Child Circulation in a globalized era: anthropological reflections[1]

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In a multidisciplinary volume such as this, perhaps the wisest strategy for this chapter –focusing on anthropology's contribution to the study of transnational adoption[5]– is to begin by clarifying anthropologists' particular approach to the adoption process.

A first point of note deals with the tradition of comparative studies in anthropology that underlines the contextual specificity of different understandings involved in the adoption process[6] .Through their observation of child-raising practices among such varied groups as the Kanak of New Caledonia (Leblic 2007), the Kotokoli of West Africa (Goody 1982), the Inuits of Northern Canada (Saladin-d'Anglure 1988), the Sullk'ata of the Andean highlands (Van Vleet 2008) or native peoples of Hawai'i (Modell 1998), anthropologists, early on, coined the expression "circulation of children" to describe a child's transfer between different families

Despite important differences, descriptions of child circulation in different parts of the globe generally bring out certain points in common: child transfers occur mostly among extended kin, although placement with "strangers" is not uncommon; the transfer carries a connotation of apprenticeship, education or otherwise the widening of future opportunities; kinship is calculated through care, work, and other shared activities as much as through marriage and blood relations (Lallemand 1993, Grau 2010). Finally, child circulation does not normally imply a rupture of ties between the birth parents and their child. As Demian points out in the New Guinea setting: "adoption is 'for life', but in no way do natal parents expect to 'lose' their child" (2004, p. 103). "Othermothering", "shared parenthood" and "pluripaternity" are different terms scholars have used to describe such dynamics of child circulation found also in particular enclaves of Western societies (Cadoret 1995, Modell 1994, Collins 1992) where everyday understandings of family belonging appear to have little in common with legal directives.

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[5] For overviews focused on similar issues, see Howell 2009a, Ouellette et Belleau 2001, Terrell and Modell 1994

7 For material on the vast discussion around a child's best interest, see Fonseca, Marre, Uziel y Vianna, 2012; Reynaert, Bouverne-De Bie and Vandeeld 2009.

Ex-colonies were the traditional sites for studies on child circulation. After the first field studies in Oceania (Carroll 1970) and Africa (Goody 1982) and later in Latin America (Weismantel 1995), researchers began to recognize that something akin to child circulation was to be found in most parts of the world. The practice, framed at first as something typical of the past or of isolated groups, began to be perceived as an integral part of the family dynamics of many present-day, urban populations (see Estrada Iguíniz 2009; Leinaweaver 2008; Mummert 2008; Leblic 2007; Alber 2004; Demian 2004; Halbmayer 2004; Notermans 2004; Treide 2004; Wardle 2004; Cadoret 1995; Weismantel 1995; Modell 1994; Stack 1974).

A second important element of anthropological studies on adoption deals with the framing of people's "understandings" through a certain vision of culture. Coherent with contemporary perspectives, "culture" is not seen as some sort of millenary monolithic force weighing down on people's choices according to the territory in which they live. Forged through politically contested and conflicting narratives, its manifestations are ubiquitous, hybrid and changing (Geertz 2000). Perhaps more importantly, culture has ceased to be the privilege of exotic peoples. As Western societies have fallen under the lens of analysis, many concepts and practices seen heretofore as obvious –natural or universal– have been revealed as the product of historically-specific cultural values. In other words, the analyst's own cultural norms have been put into perspective, provoking a radical rethinking of naturalized categories of family, childhood, child development, parenthood and kinship.

The rise in Europe and North America of what is frequently referred to as the "modern, nuclear family" came hand in hand with the changing value of children, conferring new meaning to adoption practice. Analysts have traced changes in Western family values, pointing to the particular political and economic circumstances of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries that contributed to the emergence of children as "emotional assets" (Zelizer 2005 and 1985). Seeing sons and daughters as a way of completing the ideal family, adoptive parents sought to guarantee their permanent and exclusive parental rights over the child . Arguing that the adoptive family should "imitate nature", jurists and educators – often in partnership with anthropologists of their time – used their own culture-bound beliefs on the importance of biological procreation as a yardstick for "natural" family relationships.

Anthropology's cornerstone methodology – ethnographic techniques of field research – accounts for its third distinctive contribution to the field of adoption studies. The fact that anthropologists tend to spend long hours with their subjects -- observing everyday practices in people's homes, neighborhoods and workplaces – makes them privy to scenes and thoughts that do not easily surface in more formalized encounters and modes of expression. In other words, the ethnographic method, with its ferreting out of the real-life particulars of human existence, lends itself to the discussion of people and practices that are not necessarily apparent in research using other methodologies (Greenhouse and Greenwood 1998).

It is thus no mistake that, as they delve into the emotional economy of different subjects in the adoption field, today's anthropologists concentrate their attentions on actors who have been overlooked in other analyses. In most settings, these "forgotten subjects" include birth parents – living as a rule in poverty-stricken sectors of society, often diagnosed with some sort of individual pathology – who seldom find a collective voice to influence decision-makers (e.g., Latchford 2012, March 2012, Fonseca 2010, Högbacka 2011, Mandell 2010, Kendall 2005). In places such as China, the generally overlooked category would be that of *local* caregivers, repressed by government policies of population control and obliged to compete with foreign adopters in Europe and the U.S. in order to hold on to children they have fostered or informally adopted (Johnson 2004). In other settings, it might be the adopted children themselves whose feelings of ambivalence, seldom heard beyond the confines of individual therapy, have been largely censored.

Voices such as these are easily glossed over especially in the legal sphere where –in an attempt to establish general rules applicable in any context– debates underplay the complexity of specific local situations. In international arenas, although "sending countries" generally have ample participation, one finds few if any representatives of birth, or even foster, families. The majority voice appears to lie consistently with the well-organized adoptive families and agencies hailing from the Northern hemisphere who are concerned with regulating transnational adoption. Notwithstanding the seeming consensus of international laws, scholars have done revealing analyses that underline voices of dissent, pointing to the ever-present need to rekindle the dialogue, with special attention directed toward questions not only of diversity, but also of inequality.

