A Research Proposal: “Becoming Catalan: Language and Racialization in Immigration and International Adoption”

In the summers of 2011 and 2012 I had the opportunity to perform pilot research with adoptive parents in Catalonia as I pondered a new long-term research project on the question of how language and physical difference affect who does and does not get to “count” as Catalan. For some of the parents, a belief in the power of culture to make their children fully Catalan coincided with beliefs that seemed to blend biology and culture in explanations of difference. For example, several parents of adopted children of Chinese origin noted that their children walked “like Catalans” while the children of Chinese immigrants walked differently. When asked to explain this difference, some of the parents noted that walking style was a learned habit, others attributed it to physiological structure—even while noting that their own adopted daughters did not walk in this way. Other parents attributed their children’s personality traits to their country of origin—one child’s “toughness” was attributed to her West African origin. The aca-
This new research project grew organically out of my first ethnographic project. That project began in 2002 and resulted in my linguistic anthropology doctoral dissertation *Catalan that Doesn’t Hurt the Eyes: Linguistic Display and Linguistic Regimentation in Barcelona* (2006, University of Michigan) and several article publications. In that body of work, I try to understand what it means for Catalan to have become a public language again after its exclusion from the public realm during the Franco dictatorship. I argue that while in many ways, Catalan is now seen as a neutral public language available for all to use, many still see it as a language with strong ethnonational ties.

My interest in adoption began when participants in my first study as well as other friends and acquaintances in Catalonia began to adopt children from abroad. I realized that I was witnessing a major social phenomenon... and one that would permit me to con-
by observing immigrant and adopted children across a number of settings. Further, by comparing immigrant and adopted children, I am able to focus not only on children in isolation, but also on the ways in which children’s familial relationships affect their status as Catalans.

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Thinking about Immigration, Adoption and Racialization

“Race”—defined as the belief that cultural groups are bounded by shared genetic or physical traits—has never been a main component of definitions of Catalan-ness. Rather, being Catalan has been equated with speaking Catalan, a tie that appears to be loosening as Catalan gains ground as a more “neutral” public language that is available to people other than ethnic Catalans. Research on immigrants in Catalonia has tended to focus on school settings. Scholars working in such contexts have documented immigrants’ reluctance to speak Catalan and adopt a Catalan identity. Another line of research explores institutional policy favoring or disfavoring the integration of immigrant children. My research expands these studies by observing immigrant and adopted children across a number of settings. Further, by comparing immigrant and adopted children, I am able to focus not only on children in isolation, but also on the ways in which children’s familial relationships affect their status as Catalans.

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thinking to ponder the Catalan language. If Catalan is a public language and Catalan is an identity available to all, children adopted by Catalan families should have the same opportunity to “become Catalan” as children born to Catalan families. I decided to develop a research project that would test this question.

The fact that the boom in international adoption coincided with the boom in immigration—often from the same countries—allows me to tease apart several variables: place of origin, physical appearance, and home language. Therefore, I have devised a four-way comparison among non-European international adoptees, European international adoptees, immigrants and locally born and raised children. Is speaking Catalan enough for children whose physical appearance may differ from that of other Catalan speakers to be accepted as Catalan? Through what processes can they become Catalan? In which situations is their Catalan-ness questioned, and in which might they themselves choose not to be Catalan?
This project combines these foci, taking Catalonia as a case in point for examining the current constellation of meanings surrounding language, physical difference and citizenship, which have shifted over time with WWII, decolonization, EU integration and finally the current European financial crisis.

Studying Racialization, Language and Belonging in Barcelona

For initial clues to whether the study children become Catalan in different ways and to different degrees, I will analyze explicit commentary by children, teachers, peers and family members about the Catalan language and Catalan-ness, from both conversational and interview data. I predict that explicit talk about the Catalan language and Catalan-ness will be inclusive, a finding that would be consistent with public discourse, which tends to be explicitly anti-racist. Parents in my pilot study often made direct claims that their adopted children were not victims.
of racism, but then went on to reveal subtle ways in which their children were indeed excluded. For example, one parent of a girl adopted from China told me that her daughter was fully accepted by her peers and had good friends at school. Later in our conversation, however, she mentioned that her daughter was generally excluded from her friends’ birthday parties.

