transracially and to continued fears of adoptive parents. This fear, however, was and still is brushed aside as a small barrier to overcome. The quote above demonstrates how one adoptive father of a black transracial adoption in the 1960s expressed his attitude about the tricky subject of race. Beyond possibly confusing prejudice with discrimination, this father suggests that the only violence his son will encounter is “prejudice.” This reiterates the mantra that has stayed with transracial adoption, which is as long as parental and familial love stay constant then children who are adopted will grow up just fine despite

219 Fricke 1965: 97.
discrimination and racial challenges they might face. Fricke describes this quote as “perhaps the best description of their attitude toward the coming years [of transracial adoption].” The “their” refers to adoptive parents who are both aware of the need for and open to the idea of these adoptions. Thus, the quote expresses the feelings of not only the adoptive father and Fricke but all transracial adoptive parents. Fricke claimed that a “little revolution” occurred in the late 1960s because white adoptive parents were able to overcome their own racial prejudice and the fear of discrimination from their neighbors, but how does this simplify the realities of transracial/national adoption? What are the narratives that continue today, and to what extent do they address, ignore, and reproduce various forms and levels of violence? Lastly, how does this violence contribute to the ways in which subjects emerge differently and help determine whether they are intelligible or not?

In this chapter, I argue that despite changes in transracial/national adoptions practices, statements from the comments of these New York Times blogs demonstrate how family and multiculturalism work in concert to individualize, dehistoricize, and flatten the complex global and historical contexts of adoption in a way that produces and simultaneously hides violence enacted onto adoptees and non-adopted subjects. This chapter, in short, explores the violence of inclusion. It first acknowledges “the break” as the universal reference of violence. Adoption discourse and practice use this referent as the point of departure to begin the progressive or teleological narrative of adoption, where security, permanency, love, and family take the place of violence, homelessness, institutions, and trauma, which in turn produces a complete and resolved normative family. I argue, however, that the narrative of inclusion and progression obscures the
unmarked precessional and successional violence that is produced by the state, adoption agencies, and adoptive parents. The real and/or traumatic must either be negated or foreclosed because it threatens the perceived completeness and linearity of the adoptive family. I examine numerous comments posted in response to blogs from *The New York Times* to demonstrate how adoption discourse and practice has maintained elements that perpetuate old forms of violence. I argue that these elements, such as the antihistorical statements and articulations of realness by adoptive parents and adoptees, grand theories of love, and the rejection of the political, contribute not only to the production and reiteration but also the negation of unmarked precessional and successional violence.

**Precessional violence**

I categorize precessional violence as that violence that precedes the traumatic and marked event of “the break” but which also spans time because such violence can reappear in the form of memories or the act of remembering. It, like successional violence, is mainly unmarked and negated or foreclosed, and it can be organized into main two categories: material and political-symbolic. Much of the literature that critiques transracial/national adoptions has already addressed the material aspects of precessional violence. For example, literary scholar Christina Klein and historian Arissa Oh, along with Deann Borshay Liem’s film, *First Person Plural*, elucidate the ways in which the US played a role in creating the “need” for adoption. Likewise, the US involvement in the Vietnam War contributed to the estimated 70,000 “orphans” in Vietnam.\(^{220}\)

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Additionally, almost simultaneous with the rise of adoptions from Korea and the beginnings of transracial adoption of black children in the US, the state, through the backing and funding by Bureau of Indian Affairs and the administrative efforts of the Child Welfare League of America, began the “Indian Adoption Project.” This state sanctioned and funded effort lasted ten years, from 1958 to 1967. It placed nearly 400 Native American children with white families mostly in Illinois, Indiana, New York, Massachusetts, and Missouri, with a small percentage in other Eastern, Midwestern, and Southern states.\(^{221}\) This project was the continuation of federal attempts since 1878 to “civilize,” Christianize and assimilate Native Americans and is in fact one of the many cases in which Native American children were sent or forcibly removed from their homes to boarding schools, orphanages, or adopted by white families.\(^{222}\)

Furthermore, Dorothy Roberts and Rickie Solinger hammer the US government in its domestic adoption policies and welfare reform that, together, work against mothers and families of color and for white parents who had the privilege to “choose” to adopt because they not only had the economic means but are culturally represented as “good choice makers.”\(^{223}\) Historian Wayne Carp notes that the state is involved in nearly every aspect of adoption:

A host of state laws govern every aspect of legal adoptions: who may adopt, who may be adopted, the person who must consent to the adoption, the form the adoption petition must take, the notice of investigation and

\(^{221}\) Ellen Herman, “Indian Adoption Project” (Nov. 7, 2007) <http://www.uoregon.edu/~adoption/topics/IAP.html>.

\(^{222}\) Robert A. Trennert, “Educating Indian Girls at Nonreservation Boarding Schools, 1878-1920” The Western Historical Quarterly 13.3 (July 1982) 278.

formal hearing of the adoption petition, the effect of the adoption decree, the procedure for appeal, the confidential nature of the hearings and records in adoption proceedings, the issuance of new birth certificates, and adoption subsidy payments.\textsuperscript{224}

The state’s regulation of adoption is in part mapped out by Carp. Its primary role was “enveloping” adoption in secrecy. The examples of war, violence, and even secrecy all demonstrate the temporal fluidity of the material precessional violence because the memory or even thoughts of the war can arouse the violent past, and the continued absolute secrecy in many states haunts adoptees who try to find out more about themselves and their birth parents. Precessional violence also includes inadequate funding for institutional programs and structures that help homeless, foster, or orphaned children. It also includes the increasingly predominant practice of black market baby selling in which babies are acquired through trickery or coercion. In this case, the enactors of violence are both the adoptive parents who push “supply” to a highpoint that it creates an environment of unethical practices and the baby brokers who facilitate these black market adoptions for quick and high profits. The point here is not to provide an exhaustive enumeration of material precessional forms of violence, but instead, it highlights the unmarked violence that precedes the moment of adoption. This violence is almost always ignored, negated, or foreclosed.

The second part of precessional violence is the political-symbolic signification that I discuss in chapter one, where subjects emerge differently, in relation and opposition, to each other because of how globality and the racial inform transracial/national adoptions. Again, this type of precessional violence, racial

\textsuperscript{224} Carp 2002: 1-2.
signification, is not tied to a specific temporal location. While I argue that adoptees reemerge after adoption in relation to their adoptive families, the racial signification of the birth parents and the community or culture from which the adoptees come from continue to emerge in racial particularity that is in opposition to the adoptive family and thus unintelligible. Moreover, although adoptees “reemerge” through adoption, their racial signification often depends on the presence of the adoptive family and, in essence, is unstable. Thus in applying a global/historical framework, I hope to show how precessional violence operates in concert with successional violence and how they are indeed the conditions of possibility for “linear” and “complete” transracial/national adoptions.

**Successional violence**

In shifting to successional violence, we should think about what McGinnis states in her blog, that “love can be thicker than blood.” This is the axiom that comes to mind when we think about adoption, especially transracial/national adoptions, where “difference” is more noticeable. Part of this project, however, is to interrogate how transracial/national adoptions produce violence for not only the adoptee but for non-adopted subjects too. This violence is not the overt violence seen in rare and often hyper-exposed instances of adoption, which lead to abuse, physical violence, or even “return/failure.” Focus on this type of violence can be unproductive because it obscures the political-symbolic violence that is far more pervasive. Important to my reframing of transracial/national adoption is investigating what I call successional violence. While the term “successional,” like precessional, implies a temporally linear rigidity, I argue that many of the different forms of violence that fall under this category have the ability and
are in fact temporally and spatially fluid. Successional violence includes the violence to the adoptees, to their birth parents, and to other communities of color “after” the initial act of adoption. I place some of these types of violence under this category even though their status is fluid because I believe that is where they might most commonly fit, but again this does not mean that they are statically successional.

Probably the most significant or well known successional violence is ignoring or erasing individual histories. Common forms of this type of successional violence include disregarding birth “culture,” identity, and birth parents. Pertman notes that adoptive families have historically wanted to maintain a strict notion of family in order to be normal: “Society’s central mistake in the past, which led to nearly all the faulty statutes and misguided behaviors we still live with, was to try to force adoption into the same mold as ‘normal’ (defined as biological, same-race, heterosexual) family formation.”

Traditionally, Carp argues, adoption “constitutes narrative of closure, or resolution,” where stories of adoption “typically end with a child being taken by a new family and with the acknowledgement—legal and otherwise—of the finality of this domestic arrangement.” The desire for normality and completeness that are free from the fear of intrusion by birth parents or another past and identity stimulates violence because there is an unremitting contestation by both, which is embodied through the recurring specter of the birth parents. Thus, this violence requires a clean or plenary “break” (one that cannot literally happen but that is attempted nonetheless) that goes beyond the relinquishment and separation of adoptable children and their birth parents. The birth parents, and by

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226 Carp 2002: 52.
extension their respective communities, are then separated from the adoptive family in social death. As Barbara Yngvesson notes, the clean break allows the adoptees to integrate and connect to a “new family, a new name, a new nation.” In transnational adoption, this break has heightened relevance because a vast majority of the time birth records do not exists and children are adopted at younger ages so they do not remember as much from their childhood or past. As one adoption expert put it, “[A]s own-country adoption becomes more open, more couples may of course turn to intercountry adoption in the expectation that they will not have to concern themselves too much with issues about parental access and possible interference.” The complete break in fact enables the privileged adoptee to (violently) re-emerge as another subject with a new identity, one whose ties to his/her the past are severed. Moreover, this break is facilitated by the state through the legal adoption process that forces birth parents to relinquish all rights and through closed record laws that make it extremely difficult and in most cases impossible for adoptees to find information about their birth parents or about any other documents from their past. While the notion of blocking out or erasing history is impossible because history is fundamentally engaged with the present and the future, attempts to do so by adoptive parents are similar to the state’s efforts to maintain the historicity of linear time. Just as the state endeavors, so too does the adoptive family who hopes to create a new beginning in order to make a “real family.” This move of creating a linear and progressive historicity requires that adoptive families deny or obfuscate what

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229 It could be argued that white adoptive families play a role that is opposite to Giorgio Agamben’s critique of the state—that is, while the state determines bare life, they cultivate and support full life. Thus, through transnational and transracial adoption, nonwhite children can be made intelligible and become universal subjects of hope, demonstrating the morality adoption and the power of love.
happens before and outside of adoption. Rather than allowing history and the present—and therefore the future—to be open, the statements and actions of many adoptive parents forecloses this possibility in efforts to maintain their family. Again, the violence that is produced and reiterated is not necessarily the explicit and sole work of the adoptive family; rather, the adoptive family grasps onto and employs such signifying strategies because it is the model and the way in which adoption discourse has presented the condition of possibility for the adoptive family. Thus, adoption as a moment of parental love and inclusion must be reexamined as also a moment of violent ordering and exclusion.