Conflict and inequality in the history of transnational adoption

The systematic evacuation of children from war zones dates from the first half of the twentieth century (Briggs and Marre 2009). Yet, as scholars point out, at the time, actions of solidarity did not carry the connotations that adoption does today. Volunteer foster families would express their solidarity by caring for youngsters as long as necessary. However, no one expected the child to take on the identity of her/his new family, nor that she/he adopt the religion, nationality, and culture of her/his new home. All concerned were supposed to consider it normal that, sometimes after years of living with their "rescue family", children could be abruptly "repatriated", returned to their original homes (Dubinsky 2010).

The transnational circulation of children, as a result of war, was thus a reality well before the 1950s. However, in adoption circles, the beginning of transnational adoption as we know it today is normally attributed to the Korean War. The Korean rejection of half-blood children fathered by American GIs served as a sort of kick-off to a more general process. From then on, in Europe and particularly the United States, child-saving campaigns, often of religious inspiration, were embraced by all elements of the political spectrum. Briggs (2003) describes the "visual iconography of rescue" that began to circulate in

weekly magazines during the fifties –photos of dark-skinned emaciated children, sometimes in exotic garb– published by charitable organizations seeking financial contributions. Focused particularly on the historical symbolism of children, this sort of analysis demonstrates how images of children, "bearers, but never makers, of social meaning" (Dubinsky 2010, p. 3), are used to build and convey nationalist ideologies.

During the 60s, North America and Western Europe witnessed a number of social innovations that would spell change for the field of adoption: the feminists moved to diminish stigma against women's sexuality and children born out-of-wedlock; more and more women entered the job market, gaining increased autonomy; and the dissemination of effective means of birth control dramatically reduced the number of unwanted pregnancies. In other words, traditional sources of adoptable babies were drying up, exactly at a time when couples were, more than ever before, seeking children to "complete their families". In Australia, Canada and the U.S, a first move to compensate the dearth of babies involved the moralization of aboriginal peoples. Native children, removed from their "unfit" parents, would be sent to live with white, middle-class families. Historians refer to this period as the "Sixties (baby) scoop" in Canada, the "Stolen Generation" in Australia (Manne 1998) and the era of "Lost Birds" in the U.S. (Mandell 2007). However, social movements defending the rights of minority populations soon caught up with the situation, and as legislation tightened against abusive practices at home, adopters were increasingly forced to go overseas to find an adoptable child.

At the same time, people were less and less willing to "simply" foster a child. Adoption itself was being adjusted to the proprietary logic of the Western nuclear family. During the 60s, plenary adoption –stipulating complete rupture with a child's birth family– was written into national legislations throughout the Western world, marginalizing or even outlawing previous versions of child circulation or "simple" adoption. Anonymity was increasingly incorporated into new institutional practices, followed by the rise of "sealed" birth records that would eliminate any possibility of shared parenthood (Carp 2004 and 1998, Samuels 2001, Solinger 2001). The expression "war orphans" gave way to a simpler and more generic term –"orphans", including not only children whose parents had died, but also those who were "abandoned" or whose parents had "consented" to release them to adoption.

The need to combat abuse in the adoption field was a consensual issue. There were rumors that unsupervised adoptions might feed the traffic in human organs. But of equal concern was the arbitrary use of state power to "abduct" children from their homes. The babies sequestered by the Argentine dictatorship of the 70s and 80s, brought into worldwide view by the courageous efforts of the *Madres de Plaza de Mayo*, underlined the danger of totalitarian regimes in the mediation of adoption procedures.

Carla Villalta (2012a, 2005), specialist on the abduction of children during the Argentine military dictatorship, uses this material to formulate a provoking argument. Her contention is that, in many cases, the military were able

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to mask the kidnapping of children under the legality of existent adoption law exactly because previous democratic governments had allowed ample leeway for the unilateral termination of parental rights, particularly among poverty-stricken families. Public outcry occurred, however, only when this sort of abduction was coupled with the terrible violence of the military regime. Whereas Argentina, after its return to democracy, prohibited transnational adoption to avoid abuses reminiscent of the dictatorship, domestic adoption, as elsewhere in the Western world, advanced free of critical scrutiny.

Villalta's analysis suggests that concerns about abuse in the adoption system should not be limited to situations of unlawful abductions by totalitarian regimes. In recent times, well-publicized episodes such as the Zoe's Ark incident in the Sudan (Perreau 2012) and adoptions of Third World children by pop-stars such as Madonna and Angelina Jolie evoke the pitfalls of *legal* adoption in a world of radical inequalities. Analysts imply that these cases may be simply the tip of the iceberg of routine abuses perpetrated by present-day democratic regimes against economically discriminated or minority populations.

Altogether, scholars argue convincingly that, even if adoption can sometimes be considered a good solution for a difficult situation, in general, the system serves to transfer children from the poor and disfranchised to better-off and better-connected families. The classifications that qualify certain parents as inadequate, and others as adequate are charged with connotations of poverty, race and economic inequalities that have shaped domestic adoption as well as transnational adoption. (Modell 1994, Briggs 2012).

