The Cultural and Political Economies of Adoption Practices in Andean Peru and the United States

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Resumen

El artículo examina desde una perspectiva comparativa las prácticas de adopción transnacionales y transraciales en la sierra sur andina del Perú y los EE.UU. De esta forma, se analizan las diversas actividades y estrategias que los padres adoptivos desarrollan para construir un sentido compartido de lo local y lograr cruzar fronteras culturales, las que tienen un gran impacto en la formación de la identidad de sus hijos. En los casos de adopciones transraciales que suceden en el mismo espacio físico, los padres adoptivos no pueden fácilmente pasar por alto el racismo y las desigualdades sociales institucionalizadas. En efecto, estos aspectos llegan incluso a adquirir mayor relevancia que la cuestión misma de la adopción. En cambio, en los casos de adopciones transnacionales, la creación de prácticas innovadoras que permitan cruzar fronteras físicas y socioeconómicas, y establecer un sentido de lo local, se vuelve fundamental para los miembros del grupo familiar. La distancia física facilita la generación de imaginarios fuertemente influenciados por ideas y prácticas relacionadas con la herencia cultural y el multiculturalismo. En algunos casos, el mismo hecho de cruzar fronteras permite desafiar las estructuras de poder, las ideologías, y los modelos normativos de parentesco establecidos.

This article comparatively examines transnational and transracial adoption practices in the Peruvian Andes and the United States. Adoptive parents engage in particular place-making and border-crossing activities that significantly affect the identity formation of their children. When proximity, that is the materiality of place, intervenes spatially in transracial adoption processes, adoptive parents cannot easily overlook issues of social inequality and racism. In fact, they take precedence over the question of adoption itself.

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For family members involved in transnational adoptions, adoption is central to novel modes of place-making and border crossings. Distance creates the possibility for imaginaries to flourish, filtered through the medium of cultural heritage and multiculturalism. In some instances, the very process of crossing borders may challenge existing power structures, ideologies, and normative models of kinship.
PALABRAS CLAVES: adopción, transnacionalismo, parentesco, raza, geografía social.
KEYWORDS: adoption, transnationalism, kinship, race, social geography.

THE CIRCULATION OF CHILDREN, specifically through adoption, is significantly affected by the dynamic interactions of kinship practices, ideologies and ties, on the one hand, and the workings of national and transnational political and cultural economies, on the other. This article comparatively examines the place-making and border-crossing activities adoptive parents pursue that, in turn, contribute to the identity formation of their children. I begin with an adoption that took place in the Andean highlands of southern Peru, and that I have followed over a 25-year-period from 1985 to the present. It resembles many others that have unfolded during my years of field work in rural settings in the southern Peruvian highlands. I contrast it with those arising in my current research on transnational and transracial adoptions in the United States (Seligmann 2005, 2006). Situating transnational adoptions, some of which are transracial, within the same frame as those that take place transracially within the United States and those taking place in the Andean highlands of Peru highlights how parents make sense of and negotiate particular "borders" and the differences in the ways they engage in place-making. In addition, my husband and I adopted our daughter from China. Thus, I have participated in and reflected on some of the border crossings and aspects of place-making that are part of adoption processes. The theoretical concepts of place-making and border-crossing may also be heuristic for analyzing other kinds of adoptions.

In comparing the practices of adoptive parents in the Andes, and those of parents in the United States, there are striking differences in the impact of translocal flows on how place-making and border crossings transpire. At the risk of painting with too broad a brush stroke, my principal argument here is that when proximity, that is, the materiality of place, anchors adoption processes, issues of inequality and racism cannot be easily overlooked. To give an example, parents participating in transracial adoptions within the United States found that issues of race, as well as class, in the United States proved to be far more significant in their everyday lives than the fact of forming a family through adoption. This is true, as well, in the Andean case I describe below, although the reasons for why and how race and class matter more than adoption itself depends on the specificity of racialization in

Andean society and the contexts in which children circulate. By contrast, in my research with parents involved in transnational adoptions, including transracial ones, translocality had a different character. In those cases, the fact of adoption was more central than racial or class difference to novel modes of place-making and identity formation. My conclusion from this contrast is that distance creates the possibility for imaginaries to come to the fore, even when those imaginaries, which exclude as much as they include, then become the impetus for new kinds of marketing devices, celebratory days, or community building.