**Assimilation and being 100 percent American**

Earlier practices of assimilation that are widely critiqued are a useful point of departure for thinking about the successional violence of negating and foreclosing personal histories and identities of adoptees. I call this type of assimilation, which is uniquely related to transracial/national adoption, assimilation overdrive. Also referred to as Americanization in the US context, assimilation, as a sociological concept, is “the process by which the culture of a community or a country is transmitted to an adopted citizen” or a “process of denationalization.” In other words, assimilation is a unidirectional process of one person or a minority group being absorbed into the majority. Although it has historically been thought of as an “unassisted” or “unconscious” process, assimilation has taken more explicit forms through policy and

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230 Robert E. Park, *Introduction to the Science of Sociology* (Univ. of Chicago Press, 1921) 734. According to Park, immigrant groups experienced the “assimilation or Americanization cycle,” which included the four stages of social interaction: competition, conflict, accommodation, and assimilation.
legislative interventions. In regards to earlier practices for transracial/national adoption, assimilation was an essential process of situating adoptees into their new home. Similar to immigrant assimilation, adoptees were forced to sever their past from the present and future of adoption; in many cases it was at an effort greater than 100 percent, which is why I name it “assimilation overdrive.”

Pertman explains for one situation in which the adoption agency advised the adoptive parents to have their child embrace American culture and not focus on the past to enable swift and complete assimilation. The adoptee described that she was “brought up 110 percent American,” which meant that she “really thought [she] was white.” Sociologists Elizabeth Rienzi, Jiannbin Shiao, and Mia Tuan, in their study of families who adopted from Korea, found that most white parents, when dealing with racial differences, often took the colorblind approach and encouraged the adoptees to assimilate because it was easier than dealing with unfamiliar racial issues. They argue that this approach actually led to a white perspective that tried to “normalize” their children, which, “consciously or not, worked to include their own children in the White category.”

Additional evidence from surveys suggests that many Korean adoptees perceived themselves as “Caucasian” or “American/European.” In a survey of 167 adult Korean adoptees nearly 60 percent considered themselves either “Caucasian” or “American/European,” while growing up. More specifically, 36 percent of the adoptees considered themselves “Caucasian” and 22 percent considered themselves

231 Ibid., 735-6. For example, some states such as California have passed propositions that have eliminated bilingual education in order to accelerate the assimilation process of mainly Latinos and Asian immigrants.
232 Pertman 2000: 70.
“American/European.” This idea of assimilation is bolstered by another study by Bergquist et al. that surveyed Caucasian parents who adopted children from Korea. More than two-third of respondents (68 percent for mothers and 73 percent for fathers) reported that “their transracial adoption did not change the racial characteristics of their family.”

In this way, through the method of assimilation overdrive, adoptive families and even adoptees themselves were able to construct a seemingly linear, complete, and resolved image of the family, but dedication to assimilation foreclosed the complexity of transracial/national adoption.

As previously noted, contemporary adoption literature indicates that both the rhetoric and practice of transracial/national adoptions have improved significantly. To be sure, the act of transracial/national adoption itself is historically interpreted as a seminal moment of inclusion, where adoption could help more than just white children. Even so, clear and fervent efforts to assimilate adoptees had stained transracial/national adoptions from being fully embraced as practice that was in the best interest of children. While statements by adoptive parents, and even some tangible evidence, suggest that they have learned from other adoptive parents and adoptees that previous methods have been revised to include the acknowledgement of the hybridity and multiplicity of adoptees, this gesture of inclusion has been riddled from its very inception. The notions of a clean break, living in the present, and not dwelling on the past are reoccurring themes—made by the “new” wave of adoptive parents and found in a liberal space such as the New York Times.

234 “Survey of the First Generation of Adult Korean Adoptees.” The Evan B. Donaldson Adoption Institute and Holt International Children’s Services (2000). The other percentages were 14 percent viewed themselves as “Asian/Korean,” while the remaining 28 percent considered themselves “Korean-American/European.”

that reiterate difference, demarcate strict definitions of family, and require strict
guides for legibility. This is evidenced in countless statements made by not only adoptive
parents, but birth mothers and even adoptees because oftentimes their legibility and “full”
inclusion depend on the fervor of these beliefs. In order to become a part of the family
and included in the nation, adoptees had to materially, by law, and symbolically, through
assimilation, completely separate from the past. Paralleling the state, adoptive families
strictly demarcate the family formation by obfuscating both successional and precessional
violence. The concealed or ignored violence allows the social fantasy of historicity to
continue uninterrupted, relieving fears of invalidation or contestation by the existence of
another history, identity, and family.

Your Past Doesn’t Matter: Denying Historical Conditions and Context

Indeed, this is what several of the respondents did in denying historical contexts
to many adoptees who express curiosity or desire to know about their past. In this section,
I demonstrate that although some people, as noted above, have recognized the value and
reality of birth parents and birth history, the tropes of “clean break” and “gratefulness”
reemerge in a new way.

One way this is articulated and has actually continued from earlier adoption is
through the theme that the past does not matter. This was echoed by one commenter,
Lizette, responding to “Being Adopted and Being Me,” who says, “Dear Adam, I loved
your story. I personally think that the origin of precious innocent children is irrelevant.
Your parents feel very lucky to have you, I’m certain.”

Although Lizette’s statement
does not appear to be made in malice, the focus should not be on the intentions of the

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236 Lizette, comment #74 in “Being Adopted, and Being Me” (Nov. 16, 2007).
speaker, which defenders of her statement might suggest, but more importantly on what
the statement does. Lizette’s statement presupposes innocence to a child, which negates
the violent rupture between parent(s) and child. In her view, a child comes into adoption
in a more simplified form of innocence, merely in need; there is a simple problem of a
child without a home, family, and love and a simple solution in which the child’s re-
emergence through adoption is all that matters. The historical that happened before
adoption and that is relevant to the subjectivity of adoptees is diminished and disavowed
as irrelevant. Thus her statement ignores the possible state violence that occurred prior to
Adam’s adoption, and it also forecloses Adam’s other identity, history, and family.²³⁷

Another example is of an adoptive father, Alan Buckle, who has two sons in their
30s but also five children whom he and his wife have lost, says that children adopted may
emerge differently in terms of being “wanted” and “loved,” but that after adoption this
difference matters little. He replies to “Blood Ties and Acts of Love,” a blog entry by an
adult transnational adoptee from Korea who describes her anticipation and the
significance of an adoptee giving birth. Her main point, however, is to highlight that there
are cultures of both blood and adoption, where “love can be thicker than blood.” In his
response, he says:

Our children, adopted children, all, whatever, they came into the world the
same way. The difference can be that some were deeply wanted and loved,
and others were not. Too often a child is an ‘accident’. But an adopted

²³⁷ In another example, an adoptive mother speaks about her Korean daughter, and while she says has
“wondered about her daughter’s birth mother,” her conclusion parallels Lizette: “As Julia has grown it
has mattered less and less how she began. Of course it’s part of her story, but the larger part of the story
now is who she has become and is becoming. The world is full of possibilities that would not have
existed for her in her homeland.” Here, Manna takes provides a similar explanation, suggesting that the
past has less relevance, but she also adds the supplemental comment that establishes cultural
difference, where Korea is a symbolic space of death, while the US is a space of possibility and
empowerment. Ruth Manna, comment #4 in “Finding Zhao Gu” (Nov 2, 2007).
child may be an accident, but their adoptive family is most certainly not! Thus the child born of love, and the child taken in adoption are the results of the same early, simple, decent, honest wish, and receive the same dedication and same love. It always saddens me to learn that some adopted children wish to look back, and are obsessed with this insignificance. They must learn [to] … look ahead, not back. Those who look back can well lose [sic] the future. No child is to be grateful to the parents. The adoptee is a child as any other and should shut off any wish to know of a very brief, and now insignificant past that is not important. To all children - Get on with your life. … We are so very briefly on this earth, and there is so little time! Make the best of life; the past is dead.  

Beyond Buckle’s reductionist claim that children who are up for adoption are not loved, his statement is revealing. Again, similar to Lizette, the emergence of the child after adoption is the crucial moment but not because it is somehow unique. Instead, this moment, according to Buckle, is conflated with the experience of a non-adopted child; they are both “results of the same early, simple, decent honest wish, and receive the same dedication and same love.” The “wish,” in this sense, is both the desire to have a child and the work or the impetus that was furnished in order to adopt. It and the continuing work of love and dedication are justifications for not needing to “look back.” For Buckle, the “obsession” of looking back is a useless and fatal mistake because one’s future will be marred by the death of her/his past. Buckle’s statement is a common reiteration of denying the personal trajectories of adoptees. The common refrain of “those who look back can well lose the future” posits the past as solely negative and as something to be shunned and forgotten, which is the essence of historicity and linear time. It does not acknowledge the impossibility of forgetting the past and its important role in the present

238 Alan Buckle, BTAL 59.
239Unlike this statement, many statements like it, and recent popular culture references such as the critically acclaimed film Juno, there is countless evidence to demonstrate that most birth parents find it very difficult to relinquish their children for adoption and it becomes something that they struggle with and think about for the rest of their lives.
and future. Instead, Buckle’s statement narrates the adoptive family as the foundational and central component, symbolically annihilating the existence of birth parents and the history and identity that are connected to them.

In a more telling example, John agrees with a previous commenter, a transnational adoptee from Asia, Lila, who says that she detests the idea of roots. Lila claims that her adoptive parents instilled “strong Asian values” but that she was never interested in her background and past. She has no confusion of who her parents are. They are “the ones who took care of me and what happened before I was my mom’s did not interest me at all,” she contends. Similarities, not differences, are what matter because differences only serve as a reminder that she was abandoned and adopted. Her adoptive parents highlighted this, for which she expresses gratitude. She says:

> I was constantly reminded of how much I was loved and cared for now, the past was the past and my abandonment had no bearing on my present. I’m very glad that I was never subjected to reminders that I was not biologically my parents [sic] ‘own’ child and NEVER reminded that abandonment plays a role in the process of adoption. I find this incredibly distasteful and disgusting.²⁴⁰

While Lila statement is definitely worth analysis, I save discussions of seemingly contradictory statements by adoptees for later. I provide Lila’s comments because John suggests that she “makes a worthy point,” and he too is troubled by the author’s blog. Jeff Gammage, author of the blog “Finding Zhao Gu,” describes how adoptions from China often possess “unknown and unknowable” beginnings. Instead, the “next best thing” is other details such as where they were found, who found them, what day and time, the weather, etc. In concurrence to Lila and response to Gammage, John says:

²⁴⁰ Lila, comment #66 in “Finding Zhao Gu” (Nov 2, 2007).
My wife and I, as parents to two little girls adopted from China, never considered the “next best thing” to be the details of how they were found and by whom. For us – all four of us — the only thing that matters is that we all came together as a family. That is a story we can and do tell to our daughters, now 8 and 5, to their endless delight. We can recount, first-person, how we came to China to adopt them, how they cried when they were handed off to us, how we were overcome in return, how we spent our days exploring the local side streets and shops before flying home, and how the people we encountered in China – regardless of their age, gender, social standing, etc. – expressed utter joy that we had adopted these two little girls and that they’d grow us in the United States. Unlike other many adoptive parents, we never think much about why our girls were abandoned. We can only guess at the possible answers, and we spell those out to our girls when they ask. They have asked but, frankly, not very often. Their interest is tepid. None of the four of us had ever wondered about how our girls were found. My wife and I have, however, wondered at times about those who cared for our girls for the year or so they were each in an orphanage/foster home. We try to be candid and understanding in answering our girls’ questions, when they do ask. And we try to give them some perspective on China, its culture, history and people, but without hallowing the country. After all, we tell them, China is an amazing land in many way but if the people fully appreciated its girls, our two would still be there. Of course, they know they’re adopted from China but we treat it casually, not something connected to angst or unrequited memory. We don’t have photos of our girls when they were newborns but, trust me, we aren’t hurting for photos of them. We focus on enjoying the time we have together and don’t worry much about what happened before.²⁴¹

Similar to Lizette, Buckle, and Lila, John says that the historical does not matter, what does is “that we all came together as a family.” Again, what is important is how the adoptee emerged during adoption. For John, the relevant beginnings and histories of his two daughters only extends to the point of “adoption day,” or as others refer to as “gotcha day,” the semi-equivalent of birthday for adoptions. John and his wife’s actions were the only significant conditions that enabled their two kids to be adopted. Although not explicit, John’s narrative rehearses the trope of rescue. In his version of the story, he and

²⁴¹ John, comment #101 in “Finding Zhao Gu” (Nov 2, 2007).
his wife are the prominent actors who created their family through adoption.