Law and divergent views of the adoption process

As a logical extension of its method, anthropological inquiry is routinely directed toward manifestations of "authoritative knowledge". The question of who has the authority (and based on what moral and scientific tenets) to decide which child goes to which family, when and under what circumstances, becomes particularly relevant as anthropologists, working in different parts of the globe, grapple with the conflicts between government authorities, birth families and potential adopters (Cardarello 2009, Leifsen 2006, Johnson 2004). Laws are seen as imbedded in policies of governance; they are part of the modern state's strategies to promote national styles of citizenry and regulate behaviors. Especially in this era of massive migration, multiple forms of belonging, and frequent dislocations, it is a challenge for state authorities to find ways to "set" individuals into precise molds of family and territory –not only to "control" populations, but also to better define who is entitled to which family allowances, which tax cuts, and so on (Cadoret 2012, Yngvesson 2009). Yet, anthropologists remind us, people's understandings, in actual practice, often "sit uncomfortably" with legal personhood (Collard 2009, Yngvesson 2009, Strathern 2005). In particular, the question arises: to what extent are practices of "traditional" child circulation compatible with contemporary adoption law?

With great prescience, a classical anthropologist wrote in 1930: "adoption customs [in traditional societies] rest on a mental attitude difficult to conceive for those nurtured in Western traditions" (Lowie apud Howell 2009a, p. 162). Howell underlines the continued relevance of this phrase in order to criticize the prejudice of Western authorities against adoption: "Many, including legislators, expect that the absence of shared blood must result in tension, in a troubled sense of identity, and even in second-best love and affection" (Howell 2009a, p. 162). Other scholars would extend this line of thought to the difficulty people (in particular, birth families) in non-Western countries have in understanding the terms of legal, plenary adoption (Högbacka 2011, Leblic 2009, Leinaweaver 2008, Fonseca 2003). Clearly, there are moments when the "gap" between formal regulation and popular practice creates an opportunity for the abuse of subaltern populations (Leifsen 2006 and 2004, Anderson 2004, Fonseca 2002a and 2002b).

Scholars working in diverse settings, from the U.S. to Africa and Asia, demonstrate how birth parents, when asked to sign the "relinquishment" form releasing their child for adoption, often do not fully grasp the meaning of the document (see Hogbacka 2011, Kendall 2005, Schachter [Modell] 2009, 2002 and 1994). In many Third World regions (just as in the U.S. and Europe), illegitimacy has long since ceased to be a social stigma obliging unwed mothers to give their babies away, and historical forms of discrimination against bastard children – including exclusion from or diminished rights to inheritance – have been abolished. Hence, there are fewer and fewer newborns "given up" in adoption. Those women or couples who, generally motivated by poverty, "consent" to put their child up for adoption often do not confide in court mediators. They themselves look for a "good family" among employers and neighbors, before arriving in court where, in *a post ipso facto* measure, they seek official validation of their choice of adoptive parents.

Fonseca (2011) describes just such a case to illustrates the sort of disarray Brazilian birthmothers may feel when confronted with the rules of legal, plenary adoption. During a court audience called to formalize an adoption planned and arranged by the birthmother, the judge, following the usual protocol, explained to the birthmother that, after signing the child's relinquishment, she would have no further contact or information relating to the child: "You will never see your child again. It will be as though your baby had died. Do you accept these conditions?" To the dismay of all present, the woman, visibly troubled by the judge's words, said no. Evidently, the process described by the judge was not the process she had imagined when making arrangements with her child's future adoptive parents. The hearing was immediately suspended and court authorities had all withdrawn when the birthmother, attempting to hand her child over to the adoptive parents she had chosen, realized that she had unwittingly rendered her child's transfer unviable. At this point, discovering she had no other alternative, the woman asked to call everyone back and reconvene the session.

There is strong evidence that adopters in Europe and North America have been traditionally resistant to the idea of their children having any affiliations

beyond their own nuclear family. Although most children declared available for adoption have known or knowable families, adoption is commonly presented as a protective measure for helpless, vulnerable "orphans" — youngsters who are "socially naked" (Howell 2006), alone in the world. The widespread discourse in receiving countries that presents birth mothers as those who "abandoned" their children has been repeatedly criticized (Mandell 2010, Marre 2009a, Selman 2004). It serves not only to justify the need of adoption and prevent any kind of communication between donors and receiving families (Yngvesson 2002), but also to blame "abandoning" mothers and the "abandonment wound" for any of the adoptee's eventual behavioral problems (San Román 2013a).

Historians have repeatedly pointed out how the legal "sealing" of files, rendering information on a child's origins a secret of the court, was largely (if not exclusively) the result of pressure from adoptive parents (Marre 2007, Carp 2004 and 1998, Samuels 2001, Solinger 2001, Sanger 1996). Observers suggest that even the international legislation on transnational adoption has been dominated by a historically specific set of values that does not necessarily give proper weight to the concerns of less powerful members involved in the transaction (Yngvesson 2004, 2010, Smolin 2007, Stephens 1995). In dialogue with the literature on child rights, analysts question precisely the "clean break" principle of modern plenary adoption, asking how it is possible to impose a Western concept of exclusive belonging in situations where kinship is generally perceived in broader terms such as "relatedness" (Carsten apud Howell 2006) or "connectivity" (Saul Joseph apud Leinaweaver and Seligmann 2009). It is in this spirit that Schachter [Modell] proposes a reformulation of the very notion of "belonging" – recommending " not the one-dimensional attachment based on a nuclear family model but the solidarity promised by diverse nodes of affiliation" (Schachter [Modell] 2009, p. 66, see also Cadoret 2013, Ouellette 1996).

Nonetheless, anthropologists caution against arguments that plant a divide between the "West" and the "rest". Present-day research demonstrates that different perspectives do indeed exist on what is appropriate –i.e., "in the child's best interest"– in the field of adoption[7]. However, these differences surface not only between nations, but also within nations, on the border between different socio-economic classes, between government authorities and common-place citizens, and between the different agents in the adoption triad (Briggs 2012). Overlapping spheres of interest and authority impede the idea of given oppositions. In many situations, legal adoption is an "alternative to and not a replacement for customary practice" (Shachter [Modell] 2009, p. 63). As we saw above, it is not uncommon that, following an informal adoption or fosterage arrangement, carried out according to customary practice, the adoptive parents resort to court authorities to guarantee the permanence of their parental authority (Schachter [Modell] 2009, Van Vleet 2009). It is thus not surprising that

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anthropologists are widening their lens of analysis to include institutional practices that might be in accord with flexible understandings (both old and new) forms of kinship: simple adoption, open adoption, and different forms of fosterage (Fine 2009, Leifsen 2006, Kosack 2004, Collard 1999, Hoelgaard 1998, Yngvesson 1997, Cadoret 1995).