It is not that racial differences did not matter in transnational adoption—to the contrary. In both transnational and in-country adoptions, particularly those that are transracial, adoptive parents encounter racial and class borders, but how they interpret, confront, and incorporate them into place-making differ in the two cases. Institutionalized racism and class inequalities, experienced on a regular, if not daily, basis, allow for far less distancing and imagining. There is more likelihood that adoptions in-country that openly cross locally recognized or salient race and class lines (even within a single neighborhood or community) may lead to minor and major upheavals of daily habitus in a tangible fashion, as we see in the Andean case I describe below.

In many transnational adoptions, behind physical distance lies silence, the unknown, and, often, the unknowable. My research findings show patterns in how parents use place-making practices to confront physical distance and that which is unknown about their child's origins. The uneven political and economic topography of transnational transactions is replaced by ideologies of multiculturalism, passing, and cultural celebration, activities that transform race into ethnicity, and often erase the very factors that permitted adoptions to occur in the first place. Social, political, and economic capital, as convertible resources (Bourdieu 1984), cannot be hidden or masked so easily in intimate transactions in-country that occur openly. Thus, spatial proximity and distance become powerful structuring variables in how relationships are forged or imagined that then contribute to the meaning of "family," belonging, and the identity of adoptees themselves.[1]

Adoption and Place-Making

The ease of traversing physical distances and traveling to and from multiple locations has led anthropologists to focus increasingly on "place" and its meanings. In the introduction to their text, *A Place in the World?*, Doreen Massey and Pat Jess (1995:1) note:

> … If a common notion of place, and perhaps especially of small-scale places, is often bound up with settledness, coherence and continuity, then any current talk of

> *dis*placement, most particularly through migration, depends likewise on a prior notion of cultures as embedded in place. Yet in today's world, this is either less and less true or … it must be thought about in a different way. The simple relation between local place and local culture is not one which can be assumed. Perhaps the notion of local *culture*, too, must be rethought.

In rethinking the notion of local culture through adoption practices and the circulation of children, it becomes evident that while the local is, indeed, partially defined by everyday activities in a particular space and time, it is also saturated by all sorts of associations, symbols, material artifacts, and active engagement with ideas about and connections to very distant places and how they are construed. Further, these kinds of place-making activities are almost always embedded in political and economic processes that at once facilitate connections between people and reinscribe or exacerbate differences in power between them (see Gupta and Ferguson 1997; Green et al. 2005). As Akhil Gupta (1997:197) observes, sentiments, memories and ties come to constitute history, produce location and create rootedness to a "homeland." Yet, they may also simultaneously "redivide, reterritorialize and reinscribe space in the global political economy" and create differentiation between "us" and "them."

Adoptions and Border Crossings

Lynn Stephen (2007) suggests that the concept of transnationalism does not fully capture multilocal processes of identity formation or the impact of political and economic forces and structures at work for people who, literally and figuratively, live in multiple sites and find themselves enmeshed in contradictory demands, pressures, and sentiments. She proposes that the concept of transborder crossings more aptly describes the lives of migrants who move back and forth and form lives in multiple sites, traversing, sometimes on a regular basis, borders that may be racial, economic, and geographic, in nature. Although the case may not be quite as extreme, place-making, as it entails multiple sites and border crossings, plays a significant role in identity formation and in the kinning process itself among transnational and transracial adoptive families (see Howell 2006 for an excellent discussion of multiple dimensions of "kinning" processes).

Stephen's conceptualization of transborder crossings resonates with Arjun Appadurai's introduction of the idea of translocality. Both place-making practices and border crossings are central to participants in adoption processes. Sometimes these activities are translocal, involving travel, communication, social interactions, and activities that take participants far outside of their familiar coordinates and which may lead them, gradually, to create new kinds of coordinates. Arjun

Appadurai (1995:216) suggests that to understand the workings of communities as translocalities we need to uncover and track "the network of absent members and flows of information and value in which they are embedded." By looking at the specificity of activities and relationships in which adoptive parents engage to create a sense of place for their children and on which they draw to cross borders (or not), we are able to grasp better what kinds of translocal currents structure their communities.