Abandonment, which is usually a necessary criterion for rescue because it engenders political commitment, does not have to be critically considered, but it is presupposed and superficially justifies their actions. The vague/non-existent historical and social conditions of abandonment are replaced by an explicit recount of how the adoptions were “unequivocally” supported by Chinese people.

Additionally, John and his wife’s lack of inquiry and consideration of the historical is never regarded as a possible explanation for the scarcity of interest from their daughters. Instead, this lack of curiosity and investigation is simply substantiated by their daughters’ so-called “tepidness.” The historical accounts that they do provide their children, John admits, is limiting, as they “give them some perspective” without “hallowing” China. To not provide at least some perspective would suggest that they were dangerously modeling previous adoptive families in completely ignoring history prior to adoption. As John clarifies, however, there is a balance between not enough historical perspective and too much. Too much, to the point of “hallowing” as he puts it, could greatly jeopardize the validity, necessity, and genuineness of their adoption; it would present contradictions (especially in the area of abandonment) that could not be easily reconciled, such as why were they really abandoned? It brings the birth parents back into the narrative because it generates the possibility that maybe the reasons for abandonment cannot be presupposed. Thus, John and his wife’s actions of not going “too far” become strategically purposeful and are even evidenced by John’s statement that “after all” if China “fully appreciated its girls” they would still be there. The reiteration of cultural and moral difference again justifies their decision to adopt in China. It, along
with a nearly complete focus on the present, simplifies the act by placing the blame on China as morally and culturally deficient and relieves them of responsibility and commitment to their children’s historical past.

A further revealing example is presented by an adoptive parent, Bill Samuelson, who in response to the lone blog authored by a birth mother, acknowledges her story as “poignant and valid” but says his experience is different:

… I have a very different perspective as an adoptive father. This is all very sentimental and melodramatic. How does knowing who your birth parents are change who you are? There are lots of people (including myself) who have essentially no clue who their grandparents and older ancestors are. So what? How’s this different than not knowing who your birth parents are? Birth parents are what they are. They’re not some cosmic connection to the fabric of universal oneness of harmony that so many think they are. They’re no big deal. What’s a big deal? The experiences, character, and knowledge my kids develop as they grow. How they will tackle life in the future, not the past. That’s a big deal and that’s the bottom line. I am glad my two adopted sons, who were born in western China, have essentially no chance of finding their bio parents. The last thing my children or their parents need is for some stranger(s) to show up at holidays or birthdays and try to pretend everything makes perfect sense. There’s a good chance they would carry baggage, possibly a freight car full of baggage, and like a couple other commenters have suggested, there’s a really good chance they’ll ask for money. That’s a lot of people’s bottom line, after all. As parents, my wife and I have a sacred responsibility to our children: we must demonstrate to them the limitless possibilities before them for happiness, fulfillment, and success in the early twentieth century while simultaneously shutting down the various barbarous impulses that lead so, so, so many people to wander aimlessly, lucklessly, and morosely through an otherwise wonderful world. I humbly suggest we know what we’re doing as parents and the birth parents would just get in the way.242

Samuelson’s comment echoes other respondents who attempt to link not knowing information about birth parents with not knowing details about their parents,

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242 Bill Samuelson, comment #116 in “Reunion” (Nov. 20, 2007).
grandparents, and ancestors. His statement clearly defines what is important—“the experiences, character, and knowledge my kids develop as they grow” and “how they will tackle life in the future”—and what is not—knowing your birth parents. Similar to how Valerie deploys the concept of “bottom line” in her configuration of adoption as “a good deed,” Samuelson also reduces the complexity of adoption to a simplistic theory that the past does not matter; it and birth parents are “no big deal.” He even expresses his elation that the “break” is indeed nearly absolute, explaining that such a presence would carry “a freight car full of baggage” and surely disrupt the linear narrative of his family. To further justify his position, Samuelson asserts cultural difference. While he and his wife are positioned as sacred and both the model and conduit for full self-determination, of “limitless possibilities,” in the form of “happiness, fulfillment, and success,” the birth parents, and by clear extension, China, are defined as unworthy (as opposed to sacred),

243 One person explained that while she does not want to “negate” the loss of adoptees, she believes that “genes do not necessitate a family bond,” providing the example that her father left when she was ten without the hope that her family would have a better life (Trina, comment #69 in “Blood Ties and Acts of Love”). Another individual made the “sympathetic” comment saying, “If it is any comfort to adoptees wondering about their ancestry, there are many Americans of European [sic] roots who know little of theirs” (Ruth, comment #9 in “Blood Ties and Acts of Love”). Other commenters take a slightly different approach, saying biological connections can be horrible as well. For instance one respondent described, “This entire series makes me uneasy. I want to cry out, “What are you talking about?” You are breaking my heart, and I mean it. No, I am not adopted but so much of this sounds like people who belong in an Adult Children of Alcoholics group. … My father! I would be so lucky to have a different father! But no, no matter how often I have asked my mom, she never veers from saying that he is mine. Stop romanticizing the biological connection a bit, not to give it no importance, but perhaps to put it into perspective: For those of us who know all of our ‘blood,’ just because we are related by blood doesn’t mean that we love each other, look like each other or want anything to do with each other. Sometimes it is a burden; my husband was genuinely worried when he met some of my kin!” (Abby, comment #66 in “Blood Ties and Acts of Love”). One adoptive parent responding to Sumeia William’s blog about her adoptive father keeping secrets about her past from her, says that she too “had a father who checked out of our family in a relatively showy way” and explains further that anger towards family can be corrosive (Marcia, comment #34 in “Well-Adjusted” (Dec. 1, 2007)). All of these examples demonstrate how adoptive parents and others responding either trivialize or invalidate the experiences of adoptees and reduce their feelings to universal or common sentiments. This rhetorical move ignores both the precessional and successional the violence that is unique to adoption, and it again underscores the unspeakability and untranslatability of adoption because, as Edkins argues, the language of trauma is hijacked and monopolized.
beggars, and “barbarous.” In this most explicit statement, Samuelson articulates and supports what one respondent, who is a birth mother, of another blog entry intensely rejects—the concept that the birth mother is merely a “breeder,” “incubator,” or a “birthgiver.”

For Samuelson, the birth mother and birth parents truly represent the affectable other, being barbarous and only influenced by money, and because they, and those who share their cultural deficiencies, occupy a non-sacred space, they can be literally rejected and symbolically annihilated.

These examples are just some of the few responses that were articulated in such a way that denied the relevance and importance of both the global and historical contexts in which adoptees emerged. To be sure, they are competing narratives within adoption

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244 The mother says, “One little nit - I don’t call my self a “b****”mother. That word limits my role in my child’s life to her birth. I was not and am not an object, an incubator, a birth thing, to be used and then discarded…. It means breeder. It means Handmaiden. It is a dehumanizing, marginalizing term meant to keep a woman in her place. In AdoptionLand, your place was to give birth and then disappear. Your place was to disappear. Your motherhood was erased…. I don’t know about you, but I reclaim the fact of my motherhood. I’m reject the term “bmother” I am a mother [sic].” Kidnap, comment #94 in “Reunion” (Nov. 20, 2007).

245 Similar to the statements that denied the importance of the historical, many of the respondents simply made horrible comparisons. Ironically, in trying to relate with adoptees and also refute their experiences, they universalized certain feelings and experiences, which deny and invalidate the violent history and re-emergence of adoptees through adoption. One commenter, who is not adopted, said, “[N]o one ever asked me what family I would like to grow up in-you weren’t asked either. Sounds like we both got lucky!!” (A sad mother, comment #28 in “Being Adopted, and Being Me”). Another said that her parents “did not understand” her either (Chris S., comment #9 in “Being Adopted, and Being Me”). One lamented that she never had a “loving” and “accepting” family (Kathleen Slattery, comment #55 in “Being Adopted, and Being Me”), and yet another said, “There are much worse things than being adopted. I know this. When I was growing up my parents fought a lot and we moved every few years because of my father’s job. At night I would lie awake and listen to my parents argue, and I wished I was adopted so I wouldn’t really be part of the family” (Liz, comment #69 in “Being Adopted, and Being Me”). One father with seven grown kids said that familial relationships are important, but it is the day-to-day relationships that count: “Here in the US, with our staggering rates of adult, serial relocation and separation from the proximity of our blood relatives, most of our relationships are essentially adopted. … The good quality of our life is now mostly felt through our adopted neighbors, friends and their kids. My blood ties are a wonderful memory, but in the day to day, it is my adopted connections that keep me warm” (Will Millier, comment #72 in “Blood Ties and Acts of Love”); Similarly, another person, who is a psychoanalyst and researcher, said, “[W]e all share an ‘adoption experience’, that is, a feeling of being separated from mother and turned over to other people for care—baby sitters, teachers, doctors, etc.” (Jo, comment #91 in “Blood Ties and Acts of Love”). The list of bad comparisons is lengthy and troubling. It points to the fact that many by standers
discourse that are hidden by broad liberal multicultural claims that transracial/national adoptions have changed and progressed. Instead, the statements articulated the position that such contexts were in fact detrimental. They highlighted the adoptee in an extremely isolated and specific historical moment, a time of unproblematized a priori need, where the moment of adoption marks the beginning of relevant history for the adoptee. While Silva claims the historical has been the privileged form for which we come to know ourselves, she, like critical historians and other scholars, understands that the historical is indeed crucial, and we must read history against the grain and know that the past is not separate or mutually exclusive from the present and future but indeed, all three are infused and necessarily inform each other. Furthermore, while the comments by non-adoptive parents discursively help to define family in constrictive fashion, the statements by adoptive parents themselves are both discursive and material because their beliefs are put to practice. The materialization of statements that explicitly reject the historical and global, through the trope of “clean break” and articulations that the past does not matter, enacts further violence on adoptees and related subjects, specifically birth parents. Thus, the act of adoption, which has historically been interpreted as an act of love, compassion, and humanitarianism, can also be an act of violence.

Reifying Realness and the Unintelligible

The previous section provided examples of some of the context in which adoptive parents make statements that ignore, hide, or explicitly reject the personal histories, identity, and birth family of adoptees. This context included individualization and

and even some people in the adoption community do not grasp the uniqueness of the adoption situation and context.
reduction of adoption, where adoptees emerge as full subjects only through adoption. But what are the conditions that allow for these statements and practices to be made and embraced, and what do they do? Here, I bring back Derrida and his concept of the sign and its instituted trace. For Derrida, the sign is something that is always becoming, i.e. its definition and symbolism, or representation, are never fully concrete. Its becoming, or development, is dependent on the line that separates the signifier and the signified. That line, the trace, is what polices and determines which signifiers are legible and illegible, and in essence, it dictates which signifiers are in/eligible to represent the signified meaning. Signifiers that are determined to be ineligible by the trace are illegible. They are still there—still present, but they are hidden and obscured, or even erased. This purposeful action is violent, what Silva calls productive violence, because it is violence that produces something while destroying or rejecting another.