"Completing families" in the receiving countries

Adoption has classically been associated with two sorts of motivation: the desire to help "children in need" find a family and the desire of potential parents to found or "complete" their families. Yet, research suggests that in the great majority of cases, adoptive parents are motivated less by humanitarian motives than by the desire to allow childless people to experience parenthood.

The need to go overseas in order to find an adoptable child depends, to a large extent, on the supply of local adoptable children. In the United States, for example, over half of all adoptions are domestic adoptions, many of which concern children who have been through the child welfare system. In this case, observers (Graff 2008) suggest that adopters might prefer to go abroad not only in the hopes of finding a "blue-ribbon baby" (Gailey 2010, 1999) –the healthy, white newborns in short supply in the public child welfare system–, but also because the child's distant origin serves to decrease worries about the "return" of a birth mother who would compete for her child's affections.

In Europe's Nordic countries where a combination of welfare measures and policies allow for long-term fosterage, there are often very few locally-born children available for adoption (see Howell 2006 on Norway, for example). Likewise, in Spain, the EU country that, during most of the first decade of this century, had the highest rate of transnational adoption, there were many children in foster care (some 35,000 in 2012), and extremely few domestic adoptions.

Fertility patterns are also relevant to this issue. In Nordic countries, where the tremendous emphasis on being a parent for fulfilling one's individual and social destiny has given rise to high birth rates (Howell 2006), adoption appears early on as an option for involuntary infertility. In countries of Southern Europe, where birth rates have dropped dramatically during the past decades, transnational adoption often concerns women (and couples) who, out of choice, have delayed pregnancy until an age when it is difficult to conceive a child (Marre 2012 and 2010b, Di Silvio 2008).

Although Spain may represent an extreme case[8], the trajectory of reproductive behavior in this country mirrors general trends in Europe and the Americas (Marre 2012, 2011, 2010a, 2009a). Starting in the 70s –with the legalization of contraception, followed by the Divorce Act (1981), the acceptance

[8] Between 2004 and 2008 Spain was a world leader, second only to the USA, in children adopted from abroad (Selman 2009) and second only to France in ART's treatment in Europe (Marre 2009a).

of voluntary surgical sterilization (1983), abortion (1985, further liberalized in 2010), and the "day-after" pill (1999)–, Spanish women have gradually acquired greater control over the decision of when and how many times to become pregnant. An analysis of the plunge in the nation's birth rate should also take into stock the scarcity of public child care facilities and the unfavourable position women occupy in the labour market (in which motherhood still represents a major career hamper). Women, forced to choose between maternity and better professional opportunities, may put off starting a family, discovering when they are well into their thirties that it is not so easy to conceive a child.

Against this background, Marre (2010a, 2009a) suggests that transnational adoption functions as a sort of "outsourcing" of reproductive work. Not only are women able to put off maternity until a convenient moment, they may also hope to start off with a toddler who no longer requires the intensive, full-time (and expensive) care of a new-born. Although many prefer medically-assisted maternity in order to have a "child of their own", some express a preference for adoption because "adoption is cheaper and has safer results" as an adoptive mother said to Marre; others explain this preference in terms of bodily travail. Thus, through what scholars have labeled "stratified reproduction" (Colen 1995), Spanish parents are able to maintain their reproductive life-styles at the expense of other parents whose parental roles have been for some reason abrogated or terminated.

Finally, whether or not to adopt a child from overseas is a decision that involves a number of market-like considerations. In the U.S., for example, where adoption agencies play a major role in the mediation of the child transfer, transnational adoption is, for many would-be adopters, prohibitively expensive (Gailey 2010, 1999). In European countries, where a good part of the procedure is carried out by state services, the costs, although onerous, are normally within reach of a wider gamut of socioeconomic classes. Nevertheless, children with particularly desirable characteristics or from certain countries are often beyond the purchase power of potential adopters who are obliged to abdicate original preferences in favor of older, darker-skinned children (Marre 2010a).

Research suggests that adoptive parents are well aware of the quandaries of racial diversity introduced through international adoption into their families. Yngvesson (2010, p. 108), citing a Swedish adoption worker, describes the anxiety of potential adopters: "[What] if our family gets a child who isn't like us and who doesn't become like us —a child who doesn't just look different but in fact is different and will always be so?" Furthermore, adoptive parents must now face the implications of a growing number of immigrant youth who have the same national origins as their adopted child.

Nonetheless, many adoptive families are individually and collectively finding new strategies for re-imagining their families. Howell (2006, 2001), for example, describes how Norwegian adoptive parents (no doubt much like adoptive families in other parts of the Western world) transform the adoptee into a child "of their own". In a sort of transubstantiation of the child, the different moments of the adoption process are likened to the experiences of pre-

pregnancy, pregnancy and birth. Through a series of secular rituals involving dress, activities in the great outdoors, and other typically Norwegian pastimes, these parents also inscribe their child into a family and national lineage. De Graeve (2013), in his study on Flemish society, has suggested that parents "metabolize differences", drawing on prevalent conceptualizations of culture and belonging: belonging is thought to be only possible through cultural assimilation into the adoptive nation and the rejection of the so-called culture of birth. Citing an adoptive father in Barcelona, Marre describes similar examples in Spain to illustrate how "culture stands in for race": "[the race of our adopted children] doesn't matter because they'll end up being Catalan" (Marre 2009b, p. 237).