Andean Adoption Practices: The Circulation of Children and Kinship Fissures

At the outset, let me clarify that my use of the label "Andean" or "Quechua" is a somewhat clumsy device to specify that the field work I am drawing on took place among Quechua-speaking villagers in the southern Andean highlands of Peru. I do not intend the labels to mask the heterogeneity—the class stratification, the frequent bilingualism, the diverse ways people cobble together a livelihood, or the racial tensions—that characterize Andean social life. In fact, they are at the core of explaining the complexity of border crossings in the circulation of children in the Andes.

When I was doing field research in the southern Andean highlands of Peru in the district of Huanoquite (province of Paruro, department of Cusco), I became an intimate witness to an adoption process in 1985. Donato[2] and Anselma owned fields at various altitudes, they had migrated for a time to Cusco and Lima, where Donato had learned to be a skilled builder, and they had assumed the burden of sponsoring important agricultural and religious festivals. Petronila was their only child. She was accomplished and bright. The schoolteachers had crowned her "Spring Queen" and Donato and Anselma were grooming her for upward mobility, life in the city, perhaps as a teacher. She was not meant to undertake the arduous labor of working and managing the fields. Donato and Anselma were wealthy in land, animals, and knowledge; impoverished in human fertility. Of the six children Anselma had attempted to carry, all had been still-born except Petronila. The last child was born while I was there, his umbilical cord wrapped around his neck. From festival to funeral train, we carried the baby, baptized in death as Mateo, up the mountain, in a tiny white coffin. Donato and Anselma's male relatives dug the little grave and then, dancing on Mateo's grave, Donato finally wept, repeating again and again, "I have no companion now. Anselma has Petronila."

In the days that followed, grief and anger swirled about. Donato was not to be seen. He drank heavily. He spoke little. As emotions ebbed and flowed, Anselma confided in me her secret hope: "Maybe Fortunato and Antonia will give us their baby." Fortunato was Donato's younger brother. He and his wife, Antonia spurned village and city life and lived high in the puna, poor, and self-reliant. Yet they were as

rich in fertility as Donato and Anselma were poor. Ernesto, just born, was their eighth child.

So it came to pass. Donato made a formal request that he be allowed to adopt Ernesto: "I will raise him as my own son, educate him well, and make sure that he is always well-fed." Fortunato responded, "That is fine, my brother. You will take care of him in a way I cannot." The transaction, however, was not without rancor. Ernesto was baptized on Donato's birthday, cause for a double celebration (Fig 1).

For many people, Quechua villagers among them, adoption is not a single event but rather a spectrum of practices in which care-taking is central and in which the arrangement, whether legally binding or not, is considered legitimate (Bargach 2001; Borneman 2001:36; Van Vleet 2002, 2008; Fonseca, this issue). Yet children nurtured through kin care or fictive parents (such as godparents) may be deemed "abandoned" through a legal and social framework that defines parenthood as permanent and fixed and therefore does not regard these practices as socially appropriate.

Rancor did not subside even after the priest reluctantly (because Ernesto had not been formally adopted) performed the baptism. The party to celebrate Ernesto's baptism and Donato's birthday began at Donato's. Yet Fortunato sat in the kitchen, refusing to participate in the festivities. Donato struggled to get Fortunato

Figure 1 *Donato, Anselma, Petronila, and their adopted son, Ernesto, day of baptism, 1985*

to join in the party and upon failing, burst into tears and accused him of lying, and of never having agreed to give up Ernesto. Fortunato, completely sober, stonily stared at Donato with disgust, saying only, "No brother. That is not so." The two brothers came to blows. The Commander of the Civil Guard post approached them. Patting Fortunato on the shoulder, he called him "little child" while brusquely demanding that he refrain from his "uncouth" behavior. Fortunato remained standing, proud, disdainful, and rigidly aloof from the town dwellers, while Donato wept over the multiple losses of his children and the coldness of his brother.