To return to transracial/national adoption, I contend that language, the expressions of “realness” in particular, is what allows adoptive parents and adoption supporters to deny the global and historical contexts of adoption. The notion of realness was addressed by adoption agencies and professionals with the introduction of positive adoption language (PAL),246 which is a set of widely agreed upon terms that encourages objective

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but at the same time “respectful” and “positive” language. Before PAL was systematically instituted, terms such as “natural” and “real parent” were used to describe birth parents, but such language were considered “emotionally charged” and threatened the legitimacy of adoptive parents because it did not reflect the legal outcome of adoption, which severs rights, responsibilities, and ties of the birth parents from the child. Instead, it reiterated that adoptive families are inferior or “second-best.”

The implementation and usage of PAL is partly based on the idea that adoption is now seen as a positive thing for all parts of the triad rather than an event that is emotionally charged. Adoption is perceived as good for the birth parents because they are no longer forced or coerced but instead get to “choose” to make an adoption “plan”; adoptive parents have a now socially embraced way to create and/or expand a family and thus are simply the “parents” not adoptive parents; and adoptees benefit the “most” because they receive a caring and loving family, permanent home, and bright future. The problem with the liberal deployment of specific PAL terms—such as “parent” (versus “adoptive parent”), “placed” (versus “surrendered” or “relinquished”), and “making contact with” (versus “reunion”)—is that it effaces the emotional and political violence that is still connected to all types of adoption, but specifically transracial/national adoption; adoption is not as simple as “it is good for everyone.” Moreover, it obscures the precessional and

247 Ibid.

248 “As a woman who placed a child for adoption 20 years ago, I always find it interesting that the adoption debate is centered arounds [sic] adoptees and people wanting to adopt. It is almost as if perfect babies fall from the sky into the loving arms of middle class+ Americans. Even after 20 years I still feel an incredible bond to the child I gave birth to. I’ve spent years wondering if the reasons I gave up raising him were valid enough, considering what it has cost me in heart brake [sic] over the years....” Cristine, comment # 14 in “Blood Ties and Acts of Love” (Dec. 4, 2004).
productive violence of already making the birth parents illegible in relation to the adoptive parents.

Indeed, as my analysis demonstrates, many adoptive parents and adoption supporters attempt to define and monopolize the idea of “realness,” where realness equals legibility. Pertman observes that adoptive parents fear that bonds with their children might not be permanent and that they have insecurities about their own difference, such as in the case of infertility: “As a society and as individuals, for generations we deluded ourselves into thinking that the simplest way to make the uncertainty go away, and to ensure that we would never even have to consider competing for our children’s love, was to make their birth parent disappear. Or, if that couldn’t be accomplished, at least to turn them into lesser beings who couldn’t possibly be the objects of anyone’s desire.”249 In addition, however, birth parents and adoptees oftentimes articulate this notion of “realness” as well because it is the fundamental avenue for them to become legible subjects. As globality posits white (prospective) adoptive parents as already fully legible subjects, the act of adoption always presents the possibility that birth parents might contest the position of “true” parent.250 Thus, while adoptive parents will hold the privilege of whiteness and birth parents will maintain the position of Other—largely because of PAL and adoption discourse—power is always challenged, and in this case, “legitimacy” becomes the central concern. For adoptees, adoption discourse posits their “full” emergence in relation to adoption, but their legibility is always in relation to the

249 Pertman 2000: 149.
250 Historically, keeping adoptions secret was an effort to hide “illegitimacy” by both the birth parents and the adoptive parents because the social stigma attached to having a child out of wedlock and not having the ability to conceive one’s own child. The idea of closed adoptions was another effort that continued this secrecy. While closed record supporters argue that it was solely for the privacy of birth parent, it has a stronger role in protecting adoptive parents from interested birth parents.
adoptive family and its symbolic community, which has the authority to rescind legibility through accusations of “ungratefulness” and “bitterness.” Hence, in order for birth parents to become minimally legible and for adoptees to remain so and avoid ex post facto rejection, both birth parents and adoptees employ the rhetoric of “realness.” And while a nominal number of birth parents and adoptees may sincerely possess these feelings of “realness,” the important point is not that there are even some adoptees and birth parents who truly believe in realness, but rather what allows them to have these beliefs, and what do these notions of realness do?

To be sure, adoptive parents do not overtly claim the mantle of realness like they have done in the past, but these statements still appeared in the blogs, and more importantly they did not always take the explicit form that they used to. Just as the face of racism has changed in the US, so too has the way adoptive parents and adoption advocates have articulated positions of realness. This slight maneuvering, however, has not completely displaced overt statements of realness. Indeed, both blatant and more cloaked means of articulating this idea pervade adoption discourse. In one explicit example an adoptive mother responds to Wolfington’s blog, explaining her similar frustration about people who question her realness as a mother.251

I go crazy when people ask me about our daughter’s ‘real parents’. Someone even once asked my daughter about her ‘other mother’ - she was so confused for a while after that (I wanted to wring that person’s neck). I tell people we are her ONLY parents - she is our daughter - we feel no differently about her than our other children!!!...252

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251 Wolfington’s response to those who question his adoptive mother’s realness by asking “if she is my ‘real mother’” is “What do I look like a hologram?”

252 Mom in France, comment #5 in “Being Adopted, and Being Me” (Nov. 16, 2007) (She later apologizes, but still reiterates why she feels the same way) comment #46 in “Being Adopted, and Being Me.”
While it is more than understandable that adoptive parents, and even adoptees such as Wolfington, get frustrated by the numerous times random strangers inquire about personal information or ask seemingly appropriate questions in a very impolite fashion, this adoptive mother rehearses the common linear narrative that she and her partner are her daughter’s “only” parents. The strangers who ask the question “what about your daughter’s real parents” are in many ways discrediting the validity of adoptive families, but at the same time they are getting at the issue of the unresolved, which is still a fear for adoptive parents because of the way in which family continues to be defined as nuclear. The fear is that no matter how finalized, closed, secret, or far spatially, such as across oceans, an adoption may seem, there is always the specter of birth mothers. Instead of this specter being an illuminating force that compels us to rethink family, it remains a negative fear. And despite Pertman’s claim that adoption is becoming more open and that there are in fact an increasing number of open adoptions, this reaction, perception, and practice of claiming realness is still a reappearing statement by many adoptive parents who attempt to resolve this uncertainty.

Another evident case is demonstrated in a response by a medical doctor, who defines the difference between “real” and “genetic” parents:

1) Your “real” parents are the ones that raised you, taught you, sat by your bedside when you ran a high fever, helped you with school work, taught you acceptable social actions and awareness, and were there to soothe the physical and and [sic] mental bruises which are part of childhood. 2)your genetic parents are or were the DNA donors who made you what you are biologically, and what you might become through a mechanism which has succeeded in prolonging the species due to eons of selectivity for success

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253 This fear is startlingly revealed in a national survey in 2002, which found more than 80 percent of the public had concerns that the birth parents “might take the child back.” “National Adoption Attitude Survey,” Sponsored by Dave Thomas Foundation for adoption and The Evan B. Donaldson Adoption Institute, June 2002.
of the species. The above are two separate actions, often from the same individuals, but also often from two totally separate occurrences [sic]. The second is of perhaps biologic and inherited prediliction [sic] significance….the former has taken the raw material of childhood and given you the concept of love, devotion, caring, ethics and protection necessary for you to develop into a true humane human being. I suggest it is they that are your “true parents” whether or not they are also the biologic conduits of your genetics or not.  

Important to this response is the fact that Doctor Naiman follows the long history of psychologists, sociologists, and social scientists in general who have framed adoption in terms of the medical, behavioral, and genetics. Such studies have attempted to determine if adoption creates normal families, and according to researchers such as Simon and Altstein, a vast majority of them have demonstrated this. What these studies suggest is that adoption is a healthy outcome for children, even children of color and children from other countries. Prior to the more recent understanding of adoption as being a valid way to create and/or expand a family, the biological was the heavily privileged form; from this perspective, nothing could substitute for blood or genetic ties.

Now, the pendulum has swung in the complete opposite direction, such as in the statement by Dr. Naiman, where genetics is disregarded in favor of love as a grand solution. Dr. Naiman’s articulation posits that birth parents are merely the means to the end. This is similar to the view of Samuelson, who said birth parents are “no big deal.” As Diane Turski, a birth mother and activist, says, birth mothers are reduced to breeders, incubators, or at best birthgivers. Using terms such as “genetic parents,” “DNA donors,” and “biological conduits,” Dr. Naiman regurgitates this notion that birth parents are not only irrelevant to the actual subjectivity of adoptees but also remain illegible, while  

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adoptive parents, again, occupy the space of “reality”—already legible and self-determined in which only they can enable adoptees to emerge into full subjectivity, a “true human being.” He dismisses the importance and obfuscates the continued existence of birth parents in the same way as Samuelson and so many others by reducing the issue of adoption and ignoring the personal history of adoptees. Instead, he continues the linear narrative that simultaneously hides and produces precessional and successional violence \textit{in such a way that the lines between precessional and successional blur}. While birth parents are “possible” signifiers of family and parents, such violent acts and statements are precessional because they pre-determine the legibility of not just current birth parents but of birth parents in the future as well; these statements produce future violence. Because this statement is made in a global (the difference between birth mothers and adoptive parents) and historical (the reference to already existing) context, it is also a type of successional violence, one that follows the emergence of the adoptee after the break. Such a statement \textit{reiterates} what the precessional has already established—that birth mothers are unimportant and should remain illegible because of their status as merely “genetic” parents, and at the same time it becomes the foundation for future precessional violence.

The first two examples were from commenters of two separate blogs, but the third example is by one of the blog author, Tama Janowitz, who was referenced earlier in chapter one’s section on cultural difference and rescue. In that excerpted statement she flattened the complexity of adoption issues to a “universal truth”—that every child possesses and expresses resentment, which all parents must handle. The larger theme of her blog, however, is the idea of “realness,” which can be easily discerned from the title
of her blog: “The Real Thing.” Using witty writing, Janowitz enlightens her readers to her view on parenting, which is to say that it is hard and maybe nearly impossible to raise a child who does not at one point get upset at you, but in the end tough love affirms “realness.” She concludes her entry by concretizing her position of realness:

I figure, Willow, she’s my kid, she just got here differently. I don’t remember floating around in my mother’s womb, or coming out of the vaginal canal – but I still know that person is my mother, even if she is a little off. And my kid knows I’m her real mother. Not biological, but real. It doesn’t get any realer than this.255

In some ways this closing passage appears as if it may be gesturing to birth parents. It suggests that her daughter, Willow, is conscious and able to make the distinction that she has two parents. In spite of that, the language of realness is clear; Willow supposedly affirms this as Janowitz says “And my kid knows I’m her real mother,” and then she validates both her daughter and herself, saying, “It doesn’t get any realer than this.” This realness is juxtaposed to the biological, which in the case of adoption occupies the space of unreal and illegible. While the experiences that Janowitz describes in the blog may hold a level of “realness” to them, her statement follows the logic of linear time that Edkins critiques, where trauma and violence are hidden and erased to both create and maintain a certain social, or in this case familial, order. Reality, as Edkins states, though, is never linear or complete. Despite its attempt to define the meaning of family, Janowitz’s statement, ironically, demonstrates Edkin’s point. The comparison of her individual trajectory with her daughter’s is a faulty one because Janowitz assumes that they are both linear and progressive. Her statement that she does not “remember floating around in [her] mother’s womb” is somehow supposed to parallel Willow’s own

255 Janowitz, “The Real Thing” (Nov. 12, 2007).
individual experience in way that Willow should not and does not care. Janowitz’s statement, however, belies the fact that both she and her daughter have a complex relationship among Janowitz’s mother, herself, her daughter, and her daughter’s birth mother.