Adoptive parents have, on the other hand, a number of ways of honoring the child's pre-adoptive history that include practices such as collective donations to a particular orphanage in the sending country, the planning of roots trips, and the organization of "culture days" that allow adopted children of similar origin to celebrate together certain of their birth country's customs (Volkman 2009, 2005). These "culture keeping" practices (Jacobson 2008) would allow adopted children to retain a sense of native group identity. Quiroz (2012)   refers to a sort of "cultural tourism") –in which the selective appropriation and consumption of cultural traits serves as a source of identity for adopted children, whereas De Graeve (2013, 2012) emphasizes the "culture work" through which adoptive parents deploy strategies to forge the political citizenry of their offspring.

Likewise, Gay and Blasco comment how, according to some listservers of American Adoptive Parents from China, their adopted children had been "made" by their Chinese birth parents (to whom they continued to be related) but they were also made by the love of their American mothers and fathers and – ultimately-- by God, the greatest father of all, who had predetermined their transnational destinies (Gay and Blasco 2012).

In a more critical vein, Anagnost (2000) suggests that these "cultural bites" promoted by adoptive families are a strategy to use abstract culture as a substitute of specific/real people and genetic connections. Even photos and souvenirs from the child's pre-adoptive history may be interpreted as a sort of "deactivated and objectivized archive" designed to keep the past at a safe distance (Ouellette and Belleau 2001, p. 27). Volkman counters that, in many instances (and especially in the case of children from China), it is nearly impossible to discover details on the child's birth family. The adoptive parents' move toward "the palpable and the particular" of "roots trips" that target specific places (orphanages), objects (cribs), and people (former foster parents) is a way of activating these pre-adoptive connections, in a sort of "displaced longing for the unknowable narratives of the child's past and the imagined figure of the birth mother" (2005, p. 11).

A growing class of professionals: the "psycho-technocrats"

Researchers have documented how, at the beginning of the twentieth century, a rising class of social workers in Europe and North American gained

importance as mediators in the adoption process (Zelizer 1985). Once in place, this professional apparatus –seen as a way of professionalizing services and fending off abuses of the much-feared "baby market"– made it possible to put a distance between child donors and adoptive parents. The situation of transnational adoption in "sending countries" followed a slightly different chronology. Up until the 1980s, child adoption was largely in the hands of the social elite, religious clergy and medical personnel working in maternity clinics for what were ostensibly altruistic motives (Villalta 2012a and 2005, Abreu 2009, Fonseca 2009a, Khabibullina 2009, Leifsen 2004). With the upsurge of *foreign* adopters –people who were willing and able to pay well for the privilege of receiving a child–, lawyers and other professional agents moved into the picture, raising the suspicion that mediators might be motivated by less noble aims (e.g., personal profit). It is only then that government authorities hastened to tighten control over adoption procedures, not only through more rigorous national and international legislation, but also through the mobilization of a growing class of professionals –in particular, social workers and psychologists (Yngvesson 2010, Leinaweaver 2008, Howell 2006, Leifsen 2004).

Scholars have consistently called attention to how this professional apparatus serves as a "technology of government" (Poveda, Jociles y Rivas 2013; Cadoret 2012; Gómez Bengoechea 2012; Villalta 2012b; Fonseca 2010; Jociles and Charro 2008) able to perform the difficult task of "de-kinning" (Fonseca 2011) birth mothers and, by extension, to produce "abandoned children" legally available for adoption. Ouellette (1996) suggests that these services "sanitize" the adoption process, making it possible for adoptive parents to imagine the procedure in terms of a gift, not between one set of parents and another, but between each party and the adoption service itself[9]. Yet, what Howell (2006) terms "psycho-technocrats" are not particularly popular even among adopting parents who tend to see them as bureaucratic "gate-keepers" who operate according to arbitrary standards, backed by outmoded or decontextualized psychological theories.

In some countries, the screening of potential adopters is more lenient when it concerns an adoptive child from overseas. Ouellette (2009) describes how, in Quebec, the strict surveillance of domestic adoptions by welfare services operated in contrast to a much more flexible system for transnational adoption, conducted nearly entirely by private agencies (Ouellette 2009). Marre (2010a) relates how, in Spain, professionals also tend to facilitate transnational adoption, assuming that the child from overseas will inevitably have a better life in Spain than in its original country.

The children themselves are normally submitted to rigorous examination by authorities in the sending country (where they are cast as "pre-migrants"

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9 In a similar vein, Perreau (2012) points out that, although the search for origins serves as a framework for explaining the differences between the adopted child and the adoptive family, this search will not alter the child's official filiation. It is the State that is ultimately at the origin of the family.

whose body and psyche undergo "a specific kind of mapping to prepare them for their journey to new families and new lands" -- Leinaweaver 2009a, p. 193) as well as immigration services in the receiving country (Marre 2010b). These diverse administrative instances are also responsible for stocking, often in fragmentary form, traces of the child's pre-adoption biography that may become relevant in later life (Ouellette 2008, Yngvesson 2006).

Another bureaucratic procedure of particular interest involves the biomedical discourses often used in legal briefs that justify removing a child from its birth family or local caretakers (Mandell 2010, Cardarello 2009, Leinaweaver 2009a). Descriptions of "malnutrition" (in the case of a child) or "mental illness" (in the case of her/his parents) provide the apparently objective standards by which families are judged unfit. Leinaweaver (2009a) suggests that, in some cases, this sort of professional intervention might be seen as dressing "in sheep's clothing the predatory wolves of racism and class inequality" (Leinaweaver 2009a, p. 197).

Class and racial prejudices that permeate the child welfare system, often associated with the U.S. and other receiving countries (see Briggs 2012, Roberts 2002, Solinger 2001), appear to figure prominently in sending countries as well. Cardarello (2009), for example, shows how, in a sort of "legal trafficking", a particular courthouse adoption service in Brazil was able to remove children from their lower-income, largely black and gypsy families, making them available for adoption in European homes. Justifications centered on the precarious living conditions in the children's original households were topped off by the highly speculative prediction: had these youngsters not been sent to Europe, they would surely have grown up to be criminals or prostitutes.