I anticipate that *implicit* clues in talk—such as in the above example—will reveal that the three sets of children not born to Catalan families do not have equal opportunities to “become Catalans.” The whiteness of European adoptees will likely enable them to count as Catalan, if they come from Catalan-speaking families. The non-European adoptees are likely to be considered Catalan in their school and family environments yet have their Catalan-ness questioned when they venture out of their daily settings (although the example of the girl excluded from her friends’ birthday parties may suggest that adopted children may not even *belong* to their school groups). The immigrant children are likely to be excluded from being “Catalan,” because neither do they have European appearances, nor do they come from Catalan-speaking families. Because school takes place in Catalan, these children will have command of Catalan but may not get to count as Catalan people. Instances in which speakers choose not to speak Catalan with these children, or in which the children themselves choose not to speak Catalan, or instances of subtle—or not so subtle—social exclusion, would support this finding. My previous research on Catalan’s re-emergence as a public language will allow me to contextualize my findings about language, racialization and belonging within a broader understanding of the social life of the language.

Understanding underlying beliefs about who *belongs* is pressing in the current economic climate, in which many view immigration as a financial drain and in which Catalonia contemplates independence from Spain. In examining adoption and immigration—processes in which national identification cannot be taken for granted—scholars can learn about the nature of belonging and its relationship to language. Moreover, this original project will contribute to cross-disciplinary discussions about language and physical appearance as markers of difference in Europe. Finally, this research has implications for policy and the fields dedicated to the wellbeing of immigrants and adoptees.
In *Somebody’s Children*, Laura Briggs examines the social and cultural forces—poverty, racism, economic inequality, and political violence—that have shaped transracial and transnational adoption in the United States during the second half of the twentieth century and the first decade of the twenty-first. Focusing particularly on the experiences of those who have lost their children to adoption, Briggs analyzes the circumstances under which African American and Native mothers in the United States and indigenous and poor women in Latin America have felt pressed to give up their children for adoption or have lost them involuntarily.

Since the early 1990s, transnational adoptions have increased at an astonishing rate, not only in the United States, but worldwide. In *Belonging in an Adopted World*, Barbara Yngvesson offers a penetrating exploration of the consequences and implications of this unprecedented movement of children, usually from poor nations to the affluent West. Yngvesson illuminates how the politics of adoption policy has profoundly affected the families, nations, and children involved in this new form of social and economic migration.
“Black kids in White Homes” (2008)


Stolcke, Verena. 1995. “Talk-
This film tells the intimate stories of four teenaged girls. They live in different parts of the US, in different kinds of families and are united by one thing: all four were adopted from China. These strong young women allow us to grasp what it is like to come-of-age in today’s America as transracial adopted. At the same time, we see them as typical American teenagers doing what teenagers everywhere do... struggling to make sense of their lives. And with great honesty and courage, these four girls open their hearts to experience love, compassion, and self-acceptance.

With white Jewish lesbians for parents and two adopted brothers—one mixed-race and one Korean—, Brooklyn Avery grew up in a unique and loving household. But when her curiosity about her African-American roots grows, she decides to contact her birth mother. This choice propels Avery into her own complicated exploration of race, identity, and family that threatens to distance her from the parents she’s always known. When Avery decides to pick up the pieces of her life and make sense of her identity, the results are inspiring.

Outside Looking In brings personal insight and a critical lens to transracial adoption, looking at three families facing the challenges of adopting children across racial lines. It supplies a voice to those directly affected by adoption policies and explores larger topics facing our society: race, family, and identity. The film examined transracial adoption in America and won a Paul Robeson Award. By acting as a mentor and advocate for adopted and foster youth, Bertelsen’s work with families and adoption extends beyond film.