As explicit as her title was, Janowitz’s blog, for the most part, was very subtle in conveying what realness meant. Toned down methods of implying realness allows adoptive parents to project a liberal stance but still define family in an exclusive way. One subtle example is given by Laura, an adoptive mother of two children from Korea. The blog that she responds to, “Tracing My Roots Back to Korea,” is one authored by Katy Robinson, also a Korean adoptee, who writes about her experiences of feeling different while growing up but getting a chance to return to Korea and meet her birthfather. Robinson describes how difficult it was to talk to her adoptive parents about adoption issues, such as “Who am I? Where did I come from?,” because she did not want to seem “ungrateful” or “disloyal.” At the same time, she states that she has the “most amazing adoptive mother.” Not once does Robinson mention the idea of realness in her blog. Furthermore, none of the respondents prior to Laura mentions the issue of realness; yet, Laura inserts this issue into her response:

… I am naturally concerned about my children’s thoughts and feelings that they don’t reveal to my husband or me. We talk often about how we became a family, and try to answer their questions about their birth parents when they have them…. So far, my daughter is more interested in her heritage than my son who claims “I’m American mom, I don’t want to go to Korea!” Whatever happens, my children know that we are there for them at any time or place and will support them in any way they need us to. Hmmm…sounds suspiciously [sic] like something a “real” parent would do doesn’t it?

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256 Laura, comment #51 in “Tracing My Roots Back to Korea” (Nov. 6, 2007).
Looking at Laura’s statement, it appears to suggest she and her spouse are open to the idea of what it means to have a complex family, but her reference to realness contradicts this. Even though her statement is not as overt as the first example or Janowitz’s case, Laura’s verbalization about being open to talk almost seems like idle chatter or empty words. Laura is nearly able to parrot all of the correct words but there is slippage and contradiction in her statement. Supposedly Laura’s daughter has expressed interest in her multiple identities and past, but Laura never goes beyond explaining that there is interest on her part. Instead, she highlights her son’s rejection of his “Korean” identity, which validates her own “balanced” approach. Interestingly, the child who is able to most maintain the adoptive family order is the one who is most legible in Laura’s statement. Moreover, Laura presumes that any discussions she and her husband have had with their children are sufficient for them to “know that we are there for them at any time or place.” Her statement discards the possibility that the adoptive parents could have a more proactive rather than reactive role in discussing adoption issues. Laura’s reactive method allows her, in her own view, to stake the claim to realness. Thus the liberal rhetoric of openness and incompleteness that she began with softens the brunt of her reification of violence through the notion of realness. This rhetorical move, nevertheless, accomplishes the same thing as overt statements, which is the demarcating the boundaries of family and realness.

The historical practice of privileging the biological has without a doubt pressured many adoptive parents to claim the trophy of realness in order to validate their own family to not just themselves but also to the skeptical public. Thus, it is difficult to argue...
against adoptive parents and how the positioning of them might come from a sincere belief that what they have done, are doing, and will do, are indeed what constitutes real parents. With this understanding, critiquing the sincerity or degree of “realness” becomes a difficult if not impossible task. Hence, the question that emerges is what do these statements do? The positioning of adoptive parents as real versus the biological does not occur in isolation. Too often the picture that adoptive parents portray in discussing realness condenses the frame or lens from the global/historical to the local/present, and the narrow perspective eliminates any other possibilities. It makes other possible signifiers of family unintelligible. What these statements illustrate is that the continual attempts to forget, deny, or eliminate the influence of the past are efforts to maintain a linear narrative and an imaginary completeness of the family. The “issues of the past,” such as wondering about identity and thinking about or wanting to search for birth parents, are unattached to the temporal. While the violence that separates adoptees from their personal histories, identities, and birth family occurs before the marked rupture of “the break,” they continually reappear in the present and dictate what might exist for the future, and these are the reoccurring appearances that we must be open to and heed.

**Adoptees Restating Realness**

Adoptive parents are not the only ones employing the language of realness, though. In addition to them, I argue that it is also being maintained by adoptees. Just as adoptive parents who articulate realness reduce the global/historical to the local/present, some adoptees embrace a similar frame-reducing method. For example, in response to Janowitz’s blog, Sara, a Korean American adoptee, says, “I cannot tell you how many times I was confused growing up when people asked if I knew my real parents. Of course
I knew them. I lived with them.”\textsuperscript{257} For Sara, the identification of realness seems obvious, but this is largely because birth parents are predetermined to be unintelligible in the frame of the local/present. But as the specter of birth parents constantly reappears, such as in the instances of inquiring strangers, it has to be concurrently rejected. To be sure, the reappearance of birth parents complicates the neatly defined familial order that allows adoptees to be intelligible subjects.

In another example, Amy, a Korean adoptee, responds to a previous commenter who argued that yes, there are “deleterious effects of institutionalization” but that there are also “harmful effects of adoption.”\textsuperscript{258} Amy replies in bewilderment at those who could have such feelings:

As a 20 year old adopted daughter from South Korea, I felt I must comment on this article. I have never doubted that my “real parents” are those that welcomed me into their lives and gave me a loving, caring home. I am an American, and proud and fortunate to be one. My family has loved me and my sister (also adopted, but from within the United States) unconditionally as any other parent should love their children. While I respect the feelings of adoptees that claim they think they “just don’t belong” or “feel like something is missing” because they aren’t an active part of their biological family, I can’t help but wonder how they could ever have these thoughts. … How could someone who was adopted ever not consider these people their “real” parents and know that this is their REAL family? …\textsuperscript{259}

For Amy, adoption is unequivocally associated with realness, where anything else is unfathomable. Adoption, in this sense, cannot have harmful effects or produce violence. She proclaims that her adoptive parents are her “real” parents and that she is a “proud and fortunate” American. Like so many other young adoptees, Amy identifies strongly as American. Indeed, this has been a trend for a majority of transnational adoptees. In a

\textsuperscript{257} Sara, comment #5 in “The Real Thing” (Nov. 12, 2007).
\textsuperscript{258} Disgruntled, comment #2 in “South Korea and Its Children” (Nov. 27, 2007).
\textsuperscript{259} Amy, formerly seonn keyong comment #20 in “South Korea and Its Children” (Nov. 27, 2007).
survey of 167 Korean adoptees, “while growing up” 22 percent of respondents identified themselves as “American/European” and 36 percent identified as “Caucasian.” The remaining respondents identified as “Asian/Korean” (14 percent) or “Korean-American/European” (28 percent). Interestingly, as “adults” the number of adoptees who identified as “Korean-American/European” increased to 64 percent, as “American/European” and “Caucasian” identification declined to 10 and 11 percent, respectively. What this survey illustrates in numbers and Amy’s statement demonstrates in words is that adoptive parents are not the only ones who contribute to the identity of adoptees. Adoptees’ participation in the language of realness reaffirms adoptive parents, but adoptees also have a degree of choice in determining their identity, which creates tensions and contradictions. The critical questions, however, are what allows them to make certain choices and what are the effects of these decisions? Part of what allows adoptees to claim 100 percent Americanness is the way in which they reduce their identities to a local and present moment rather than a global/historical frame.

Unaddressed in her statement is how identity is not only about self-identification but also how certain groups emerge differently in globality. Despite Amy’s signature as “Amy, formerly seonn keyong,” her birth in Korea, for example, means that in a US context she will most often be identified as “forever foreigner” before American or even Korean American. Additionally, her consideration of only the present time ignores how people identify transracial/national adoptees differently when they leave the safety and legibility of their adoptive families because they will no longer be defined in relation to them. Any alternative, for Amy though, is stark. To not claim realness is unimaginable, and she wonders “how [adoptees] could ever have these thoughts” because to do so would
jeopardize the legibility of adoptees and risk the labels of “ungrateful” and “disloyal.”

What Amy’s statement does is attempt to deflect this possibility, but in doing so she merely perpetuates the false linear historicity of herself and her adoptive family, foreclosing her own personal history and identity. Similar to statements by adoptive parents, statements such as Amy’s enact simultaneous precessional and successional violence that limits themselves and rejects their birth parents—it forecloses both the remembering and knowledge of the past and the possibilities and opportunities of the future.

Fears of disloyalty and being seen as ungrateful were feelings revealed earlier by Katy Robinson in her blog about her difficulties growing up and exploring her identity and past. Robinson says that bringing up such topics would only highlight the differences between her and her family, but fear of disloyalty was another significant factor: “I was afraid to seem ungrateful for the amazing new life I had been given, or to hurt my adoptive mother’s feelings by mentioning the mother who gave me birth. It wasn’t as if I was forbidden to talk about my Korean family; it just seemed disloyal.” Most adoptees love their adoptive parents very much, and as Robinson says, “I have the most amazing adoptive mother…” Just as adoptive parents want to protect their children, adoptees want to protect the ones they love as well. Part of this involves adoptees not talking about

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260 Katy Robinson, “Tracing My Roots Back to Korea” (Nov. 6, 2007).
261 The editors of *Outsiders Within* articulate these ideas well, “Some of us feel pressured to censor our own pain as an act of loyalty toward our adoptive families, fearing that it would cause them too much pain if we express our feelings of loss and grief. In the face of racist assumptions that we do not belong, or that a multiracial family cannot ‘work,’ we throw ourselves into maintaining a model family, proclaiming how wonderful our adoptive lives have been.” Jane Jeong Trenka et al. *Outsiders Within* (2006) 10. In an intriguing comparison, Rachel Quy Collier relates adoption and adoptees to the “dying child” who is “forced to pretend he is not dying” in order to protect the parents’ “fragility and neediness.” Collier explains further, “The adoptee, like the children in Bluebond-Langner’s Study, depends critically on her acceptance by the adoptive parents and society; because of her original
issues that could disrupt the family order they have come to know because this order is what has brought stability and love, and there is a fear that if they talk or ask about such issues they might lose that. Instead, adoptees endure the successional violence inflicted by their adoptive parents, who may produce it explicitly (via rejecting the past and birth parents) or implicitly (through ignoring or never inquiring about adoption concerns) in order to maintain the linear narrative that allows them to be legible.