It would be misleading, however, to suggest that professionals in most sending countries are unaware of potential abuse against the poor. Researchers describe the intelligence and creativity of professionals in sending countries obliged to parry pressures from international adopters, and at the same time develop a comprehensive childcare system that respects the rights of all concerned (Yngvesson 2010 on India, Fonseca 2009b on Brazil, Leinaweaver 2009b on Peru, Leifsen 2006 on Ecuador).

At the end of the twentieth century, countries such as Brazil and India developed complex structures of child welfare that resisted simplistic appeals that present adoption as an altruistic cure for poverty. Years of protest and discussion contributed to the development of valid alternatives to transnational adoption, involving financial support and counseling for families in difficulty, short and long-term foster care, policies of "family reunification" for institutionalized children, and the promotion of domestic adoption (see Yngvesson 2010 on India, Fonseca 2009b on Brazil). Countries, such as Haiti and Vietnam, developed strategies to promote "open adoptions", including some form of contact and/or exchange of information between birth and adoptive families.

Sending countries – Transnational adoption and nationhood

Upon approaching the question of transnational adoption, researchers come up against questions not only of how local practices interact with international law, but also of nationhood itself: how issues of children contribute to notions of hierarchy and difference among nations (Yngvesson 2010). Authors describe the nationalist slogans in many sending countries that accompanied the demise of transnational adoption (Yngvesson 2010, Abreu 2009, Khabibullina 2009): children adopted by foreigners would be reframed as valuable ressources lost forever to the nation. On the other hand, families in Europe and North America might take pride in taking in ethnically-marked children (black and Asiatic), sign of their faith in humanistic universal ideals.

Hübinette (2006), provides a fascinating case study of South Korea -- the world's leading supplier of internationally-adopted children. Despite early reactions to transnational adoption, Korea has sent a steady supply of children to Europe and North America, totaling by the last century's end over 150,000. The flow may have begun, as adoption history tirelessly repeats, with the Holts' post-Korean-War rescue mission of the rejected mixed-blood children of American GIs. However, by the early 70s, virtually all internationally-adopted children leaving the country were full Koreans, the children of young factory workers, ill-paid and with no hope of welfare support. Again, during the 1980s, there was a change in the profile of "abandoning" mothers that now included more and more unmarried girls of middle-class background, forced by conservative morality to hide the shame of an out-of-wedlock or disabled child. In Hübinette's description, transnational adoption emerges as a "biopolitical technology of power", a eugenic strategy of social engineering, designed to "cleanse the country of 'impure' and 'disposable' outcasts" (2006, p. 62).

Hübinette evokes different expressions of Korean popular culture (soap operas, cinema and other media representations) to consider how Korean nationals have experienced decades of a "one-way, uneven and unequal [out]flow" of internationally adopted children. In contrast to the up-beat success stories of Korean adoptees who have made their fortune in the U.S. or Europe, the material analyzed by Hubinette reveals scenes of tragedy, shame, and anxiety-ridden ambivalence. According to the author, such images can only be understood in the light of Korea's past century of colonialist exploitation, genocide, emigration of cheap labor, and arbitrary political separation (due to the line drawn between North and South Korea) – all of which have rendered the "separated family" a shared cultural experience. Hence, story lines appear to condense the fate of all ethnic Koreans through the imagining of an "exiled orphan having 'lost everything', 'name, country, and language' and 'searching for roots' and asking 'are you Korean'?" (Hübinette 2006, p. 164).

A melancholic longing for reunification is evident not only in the fictional plots, but also in the Korean DNA databases that have been set up in order to

trace family connections. As with other postcolonial situations, conciliation is not within easy reach. And, as with other episodes in modern Korean history that for many years were cleansed from the nation's hegemonic narrative –the "comfort women" sent to accompany the Japanese troops during WWII, for example, or the Korean girls sent abroad as mail-order brides (equal in number to international adoptees)–, transnational adoption remains a "national trauma" threatening to disrupt the nation's prosperous self-image.

Another major concern of anthropologists focused on adoption in "sending countries" revolves around the question: how does the possibility of transnational adoption affect the priorities in national child welfare policies? Looking into this sort of influence in China, Kay Johnson (2004) shows there is much more than "culture" at work in the production and administration of abandoned children. Countering popular stereotypes in Europe and North American, her study of nearly 800 Chinese adoptive families[10] shows clearly how many people are happy to take in "foundlings" of either sex (whether "real" or "social" orphans). There may even be a slight preference for adopted girls, as they do not bear the responsibility of carrying on the lineage.

Legal domestic adoption, however, has been consistently impeded by government restrictions. With the one-child policy that took effect in 1979, birth-planning committees cracked down on all "chaobao", i.e. "over-quota" children. In most regions, the arrival of any child after the first made the parents liable to prohibitive fines, reduction in paycheck income, and even mandatory sterilization. Adoption tended to be limited to older, childless couples who were presumably infertile. The parents of an adoptive "chaobao" who were unable or unwilling to pay the official cost could be threatened with the seizure of their child by government authorities. It is no wonder that, in these conditions, many adoptive parents simply put off registering their children, making legal adoption out of the question. These children with no official documentation took on the stigmatized existence of "black children" typical of migrant families –those lacking the documents needed to enroll in local schools and accede to other public benefits.