In 2007 Donna and Jeff Sadowsky of Long Island, New York submitted their dossier to adopt eight-year old Fang Sui Yong from Guangzhou, China. From the very first moment Sui Yong meets her new mother, Donna, we get a real sense of the emotional confusion and loss Sui Yong experiences, as adoption workers translate their first words of communication. This day will change Sui Yong’s life, forever. As she struggles to survive in this new world, we witness her transform into a lively, outspoken American. In a sense, she’s the same girl Donna met in Guangzhou all those months ago – and yet she’s utterly different.
ABOUT THE AUTHOR OF THE TEXTS

Susan Frekko

Susan Frekko is an assistant professor of anthropology in the Department of Sociology & Anthropology at Goucher College, Baltimore, United States, where she has taught since 2009. She completed her graduate training in linguistic anthropology at the University of Michigan (Masters in 2001 and Ph.D. in 2006) and her undergraduate training in anthropology and Spanish at Amherst College (1996). She teaches courses in cultural and linguistic anthropology to students at the undergraduate level. Frekko’s dissertation research (2002-2003, 2004) on language, identity and the public sphere in Catalonia was supported by grants from Fulbright I.I.E., the Social Science Research Council and the Wenner-Gren Foundation. She has published articles resulting from this research in journals such as *Language in Society* and the *Journal of Linguistic Anthropology*. Her new research compares adoption and immigration in Catalonia on the questions of language, racialization and belonging. Frekko is part of the AFIN research project launched in January, 2013: “Adoptions and fosterages in Spain: tracing challenges, opportunities and problems in social and family lives of children and adolescents” (CSO2012-39593-C02-00; PI: Diana Marre.) Frekko’s other research interests include the cross-cultural comparison of parenting practices and the intersections between socialization and human development.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR OF THE IMAGES

Madalena Elek Machado

I was born in Sao Paulo on the 10th of March 1974. My mother always tells me that I had my eyes wide open when they took me to the hospital room, I looked at her with an expression that said “So, you are my mum!”. I am an observer from the very beginning.

I graduated in industrial and graphic design in 1996. After finishing school, I decided to travel to Barcelona in order to continue studying and broadening my horizons. In 2003 I did postgraduate studies on Creative Illustration and Visual Communication Techniques at Escola Eina.

My professional career could be divided, in general terms, in three different phases. First, I used to work as a graphic designer in several studies between Sao Paulo and Barcelona, as well as a freelance. In 2007, I discovered fashion and, more concretely, the textile design and, therefore, I designed several pattern for companies like Oysho (Grupo Inditex), Mango, Zara and H&M. The third phase is as an illustrator, when I worked for La Vanguardia, Revista TPM, publishing houses like Salamandra, Global, Ágora, Abril and Scipione-Ática, among others. These three stages are only theoretical, since in reality they coexist and even melt most of the times. I am a mix of all these experiences. On my website - www.madaelek.com –, there is a representative sample of my projects.

I currently live and work between my two cities, Sao Paulo and Barcelona, but I am open to the world.
ON ADOPTIONS, FOSTERAGES AND BIRTHS: “DIVERSITIES” AND “NORMALITIES”

23TH, 24TH, AND 25TH OCTOBER 2014
ZARAGOZA, SPAIN
Colegio Mayor Universitario Virgen del Carmen
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FURTHER INFORMATION:
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DAY I - Thursday 24th October

9:30-10:00: Registration

10:00-10:30: Opening Session

10:30-11:30: 1st Session
THE MEDICALIZATION OF CHILDHOOD DIFFERENCES
RAYNA RAPP. PhD Social Anthropology. New York University.
Moderator:
DIANA MARRE. PhD Social Anthropology. Autonomous University of Barcelona. AFIN Research Group.

11:30-13:00: Segunda Sesión
ADOPTIONS, FOSTERAGES AND BIRTHS
BRUNA ÁLVAREZ. PhD Social Anthropology candidate. Autonomous University of Barcelona. AFIN Research Group.
DIANA MARRE. PhD Social Anthropology. Autonomous University of Barcelona. AFIN Research Group.
Moderator:
CARMEN LÓPEZ MATHEU. PhD Social Anthropology. University of Barcelona. AFIN Research Group.