Returning back to Lila’s statement provides another example in which adoptees echo the language of realness and espouse that the past is irrelevant. Lila responds harshly to Gammage’s blog in which he writes about both the unknowability but also the intense desire to know his daughter’s beginning. Repudiating it, Lila says:

Am I the only one who detests this “find the roots” idea? I’m an adopted child from Asia and while my parents instilled in me strong Asian values and let me know that I was free to explore my background as much as I liked, I never wanted to. My parents are the ones who took care of me and what happened before I was my mom’s did not interest me at all. That would only have served as a constant reminder of the fact that I was not her biological child and emphasized the differences between us, not the similarities. If you have an adopted child why would you chose to make this huge cleft between yourself and her/him? Why would you remind them of the fact they were abandoned?! That’s horrible! Instead, I was constantly reminded of how much I was loved and cared for now, the past was the past and my abandonment had no bearing on my present. I’m very glad that I was never subjected to reminders that I was not biologically my parents “own” child and NEVER reminded that abandonment plays a role in the process of adoption. I find all this incredibly distasteful and disgusting.262

abandonment, she does not enjoy the security of guaranteed and everlasting acceptance, no matter how loving and reassuring her adoptive parents. She may feel that behavior perceived as negative by her adopted caregivers will result in permanent banishment…. Likewise, adoptive families may to varying degrees admit or deny the pain—of the adoptee primarily, and the parents who had to give up their child secondarily—hidden beneath the joy of adoption.” Rachel Quy Collier, “Performing Childhood” Outsiders Within (2006) 207-213. See also “Blood Ties and Acts of Love” comment #112, which argues this point.262

262 Lila, comment #66 in “Finding Zhao Gu” (Nov 2, 2007).
In her comment, Lila articulates both a vehement rejection of her “Asian” identity and strong loyalty toward her adoptive parents. For Lila, acknowledging that which is always present but not always legible, “what happened before I was my mom’s,” would mean disrupting the linear historicity of her family. Such acceptance would highlight the “differences” rather than the “similarities.” Critiquing Gammage and other adoptive parents, Lila contends that they should not dwell on differences, the past, and abandonment because that only generates a “huge cleft” and should have “no bearing on [the] present.” Instead, love and care are the fundamental ingredients for a strong and stable familial order. Thus, again and this time even from the perspective of the adoptee, the only emergence of importance for adoptees is the one enabled by adoption and love of adoptive parents. Denying both her personal history and her birth mother, Lila projects a type of successional violence onto herself in order for herself to legible. She occludes any possibility that difference could have a positive value; rather, because of globality it only possesses opposing meaning, which led her to never “wanting” to “explore [her Asian] background.”

Lila claims that her reason for ignoring the past was because difference is something innately bad. Other adoptees reject the past because they, like many of the adoptive parent examples, contend that adoption produced their “true” emergence, which makes everything before that point insignificant. For example, one adoptee, “MW,” bemoans the tenor of a Lynn Lauber’s blog, “Reunion,” which describes the “shady side yard of adoption” and recounts a story of her separation and reunion between her and her daughter. In a critique of Lauber’s blog and some of the posted comments, MW argues that not all adoptees yearn for the past:
Thank you for sharing your story. While I don’t relate to the position that you were in when you placed your child for adoption, I can understand that this was difficult for you given your account. I want to note that it is certainly important to give voice to the birth-givers, but the families where children are placed have voices and feelings too. There is a tone to this story and moreso [sic], the comments that followed that seems intent on painting these families as “less than”, in comparison to the birthers. All experiences will differ, but I in my case, I was adopted by my beautiful mother and father at 6 weeks of age. I have no connection to another, birther or not, my mother and father are the people that have cared for me for 30 years and truly gave me life, in their giving of a home and hearts forever. I can appreciate that my birther physically birthed me and allowed me to be placed with my parents, and I do. But that is where the connection ends for me. I want people to understand that every adoptee is not yearning for a connection with their birther and many of us are happy and blessed in beautiful families, and would not have it any other way.263

Despite the “thanks,” the acknowledgement of voice of the “birthgiver,” and the disclaimer that “all experiences will differ,” MW expresses disappointment in the responses to blog because “the families where children are placed have voices and feelings too.” Interestingly, this blog was the only one authored by a birth parent. In addition, it was the only blog to have a significant number of comments posted by birth mothers. While most of the blogs had zero respondents who were birth mothers, “Reunion” elicited 35 out of the total 182 responses.264 While there were a handful of comments that critique adoption, many of the other posts discuss the heartbreak of loss; the joys of reunion; or the need to have more openness in adoption, the latter only being a direct threat to the adoptive family or adoptee if they reject the existence or legibility of birth parents. MW’s statement suggests just that. Rather than engage with the author’s “new” and varying perspective, MW does not even acknowledge it. Instead, MW returns

263 MW, comment #122 in “Reunion” (Nov. 20, 2007). As a note, I am not sure whether this adoptee is a transracial/national adoptee but the content and the frame of the statement are important nonetheless.

264 “Blood Ties and Acts of Love” was the next highest representation of birth mothers with four responses out of 117.
to the perspective of the adoptee and adoptive parents, and MW’s comment revolves around the adoptee-adoptive parent relationship, effectively ignoring the birth mother and severing any relationship that exists with her. Moreover, MW exceedingly marginalizes birth parents to the extent that they are diminished to the role of “birther.” Again, for MW just as with other adoptees and adoptive parents, the adoptee emerges only in relation to adoption, occluding any role that birth parents and the global/historical play in the lives of adoptees. The term “birther” predetermines the birth mother as always illegible, and it ignores and invalidates the significant voice and presence of birth mothers in Lauber’s blog. What is clear from the blog and the following comments, but not so clear to MW, is that birth parents do not always have a choice. Thus, MW’s “appreciation” might be an empty gesture because MW does not account for material precessional violence, such as coercion, corruptness, poverty, war, rape, or any cause. While adoptees do indeed have different experiences and feelings, MW’s reduction of birth parents to the status of “birther” defines the family in a way that perpetuates violence that has already placed a majority of birth parents in social death in the first place.

Apparent in MW’s statement was the fact that there was a rejection of any tension or contradiction; MW had created a linear defined reality. The uncertain possible signifiers of family were blocked, but the traumatic and specters of violence are always present (but illegible) and unexpectedly reappear. In the last example, J. Granich, an adoptee articulates similar feelings about realness as the previous examples, but there is also a noticeable ambivalence and tension present.

First, thank you for such a touching story. I was adopted in June 1982, by my awesome parents. They provided a life for me that comes 2nd to none. I am well adjusted, college educated, and have a excellent family life
along with my brother and sister who are also adopted. For me, the thought of seeking out my birth parents is a selfish one. I thank god almost everyday [sic] that my birth mother, who was also adopted, chose to give me a better life than she could ever imagined. But there are questions I would want answered for myself. Of course medical history, a history of addiction, what do you look like, and if I have any siblings? Beyond these, I would not want constant contact. THE PEOPLE WHO RAISED and PROVIDED FOR ME MY WHOLE LIFE ARE MY PARENTS! I dont feel hate or negativity towards my birth parents [sic]. But I was brought tears reading the otherside of my story [sic]. Does she ever think about me, does she want to seek me out and for what reasons? Is she even alive? Does she light a candle for me on my Birthday? Overall, I would not change a thing about my life, my adoption, or my parents… but to think that someone out there did something so great for me and that I can not repay her hurts [sic].

Similar to MW, Granich begins her entry thanking Lauber for her blog. Granich continues by listing descriptors that demonstrate her “second to none” life, such as being “well adjusted,” “college educated,” “excellent family life,” and adopted siblings. In the middle of Granich’s entry, Granich clarifies and adamantly underscores, through capitalization, that “the people who raised and provided for me my whole life are my parents.” Notably absent, however, is the term “real,” which does not necessarily indicate anything other than that Granich has not explicitly prevented birth parents from being in the picture. And indeed, birth parents are considered in this case. While Granich claims that seeking out birth parents would be “selfish,” Granich does acknowledge them in a clear way that MW does not. Granich not only thanks them “everyday” but is also curious about the past, which includes common questions such as medical history, what do my birth parents look like, and if there are any siblings. After Granich’s declaration that the adoptive parents are the parents and that constant contact with the birth parents is not a strong desire, Granich opens up again, and a tension is revealed. Not only does Granich’s

265 J. Granich, comment #170 in “Reunion” (Nov. 20, 2007).
use of “constant,” in describing what kind of contact, imply that some contact could be acceptable, but Granich also allows Lauber’s story to connect and stimulate new feelings and questions: “Does she ever think about me, does she want to seek me out and for what reasons? Is she even alive? Does she light a candle for me on my Birthday?” These questions are far more open and emotive than informational questions such as medical history, and they indicate a willingness and desire to know more, to engage, and not to foreclose. Toward the end, Granich reiterates gratitude and loyalty, which indicates the difficulty of balancing the existing tension. Even the last part of the statement, which expresses the desire to repay the birth mother, underscores the tension because Granich thinks repayment is unattainable but wants to keep it open. As they did in the examples of adoptive parents, these examples underscore how the past reappears in the present; at which point, the adoptive parents and the adoptees have a choice to either negate it in a form of successional violence or encircle it as Edkins suggests.

**Individual Choice and Love**

What I have tried to accomplish in the last two chapters is to present transracial/national adoption in a new framework—that of the global/historical because such a framework would allow us to explore how adoption can be an individual act of love and a valid means to create a family, but it is also a violent process. As adoptees and their birth parents already emerge as unintelligible subjects, it is only through adoption that adoptees “re-emerge” as a new and privileged subject. While their identity and history still play a role in their subjectivity, adoption gives them “new opportunities” that were not available to them prior to adoption. The problem, however, is that there is an inconsistency in the trends of adoption. The context of the global/historical resurfaces in
the literal “act” of adoption, as some infants and children are adopted at a much higher rate than others. The global/historical posits black children as less desirable and unsavable, while Asian children are posited both desired and worthy of saving. This contradiction, nonetheless, is dismissed as personal choice. Largely absent from my analysis was the presence of domestic transracial adoptive parents and adoptees, but this absence is in great part because of the uneven numbers of domestic transracial adoptions.

At the very least, statements of individual choice and love ignore precessional and successional types of violence, and at the worst, it produces and perpetuates them. The framework of love that is embraced by adoption discourse, adoptive parents, adoptees, etc. is love of the individual type, and it spurns the political because love is from the heart. Thus, for some, adoption takes on an apolitical disposition.\textsuperscript{266}

To the credit of more than a few, there are some respondents who question the recent transpirations of adoption in America. They prudently ask why so many parents are going abroad instead of adopting children in US, which has a sizable population of waiting children in the foster care system. One respondent notes, “Being an American myself, we Americans need to seriously look at our own country and not ignore problems across the street for the sake of solving problems or ‘rescuing’ people across the world…”\textsuperscript{267} Another exclaims, “I would hope that many babies ‘waiting’ in American places of adoption would find parents! … If Americans are so wealthy that they can

\textsuperscript{266} Such a narrow and limiting framework negates, i.e. deems irrelevant, the ideological, economic, and political structures that allow certain women to have the privilege of choice. As Rickie Solinger cogently argues, not everyone has the privilege of choice. Oftentimes, that privilege is allocated according to gender, class, and race in which a normative family is constructed. In other words, there are cultural representations and structural apparatuses that inform discretion on who is a good choice maker. Solinger 2001.

\textsuperscript{267} SH, comment #47 in “Tracing My Roots Back to Korea” (Nov. 6, 2007).
afford to go to China for a child, why cannot they try harder here in the United States. We have many children in foster care yearning for ‘parents’. “268 One person addressed both the popularity of China and the neglected foster care system, “I would like to add that I agree with several others that one needn’t go to China or any other exotic locale to find children who need the support of loving parents and a stable home. There are hundreds of thousands of children within the US foster care system that would have loved to have been adopted…. “269 While simply deriding adoptive parents decision to adopt transnationally can be intrusive on their personal choice and is not very productive, it does point to this peculiar disposition and trend in adoption vis-à-vis domestic transracial adoptions.