Throughout her rich ethnographic descriptions, Johnson underlines what she sees as the questionable impact of transnational adoption not only on Chinese adoptive families, but also on the welfare policies of vulnerable children (Johnson 2004). A 1999 law on domestic adoptions, although easing up on some restrictions (the minimum age of candidates to adoptive parenthood was lowered to 30, couples with children could apply to adopt a second or third child), limited the pool of adoptable children to "those living in state welfare institutions". Thus, the great majority of Chinese adoptive parents whose children had not gone through the institutional system continued to be barred from any hope of legalizing their parental status.. A 2001 law, celebrated in Europe and North America as the "opening" of transnational adoption in China, did nothing to make domestic adoption easier.

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[10]Johnson's study includes Chinese families that have taken in children through informal as well as legal adoption.

To and from the adoptees

Until the late 1990s, much had been written about internationally adopted children, for example, debating their possible identity issues, but the bulk of this literature was authored by or geared to adoptive parents. Volkman describes the exasperation of adoptees faced with this flood of reflections. They ask: why can't adoptive parents stop "talking and writing about their own issues, or what they imagine their children feel, and just […] listen" (2005, p. 8). Adoptive parents who were too enthusiastic about language lessons, culture days, seeking out information on the child's origin or even contact with blood relatives began to suspect they might be jumping the gun, foisting a "predetermined culture" onto their children (Volkman 2005, Howell 2004).

In recent years, more and more researchers have centered their attention on the "voice" of adoptees, particularly related to issues of identity and belonging in transracial adoptions (San Román 2013b in Spain, Yngvesson 2010 in Sweden, Williams-Willing 2009 and 2004 in Australia, Trenka, Oparah and Shin 2006 in the USA, Hübinette 2004 in Sweden). Yngvesson (2010), in her research on transnational adoptees in Sweden, brings particularly vivid testimonials of young adults seeking to come to terms with the "contingencies of birth and the arbitrariness of choice" that surround their own stories. The surprise people show upon meeting a Swede that is far from the blond and blue-eyed national stereotype constantly incites adoptees to reflection, creating a "complex story of movement between (temporary) locations of desire that is shaped by hegemonies of race, blood, and nation" (2010, p. 163). As foreign-born adoptees grow into young adulthood, they are increasingly torn between, on the one hand, their identification with immigrant colleagues at school, and, on the other hand, their need to live expectations of being 100% normal –i.e., just as if they'd been born into their adoptive family and nation[11].

Scholars comment how, in a number of contexts, the adoptee's mixed feelings are heightened by national policies that greet foreign-born adoptees with open arms, while hindering the arrival of immigrants from India, Guatemala, Ethiopia… the very same regions that produced the adoptees. They struggle with contradictory national discourses that reject racism based on skin colour while naturalizing racism on cultural grounds. All the while, they are encouraged to feel "proud" of their "cultural origins" (De Graeve 2013). The young adoptee may become racist and exclusionary, seeking to exclude the "other"; or, he or she, experiencing a growing sympathy, might try to draw near the migrants (San

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[11] Although it has been three decades since, referring to intercountry adoption, Weil (1984) coined the expression "the quiet migration", only recently have anthropologists begun to analyze adoption in relation to migration (Leinaweaver 2013, Marre 2009b, San Román 2013b, Yngvesson 2010).

Román 2013b). In apparently non-racist and welcoming countries such as Sweden, the adoptee's predicament may be compounded as he or she tries desperately to merit the generosity afforded not only by the adopted family but also by the apparently non-racist adopted nation.

Even more challenging issues arise as adoptees, embarking on "roots trips", return to their birth countries. What Yngvesson calls the "hard game" of difference begins when the adoptee finds his or her birth relatives and is forced to mediate between "two humanities which seem incommensurable, namely the humanity of destitution and that of 'consumption', the humanity of underdevelopment and that of overdevelopment" (Balibar apud Yngvesson 2010, p. 150). The heart-wrenching stories of return and encounter, and their accompanying dilemmas interrupt "fantasies of closure", embellishing nothing of the predicaments that must be faced by all concerned.

Finally, many researchers are adoptees who have grown to adulthood and become competent analysts of the processes that surround trajectories such as theirs. Korean-born scholars such as Kim (2005), Hübinette (2004) and Borshay (2000), Vietnam-born scholars such as Williams-Willing (2009, 2004) and others have produced a new wave of issues for debate related to transnationality and transraciality. Some have described transnational adoption as a form of diaspora (Williams-Willing 2009, 2004, 2001; Hoshmand et al. 2006; Hübinette 2006, 2004; Lee 2006; Miller-Loessi and Killic 2001). Others argue that applying the notion of diaspora is not accurate and of no great use (Kim 2010, Howell 2009b).

Giving rise to a "multi-generational and trans-individual autobiography" in which the collective subject becomes the focus (Xing apud Kim 2005, p. 60), adoptees of all origins have contributed to an agenda of innovative scholarship (see Trenka, Oparah and Shin 2006). Personal testimonies, well integrated into academic (and, particularly, post-colonialist) discussions, produce probing criticisms of the efforts of adoptive parents to assign any sort of cultural identity to their offspring. Emphasizing their experience of constantly being "in-between", they question the idea of a clean break with the past that was supposed to provide them not only with an entirely new family and nation but also with an entirely new identity. They are equally critical of efforts, such as those of the Korean government, which, in recent years, has attempted to use adoptees to consolidate an international diaspora. Kim, commenting on a 1999 gathering promoted in Washington D.C. by the Korean government to reintegrate Korean-born children into their "homeland culture", describes an ironic "disidentification between rhetoric of the South Korean state and the lived experience of adoptees who feel disconnected, culturally foreign and ontologically displaced in South Korea" (2005, p. 64).

It is important to note that much of this scholarship advances in tandem with the promotion of a proliferating set of associations such as VAN (Vietnamese Adoptee Network), KAD (Korean adoptees), and TRACK (Truth and Reconciliation for the adoption community of Korea) whose appeal is reinforced through the technology of internet. Adoptees born in the Far East appear to be in the lead –an understandable fact considering that Korea, for example, was

among the first countries to export a large number of adopted children. However, one may predict that as more children from subsequent sending countries come of age, the overseas adoptees' associations will cover an ever wider range of geographical origins.