13:00-14:30: Lunch Break

14:30-15:30 3rd Session
COMMUNICATIONS

GLOBAL TRENDS IN INTERCOUNTRY ADOPTION AND SURROGACY
PETER SELMAN. PhD Demography. Newcastle University. AFIN International member.
Moderator:

15:30- 16:30: 4th Session

16:30-17:00: Coffee-Break

17:00-18:30: 5th Session
FAMILIES, ASSOCIATIONS AND SOCIAL MOVEMENTS
MERCEDES NAVARRO. Medical PhD, adoptive mother. President of AFADAand CORA member.
CARMEN LÓPEZ MATHEU. PhD Social Anthropology. University of Barcelona. AFIN Research Group.
MARIBEL JOCILES. PhD Sociology. Complutense University of Madrid.
Moderator:
LOLA CAMPOS. Journalist and adoptive mother.

18:30-19:30: 6th Session
ADOPTION ON THE SIDE OF THE CHILD: DOMESTIC ADOPTION OF CHILDREN IN THE U.K
JOHN SIMMONDS. Director of Policies, Research and Development of the British Association for Adoption and Fostering.
Moderator:

19:30-20:30: 7th Session
CINE FORUM
Moderator:
BRUNA ÁLVAREZ. PhD Social Anthropology candidate. Autonomous University of Barcelona. AFIN Research Group.
DAY II - Friday 24th October

9:00-10:00: Octava Sesión

CHILDHOOD, FAMILY AND PUBLIC POLICIES IN SPAIN

SALOMÉ ADROHER. PhD Law. General Director of Family and Childhood’s Services of the Spanish Ministry of Health, Social Services and Equity.


10:00-12:00: 9th Session

ON CARE, FAMILIES, KINSHIP AND PUBLIC POLICIES


ANNE CADORET. PhD Social Anthropology. CNRS-Cerlis (retired researcher), AFIN Research Group.

ROSSANA DI SILVIO. Psychologist, Psychotherapist and Social Anthropologist. ASL Milano 1 and University Milano-Bicocca.


Moderator: JOSÉ ÁNGEL GIMÉNEZ ALVIRA. Psychologist and adoptive father.

12:00-13:00. 10th Session

POST ADOPTION CONTACT AND OPENNESS: THE POINT OF VIEW OF THE CHILDREN, ADOPTIVE PARENTS, AND BIRTH RELATIVES

BETH NEIL. Director of Research of the Centre for Research on Children and Families, University of East Anglia.


13:00-14:30: Lunch Break

14:30-15:30: 11th Session

COMMUNICATIONS

15:30-16:30: 12th Session

ON ADOLESCENCES AND ADOLESCENTS

JAUME FUNES. Psychologist, educator and journalist.

Moderator: ELENA BERMEJO. Psicóloga, madre adoptiva y vicepresidenta de AFADA.

16:30-17:00 Coffee-break

17:00-19:00: 13th Session

HOW (NOT) TO TALK ABOUT...


SUSAN FREKKO. PhD Social Anthropology. Goucher College. Visiting Researcher at Autonomous University of Barcelona, AFIN Research Group

ANA MARÍA RIVAS. PhD Sociology. University Complutense of Madrid.

NEUS ABRINES. PhD Psychology. Department of Health Services, Research and Policy. London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine.AFIN Research Group.


18:30-19:30: 14th Session

LEARNING AT SCHOOL EN LA ESCUELA

MONICA DALEN. PhD Philosophy. University of Oslo.

Moderator: OLGA LÁZARO. Psychopedagogist, Early Education Teacher, adoptive mother and vicepresident of AFADA.

20:00-20:30: 15th Session

CINE FORUM


DAY III - Saturday 25th October

09:30-10:30: 16th Session

DEALING WITH THE DIFFICULTIES RELATED TO FASD

DIANE BLACK. Medical PhD, adoptive mother of three children with FASD and president of the European FASD Alliance.

Moderator: NATÀLIA BARCONS. PhD Clinical Psychology, Researcher of AFIN Research Group and Coordinator of AFIN Services Centre.

10:30-12:30: 17th Session

ON HEALTH AND DISEASE, NORMAL AND ABNORMAL, ORDERS AND DISORDERS


INMACULADA GONZÁLEZ VIEJO y VICTORIA PUEYO. Medical PhD. Paediatric Ophthalmology Service of University Hospital Miguel Servet.


12:30-13:30: 18th Session

“NEW” FATHERHOODS

XAVIER ROIGÉ. PhD Social Anthropology. University of Barcelona.


13:30-14:00

CLOSING SESSION