In addition to these statements that question the increasing popularity of transnational adoption against the backdrop of transracial adoption in the US, the interest in TNA adoption is demonstrated by one poster’s observation that an article on foster care in New York City generated nine comments, while this one on China had produced 51, and eventually 145. Another respondent makes a similar comment: “I still don’t understand, just the other day there was a story on NPR about children “aging out of foster care” mainly because no one cared to adopt them in this country. Why do these women, mostly, go traipsing across the ocean(s) for these children while our children are languishing in foster care…. “270

268 Nancy, comment #36 in “Finding Zhao Gu” (Nov 2, 2007).
269 S.P., FZ 78. This is not to say that there were not families who adopted
270 Linda, comment #21 in “Blind Date to Addis” (Nov. 8, 2007).
The responses of adoptive parents range from “wanting to be parents”\textsuperscript{271} and “creating a family,”\textsuperscript{272} or providing “a life saving gift” for a child in a home and family.\textsuperscript{273} For instance, one commenter, Lisa, notes, “It is amazing that someone can question a family’s reason for adopting internationally as oppose to domestically. And, that you can assume that anyone who adopts internationally has plenty of money. How someone creates their family, and the reasons for the choices they make is nobody elses [sic] business. … Why do some people think it is ok to question our choices?”\textsuperscript{274} Later, Lisa injects again by replying directly to another commenter, Shannon, who had replied that the “personal IS political.”\textsuperscript{275} In response, Lisa reaffirms that adoption is an individual choice and is nobody’s business: “I stand by my comment—about my choices of how I create my family being no one elses [sic] business.”\textsuperscript{276} Another respondent agreed with Lisa, saying, “I would agree with Lisa that it is no ones [sic] business how families decide to create a family”\textsuperscript{277} Interestingly, in looking at her responding post, Lisa appears to be aptly aware of many of the critical issues involved in adoption by citing familiarity with adoption triad, reading an abundance of adoption literature especially by adult transracial adoptees, and “the importance of acknowledging and embracing our childrens [sic] culture and not ‘ignoring our different histories.’” Lisa’s last remark suggests her openness, “Shannon, I would be the first to read your personal story.

\textsuperscript{271} Mrs. B, comment #33 in “Blind Date to Addis” (Nov. 8, 2007).
\textsuperscript{272} Sheri S., comment #46 in “Tracing My Roots Back to Korea” (Nov. 6, 2007).
\textsuperscript{273} Margaret, comment #20 in “Blind Date to Addis” (Nov. 8, 2007) and Janet, comment #23 in “Blind Date to Addis.”
\textsuperscript{274} Lisa, comment #94 in “Finding Zhao Gu” (Nov 2, 2007).
\textsuperscript{275} Shannon, comment #108 in “Finding Zhao Gu” (Nov 2, 2007).
\textsuperscript{276} Lisa, comment #120 in “Finding Zhao Gu” (Nov 2, 2007).
\textsuperscript{277} Tracy, comment #135 in “Finding Zhao Gu” (Nov 2, 2007).
Whatever the ‘political message’ may be - I will read and learn and will likely not be frightened.”

Lisa’s “engagement” and level of “understanding,” however, belie the fact that she negates the relevance of the political by claiming that she is “perplexed” and “not sure how ‘politics’ entered this thread.” Although Shannon references issues involved at the personal level, such as individual loss by triad members, she also talks about “how we create our families, the roles we play in them, how we do or do not value our children” are culturally embedded. Shannon’s larger concern is how power operates in transracial/national adoption and who is dominating the discourse and narrative. She complicates the issue of adoption rather than simplifying it, “We need to hear many more adult adoptee and birth parents voices, in my opinion, before we will even begin to understand the complexities, loss, and power dynamics involved in adoption.” Lisa misinterprets Shannon’s statement as personal attack of her “politics,” and in effort to deflect the attack, she negates it as irrelevant. In doing so, she completely misses Shannon’s larger point. What Lisa is presented with but forecloses—because of her misinterpretation—is the fact that there two levels from which we can examine adoption: the individual level of the family, adoptive parents, adoptees, or birth parents and the larger level of structure. What connects these two levels are power and the political-symbolic. Thus the two levels constantly inform each other. In order to change adoption we need to examine both levels and how power and knowledge operate among them.

Strikingly similar to the claims of individual choice are the statements of love. Love can be thicker than blood, as McGinnis states, but love does not always address

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278 Lisa, comment #120 in “Finding Zhao Gu” (Nov 2, 2007).
the history, family, trauma, and violence. In fact, all too often it negates or forecloses them. One person, Shilo, who is thinking about adoption articulates this point well, “I’ve felt worried about not being able to love him or her the way a child should be by its mother, just because we don’t share genetic material. Thank you for this. It has made it all very clear. … Love is thicker than blood. The former is the thing that binds my family together, the latter is just an accident of birth. I’ve seen this - and how simple it is.” Shilo’s comment indicates the power that these blogs have. Simply after reading the blog, Shilo was able to ascertain the power of the love as the guiding principle of adoption. Suddenly, all of her worries and fears were alleviated by McGinnis’ entry. In fact, the role and power of love becomes so clear that Shilo is able to affirmatively assert that blood ties do not matter. After articulating her own worries, she displaces and negates the birth mother as irrelevant, indeed, as an “accident.”

Numerous respondents comment with similar responses. One individual says that the phrase “is profound and should be mantra for all adoptive parents!” A father of four children, two of whom are adopted from the Philippines 30 years ago, concludes his entry with, “Truly, love is thinker than blood.” Another person, MJ, proclaims, “Love is thicker than anything…. There is absolutely no discounting the power of love, and despite my own belief in love and its potential, collective transformative change requires more than this because too often our focus on love

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282 MJ, comment # 40 in “Blood Ties and Acts of Love” (Dec. 4, 2007). In addition to other statements that had to do with the power of love, there are at least nine more entries that directly refer to McGinnis’ phrase that “blood is thicker than water, but love can be thicker than blood.”
negates or forecloses both the violence of the past and present but also the memories and experiences from the past and the possibilities of the present and future. A framework that is based on the local/present can in fact make, remake, and simultaneously hide various forms of violence.

This last chapter looked at the blogs further and analyzed how violence is produced, reiterated, and negated or foreclosed in transracial/national adoptions. The guiding question in this chapter was what are the conditions of possibility for legibility, or what allows adoptees and birth parents to be legible subjects? Here, I tried to demonstrate the ways in which adoption is narrated as linear and resolved, where the “clean break” represents the reference point because it justifies the adoption as one of “need.” The narration begins with the “transformative re-emergence” of the adoptee through the act of adoption that brings the adoptee from a place of violence and a time of need to site of love and safety. I explore how narratives that include antihistorical statements and articulations of realness negate and/or foreclose precessional and successional violence in transracial/national adoptions—not only that which happened before and outside of adoption but also the possibilities of the present and future in regards to a complex genealogy, multiple identities, and acknowledging birth parents.

Although my original hope was to address globality in greater depth, I do want to return to this idea because of its importance to understanding transracial/national adoptions. What my analysis of the blogs reveals is that in framing adoption within individual liberalism and a local/present framework, adoptive parents and adoptees ignore how globality informs adoptions and their own lives. Particularly, as the blogs
have revealed, they disregard how birth parents and even adoptees, before adoption, emerged differently than the adoptive parents. They also overlook how adoptees, despite their new privileged status because of and in relation to their white adoptive families, remain “of color” and “thus” are still interpellated as different in society and sometimes even in their own families. For my thesis, then, the adoptee and the birth mother, but especially the latter, become the central figures and examples of how globality operates but goes unaddressed and is indeed foreclosed. The problem though is that these blogs mainly tackle the issue of transnational adoption or adoption in general. What is lacking or missing entirely in most of the blogs is discussion of transracial adoption in the US and what allows for different dynamics to play out between transnational and transracial adoptions. The fact is that globality concerns more than just birth mothers and adoptees of transnational adoptions; it includes communities of color both within and outside of the US. This consists of both waiting (black) children in the US, but it also includes systematically impoverished and criminalized communities of color such as undocumented immigrants and urban youth, who because of their unprivileged and unintelligible emergence and positioning are facing institutional and state violence. Adoption, in other words, affects more than just the triad. Laws, policies, practices, and perspectives relating to adoption directly and indirectly have a hand in building, defining, and restricting notions of family and the nation. The issues and problems are many and immense. So how do we begin to address either level of adoption and how power functions between and among them? My conclusion hopes to get at some of the ways that we can begin.
Conclusion

Acknowledgment, Encircling Trauma and New Representations

The production of my thesis arises out of a concern for transracial/national adoptions and the subjects who are intimately affected by them. Adoption as a violent act of inclusion is hard to digest, but this is indeed what I have tried to demonstrate. While there have been clear steps forward, statements from The New York Times blogs illustrate that there is still a strong sentiment about cultural difference and the desire to foreclose many of the complicated and unresolved aspects of adoption. I have been focusing not necessarily on the accuracy of certain statements but instead on what allows individuals to make these statements—what are the conditions of possibility—and what do such statements do? Now these two questions could very well be applied to my project: what allows me to say these things I say, and what does that do? I would argue that what enables me to say what I say is my reframing of the discussion from the local/present to the global/historical. Such a reframing encompasses the local and present because the historical is very concerned with the present and the future. What my statements do is challenge adoptive parents, adoptees, adoption agencies, professionals, the public, and even birthparents to rethink the notion of family and adoption, to place them in a new framework that acknowledges the powerful individual transformative effects of adoption and love but also the traumatic and violent effects that are instituted when history, identity, and other family is denied by the very bodies who claim to reject violence and embrace love, including adoptees.
When problems arise or they are identified, we as critical scholars and even activists habitually critique them without positing possible solutions. I realize that some of the larger problems are more difficult to solve, and thus asking critical and probing questions is always a productive starting point. In ethnic studies and other critical areas of study, many times the next step is to critique the state and implicitly or explicitly call for a radical restructuring of how things operate because small changes can be good but they frequently do not effectuate transformative change. I believe, however, that things can be done in between larger moments of rupture. This happens at both the individual and collective level. In other words, while most critiques are aimed at the structural inequalities\textsuperscript{283} that produce adoption, my critique also addresses what happens after the moment of adoption. It targets adoption at the level of the political symbolic or ideological and how adoptive families and adoptees organize and activate these ideologies in ways that hide and enact previous and continuing violence. Thus, in my concluding section, I offer potential possibilities to help the adoption community, and people in general, recalibrate (reconstruct, reconstitute, or refashion) our way of thinking and knowing about the ideas of family and adoption. This reconstituted onto-

\textsuperscript{283} Critiques of structural inequalities indeed play an important role in refiguring the violence of adoption. The ways in which recent government policies and laws have ideologically and structurally prioritized the idea of and “need” for adoption against the efforts to socially and economically support poor families of color in the US, immigrant families, and families abroad only works to reinforce the notion that adoption is the best answer for children and families. Preventative and alternative options for family preservation and reunifications—such as reestablishing their priority, reducing the prison population, reforming immigration and deportation laws, not requiring abstinence as a part of contraception aid, reestablishing an economic security net, etc.—are aspects of “adoption” that sorely need to be addressed. Thus, when one adoptee says in \textit{In Their Own Voices} (2000)—to the agreement of the majority of the public—“If you want to adopt a black or a Hispanic child or any child of color, these kids are ready to be adopted. Because many social workers and others in the community have a problem with transracial adoption, these kids lose out,” it hides how the state is the most significant contributor to the ways in which “these kids lose out” (Kennedy 2003: 475). To be sure, transformation of structural policies would have great impact on how people understand adoption, but in the mean time, I want to attend to how individual ideologies and practices that circulate help reinscribe violence in adoption.
epistemological understanding will inevitably lead toward a push for incremental changes in the ways structures unevenly operate against poor women and communities of color in the US and abroad.