Special-needs adoptions

Cartwright (2005), addressing the impact of mass communications on prospective adopters in receiving countries, underlines a major shift after the fall of Ceaucescu's regime and the rush on Romanian social orphans. Until that time, the field of transnational adoption had been dominated by the "politics of pity". Television spectators, moved by "suffering at a distance", would donate money and moral support to humanitarian causes designed to reach anonymous recipients on the other side of the world. The collapse of the nation-state's hold over social life in Romania created a sort of "borderlessness" allowing viewers to actually go after a specific child they had seen on film. This "death of distance" brought new risks as the broadcasts changed tone and began airing the fear and indignation of adoptive parents. After having "rescued" an "orphaned" child and confronting unforeseen complications, they claimed they had been misled by various mediators (journalists, adoption agencies, etc.) into accepting seriously disturbed children. Shrouded in a tone of perplexity, news stories began to build compassion for parents who had thus returned their adoptive child to an orphanage in a sending country.

As Cartwright points out, this public airing of "antihumanist" attitudes – amounting to the rejection of rescue narratives– would have been "unthinkable, unrepresentable" a few years earlier. The implications for transnational politics were mixed. In opposition to the newly-voiced "antihumanism", there emerged a "politics of consternation" among certain adoptive parents who, accepting the challenge of special needs children, forged transnational alliances across parent networks to promote practices specially oriented toward children with post-institutional trauma.

The children from Romania may be seen as symptomatic of a new generation in transnational adoption. In the past few years, the supply of young, "healthy" children available for transnational adoption has decreased – making the waiting period for prospective adoptive families longer and longer. Authorities in most sending countries are now scrupulously following the tenets of international legislation – favoring family reintegration first, domestic adoptions second, and reserving transnational adoption for those children who have not found a home within the nation's borders. When there is no war, and government machinery seems to be operating normally, children "available" for adoption are in general those who are not wanted by local adopters. They may have health problems or bear the appearance of stigmatized ethnic minorities. They are

frequently beyond toddler age, and carry with them memories. In the past few years, there has been a dramatic increase in these "special needs" adoptions[12].

Stryker (2010) concentrates her research on the most problematic of these cases: North American adoptive families undergoing radical therapy in a last-ditch effort to create family bonds with their adopted children, mostly of Eastern European origin. Stryker describes how these adoptive families visualize the child's past in terms of material and emotional lacks that must be compensated[13]. And, should the child's integration into the new family and society prove rocky, parental love (materialized in the form of toys, leisure activities, a trip to Disneyland, and other consumer products) is "constructed as a curative agent, or a fail-safe measure that will ultimately serve as the saving grace…". The idea of an adoptee being "born anew" in his or her adoptive home explains why parents have a hard time coping with the child's attachment to old clothes, pictures, broken toys and certain rituals that seem to bring a comforting reminder of their pre-adoption state.

Adoptees interviewed by Stryker have their own version of this process. Some of them, even after years in America, report ambivalence about their family status. Especially in their first days in the adoptive family, they make ritual attempts to combine previous family or institutional experience with their present circumstances. They insist on sleeping or eating on the floor, they are indifferent to presents; they yearn for contact with friends and caretakers from their pre-adoption situation. Many voice the feeling that "Being in a family is hard. It's hard to know how [I try hard] to be in the family. But [it's] not the one I had" (Stryker 2010, p. 17).

These feelings appear relevant in the narratives even of successful adoptees. Swedish scholar, Tobias Hübinette (himself, an adoptee from Korea), suggests that families and adoption services, in their effort to reject class and racial prejudice, deny the distinctive quality of the child's biography. In so doing, they isolate the adopted person, left to work out problems on an individual basis:

> "deviant problems …[when] identified are frequently pathologised and medicalised and attributed to a combination of pre-adoption and genetic factors, as if nothing imaginable can be perceived to go wrong as soon

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[12] While in 2005 only 14% of adoptions from China (one of the most foremost sending countries at the time) into the USA were labeled as "special needs", in 2009 this percentage had risen to 49% (Selman 2012).

[13] De Graeve (2013) contends that adoptees may be perceived as more problematic than their immigrant colleagues since, lacking "blood ties" as well as being disconnected from their "culture of birth", they are believed to be particularly vulnerable to psychological disturbances that require therapeutic intervention (see also Marre and San Román forthcoming).

as the adoptees are benefiting from the wealth and civilization of the West" (2006, p. 6).

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      The studies of Hübinette (2006), Yngvesson (2010) , Stryker (2011) and other scholars converge toward a similar conclusion: the need to give recognition to the varied details of the adoptee's trajectory. This agenda includes recognition of the social and political conditions that gave rise to his adoption, recognition of the existence of pre-adoptive "significant others", recognition that there are plenty of class and racial prejudices that haunt the adoptee even in his new, well-off circumstances –summing up, recognition that the adoptee´s integration into a radically different sort of family and society may not be all that simple. Anthropologists have long criticized the "as-if" model of the adoptive family –the effort to reproduce what is perceived as biological normality, just "as if" the adopted child had been born into the family (Modell 2002). This questioning goes even deeper in the case of special needs children. One might suggest that what these children need is less to feel "100% normal", and more to have their differences seen –differences that are located not in biological disorder, nor simply in individual psychology, but in the sphere of social, cultural and political trajectories. Their message is essentially that to ignore the biographical details of a child's past is to invite problems, not solve them. Entering into a relationship of mutual recognition provokes transformations on all sides. It is in the coming to terms with the dire conditions that caused the child to circulate that families and societies seeking to "save" these young people might begin to adequately deal with the inequality, racism, and other sorts of violence prevalent in the post-colonialist situations that give rise to contemporary transnational adoption.

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