The trauma that is associated with transracial/national adoption can either lead to apprehensive and arrestive obfuscation or, as Avery Gordon says, profane illumination.284 Fear of and the desire to resolve the traumatic and the unresolved are the driving forces of the former; it is the desire to address it directly or to negate it completely, which represents the controlling our own destiny and the ability to be self-determined. Profane illumination, on the other hand, informs the haunted of their own implication and incites transformative change because it requires them to engage the hauntings and the absent presences that reveal the violence and trauma of the past and present. The path people choose ultimately determines what is in store in the future. I have presented how adoptive parents and adoptees have historically chosen obfuscation through either the negation or foreclosure of the past and/or the birth parents.

I propose what Patchen Markell calls the “politics of acknowledgement.”285 Acknowledgement is ultimately about the self and how we respond to what we know,

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284 Avery Gordon, *Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Sociological Imaginations* (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minn. Press, 1997). In theorizing hauntings and ghosts, Avery Gordon says, “[H]aunting describes how that which appears to be not there is often a seething presence… the ghost is just the sign. … The ghost or apparition is one form by which something lost, or barely visible, or seemingly not there to our supposedly well-trained eyes, makes itself known or apparent to us, in its own way, of course.” Gordon says that the “profane illumination” from seeing ghosts and being haunted is transformative because it moves subjects into action: “When you have a profane illumination of these matters, when you know in a way that you did not know before, then you have been notified of your involvement. You are already involved, implicated, in one way or another …. ” (Ibid., 205). What Gordon misses though, is the arrestive effect that profane illumination can generate. The opposite action would be to ignore the ghost and pretend it is not real—it would be to unimplicate the self.

285 Patchen Markell, *Bound by Recognition* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003). The politics of acknowledgment takes the place of the politics of recognition. Recognition, as Markell explains it, especially as a mutual (reciprocal) practice, is an attractive ideal because it suggests equality (Ibid., 3). In making the social world intelligible, however, recognition produces a binary and a hierarchy that
“Although the presence or absence of acknowledgment may have important implications for others, the direct object of acknowledgment is not the other, as in the case of recognition; it is instead, something about the self.” Additionally, he adds,

So acknowledgement is in the first instance self- rather than other-directed; its object is not one’s own identity but one’s own basic ontological condition or circumstances, particularly one’s own finitude; this finitude is to be understood as a matter of one’s practical limits in the face of unpredictable and contingent future, not as a matter of the impossibility or injustice of knowing others; and, finally, acknowledgment involves coming to terms with, rather than vainly attempting to overcome, the risk of conflict, hostility, misunderstanding, opacity, and alienation that characterizes life among others.

If we understand Markell’s definition of acknowledgement to be mainly about the self and the finitude of the self, then we can apply this easily to situations involving adoptive families and parents. Historicity as a way of knowing and being has been the foundation from which we understand adoption. Transracial/national adoptive parents have embraced the idea of self-determination and the ability to overcome all obstacles with love alone. Harriet Fricke summarizes this well in her findings in the late 1960s: “But they do have all the attributes of good adoptive parents—with on important plus: they are tremendously secure people who do not need constant community or larger-family support to survive.”

stratifies some as subordinate and privileges others, which is obvious in the adoptee/adopter relationship (Ibid., 2). The flaw in recognition, he says, is that “the pursuit of recognition involves a ‘misrecognition’ of a different and deeper kind: not the misrecognition of an identity, either one’s own or someone else’s, but the misrecognition of one’s own fundamental situation or circumstance.” Moreover, hidden in this pursuit of recognition is the present (but not obvious) desire for sovereignty, which has high potential to reinscribe the actual injustice that is trying to be addressed (5), and thus, one is always bound by recognition. The alternative to the stratifying recognition that occurs even in positive characterizations is acknowledgement, which avoids reducing one party in order to validate the sense of sovereignty of the other party (Ibid., 7).

Ibid., 35.
Ibid., 38.
Fricke 1965: 96.
and while they feared racism would predominate in their neighborhoods, they eventually found out that this did not matter. Some neighbors welcomed the new community member, and those who did not were not needed. The adoptive parents, whom Fricke points to, exemplify how acknowledgement is interpreted as being about the other rather than the self.

The confidence and fieriness that Fricke speaks of are to some extent necessary for adoption, but such flippant rhetoric completely ignores the material realities and the global/historical context of transracial/national adoptions. Randall Kennedy and Elizabeth Bartholet, both lawyers and strong advocates for transracial/national adoptions, have carried Fricke’s torch by claiming “race” as a minimal obstacle that white parents can overcome and that ultimately does not have a significant impact on adoptions. “Racial identity” becomes representative of the entire issue of cultural competency for which one side says, training is needed for white adoptive parents, and the other side says, they should not be submitted to a cultural/racial litmus test. What Fricke, Kennedy, Bartholet, and even proponents of training fail to understand is that cultural competency cannot be limited to racial discrimination, exclusion, or identities but instead should focus on the culture of adoption. While the former approach maintains historicity as the governing perspective of transracial/national adoption, the latter takes into account the global/historical, the racial, and the politics of acknowledgement that Markell posits.

Thus, I am encouraged by other statements that suggest part of the adoption community has reframed the way it is thinking about family and the culture of adoption. One of the telling examples of this is the articulation of what many birth parents have long believed and stated, which is that adoptees have two sets of parents, and both sets
influence and inform adoptee identity, past, present, and future. The historical practice of
negating and foreclosing birth parents has been a violent picture in the tapestry of
adoption history that leaves successional and precessional violence hidden and
unaddressed. One way to engage the trauma and violence is to bring them into the
foreground and resist the tendency to displace or gentrify them so that we can
acknowledge the way in which we normatively think about “family” and adoption vis-à-
vis the birth family—in (racial) opposition—and then figure out a way to reframe them so
they can be more open and transformative. Paula O., both an adoptive parent and Korean
adoptive, summarizes this point well in her response to Tama Janowitz’s blog “The Real Thing”:

To be honest, I’ve never understood the seemingly insatiable need that
many fellow adoptive parents have to declare themselves the “real”
mother or the “real” father. To invoke the familiar [sic] litany of
qualifications that supposedly make a person more “real” as a mother or
father doesn’t make the argument any more convincing to me, but instead
leaves me wondering “What are they so afraid of?” When people ask me
about our son’s “real” mother, I tell them that he has two moms, both of
whom are real. Just because his Korean mother is unable to partake in the
daily events and happenings of his life does not make her any less of a
mother in our eyes. Honoring our son in his totality means recognizing
and appreciating his entire history, which includes acknowledging that he
is a child of two people who deserve to be called mother and father,
without any qualifiers. As a Korean adoptee myself, I’m appreciative that
my mother and father were secure enough and wise enough to let me
know that all four of my parents are very, very real and that I am who I am
today because of each one of them.289

289 Paula O., comment #57 in “The Real Thing” (Nov. 12, 2007). Another agreed with Paula O, “[Her] comments are right on … our adopted kids have FOUR real parents … to suggest anything else invalidates our kids’ birth and early history … it can also send a very subtle message that their first/birth parents are a taboo subject … and if we want to do anything for our kids, we want to make sure that our kids feel safe in discussing anything with us, including feeling about their first/birth parents. My kids have FOUR REAL parents … unfortunately they only live with two of them. Bernice, comment #106 in “The Real Thing” (Nov. 12, 2007).
Rather than violently demarcating the family and conceptualizing it as a self-determined thing of adoptive parents, Paula realizes that adoptive parents can rethink the notion of family to encompass more than the nuclear. Adoptive parents understand and acknowledge the limits or finitude of the self in a complex culture of adoption. Deb, another adoptive parent, echoes Paula’s point about fear, “I would do anything to help my daughter-born in China-find anything about her birth family. But I wasn’t always so committed to that promise. It took years of reading, researching and listening to realize that my fear of being supplanted by her birth family was just about me—and not about her.”

Deb’s statement is one example of acknowledging our limits and a way of encircling trauma. Rather than rejecting the fear of birth parents and their absent presence, Deb has now decided to engage it. Another adoptive parent, Patricia, demonstrates that even encircling and engaging the trauma and violence does not mean it will be resolved:

> While I can attempt to comfort and provide resources for my children as they come to address their life stories, I need to frequently remind myself that I can not [sic] “make it better.” Allowing them to process the events in their lives in a way that makes sense to them is not the same as making them “feel good” about their adoption so I can feel good about myself.

Adoptive parents, like all parents, have the strong desire to love and protect their child(ren). Physically protecting them with food, shelter, etc. is usually not difficult for adoptive parents because of their privileged socio-economic status, but it is the emotional part that can be troubling. Patricia’s quote illustrates both this desire and the acknowledgement of our own finitude. Thus, the culture of adoption for adoptive parents...
and adoptees is both the understanding of acknowledgement, which includes comprehending our own finitude, and encircling the trauma and violence from the past and that re-present themselves. These approaches and a rethinking of representation in adoption discourse and practice might begin to help address the violence that is produced and reiterated by adoption.

In this thesis, I have explored how transracial/national adoptions have been posited in the past and how this relates to current formulations, i.e. how adoption discourse has shifted from assimilation overdrive to the colorblindness and liberal multiculturalism. Also, I have examined how a global/historical framework might help us rethink these forms of adoption beyond the reduced context of the local/present, where the individualized context of love has been the principle and guiding condition of possibility for adoption. By looking at, on the one hand, the larger trajectory of discourse — statements of inclusion, progress, and love — and, on the other, the more particular trajectory of statements and practices at the level of the individual and family, where family gets narrated and restricted, I highlighted the ways in which a local/present framework, guided by love, obfuscates the productive violence is at play. In other words, a global/historical framework that takes into account raciality—articulations of cultural and racial difference—enables us to explore how subjects emerge differently in relation and/or opposition to each other and examine other conditions of possibility that allow for certain outcomes of increase for transnational adoptions and of stagnation for transracial adoptions, and erasure for birth parents and families.

Again, transracial/national adoptions are often the result of multiple forms of violence, and then adoptees and birth parents are too often subjected to further and
continuing violence. Thus, transracial/national adoptions are not the answer, but they provide a minimal, individual way to address (poorly or profoundly) the material realities of some children. Furthermore, the violence that is produced and reiterated is not necessarily the explicit and sole work of the adoptive family; rather, adoptive families grasp onto and employ these signifying strategies because it is the new paradigm and the way in which adoption discourse has presented the condition of possibility for the adoptive family.

I have tried to explore the hidden complexities of a largely two-sided debate, and while adoption has a personal character that can be respected and acknowledged as individually transformative, we must consider and engage the immensely political and global/historical aspects that structure and inform adoption; we must interrogate the violence of adoption and the possible alternatives. These alternatives begin with acknowledgment and knowing the limits of the self; encircling trauma and embracing the unknown and unresolved; and rethinking the notion of family and framing adoption as a collective effort, one that can enact collective transformative change through new forms of representation that go beyond requiring the emergence of subjects to always be in opposition.
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