Ernesto turned out to be an extremely sickly baby with tuberculosis, requiring over a year of costly medicines, humiliating medical treatment by doctors who did not want "dirty Indians" in their offices and who thought I had given Ernesto to Anselma because she was so dark and Ernesto so white.[3] When he recovered, Ernesto proved to be a sweet yet fragile boy (Fig. 2). Donato and Fortunato built a house together, a powerful activity that helped to mend their frayed relationship (Mayer 1977). Donato had high hopes for Ernesto, but while Ernesto was strong, he had difficulty learning at school, and his heart was not invested in working the fields. He was desperate to flee and find work in Cusco or Lima, and so he did, without his parents' blessing, failing at job after job, periodically returning home, helping out, and facing the disappointment of his parents. Petronila became a bilingual school teacher in Cusco who worked in different highland village schools,

Figure 2 *Author visiting Ernesto, 1998*

married a policeman, gave birth to a son, Davíd, and then dropped dead of a brain aneurysm at age 30. Davíd, who is Donato and Anselma's grandson, has not taken the place of Ernesto in contributing to the household enterprise. Davíd is still young but he has stayed in Cusco, taking advantage of its educational resources, and Anselma spends much of the week in Cusco helping to run the household there. From the circulation of resources thus far, it is likely that most of Donato's wealth will go to Davíd, because Ernesto has not fulfilled the labor expectations of his adoptive father.

To make sense of the resentment and rage that erupted at the fiesta, it is important to grasp how Ernesto's adoption calls attention to aspects of Andean culture that exist in tension with each other: the meaning of kinship and, specifically, adoption; the pragmatics of kinship practices on the ground; labor regimes; and social hierarchy and inequality. In the Andes, the circulation of children among families is not uncommon. The reasons for it vary from the permanent incorporation of a child into another family to a more temporary arrangement of caretaking, to satisfying labor needs, to patron-clientelism in which a child's labor is provided in exchange for providing the child with access to resources, such as a formal education (Van Vleet 2002, 2008; Leinaweaver 2007). These reasons may fuse practical needs with highly emotional ones: a child may be offered to a particular family as a response to a devastating social or economic circumstance, such as the repeated still-births that Anselma had suffered. While the reasons for the circulation of children thus vary, there are commonalities in what it means to acknowledge that a child has moved from one family into another and that may distinguish a relationship between parent and children from any other kind of relationship.

As Van Vleet (2002, 2008) and Harris (2008) have argued, while blood kin have their own particular characteristics of relatedness, a broader notion of kinship exists that includes, but goes beyond, the genealogical. Emily Walmsley (2008:169), in her research on the circulation of children in Ecuador, perceptively notes that it is important to understand "social and biological relatedness in terms of each other." The incorporation of a child into a family in the Andean highlands is built on the dynamic production of relatedness on a daily basis through adult "feeding" and "nurturing," not only of children within the human sphere but also of deities within the supernatural sphere, and of agricultural and plant life within an agrarian cycle (Weismantel 1995; Van Vleet 2002:64, 2008:694–95). Thus, Donato and Anselma became Ernesto's parents because they provided him with food; they nurtured him; they shared all sorts of things with him on a daily basis; and they were the providers of those qualities and substances. Ernesto becoming their son was not conceptualized as a single event, although there was, indeed, a moment in time when he was formally "turned over" to Donato and Anselma by Fortunato and Antonia. But this

act was neither inevitable nor irreversible. It was a process that had to be generated and reproduced in a continuous fashion. For Donato and Anselma, familial reproduction was inextricably linked to social reproduction. Their concern was not due to "falling into antifamily" or outside of a reproductive procreative model (Bargach 2001:86). Rather, Donato, in particular, wanted to perpetuate his social standing and participation in an agrarian economic regime in their community.

Despite the open and not infrequent circulation of children in the Andean highlands, it is often fraught, precisely because of particular borders that must be crossed, even within the context of intimate kinship ties between siblings. We see above how the tensions between the two brothers due to differences in economic standing, combined with the racialization of Peruvian society, made the whole adoption process rocky.

While Donato and Fortunato had a shared understanding of the mechanics of kinship, they differed in their demeanor, their attitude toward formal education, their proximity to the land, even their use of language, all behavioral indicators of a person's location along a racial spectrum. Further, Ernesto, as he grew up, struggling to straddle borders himself, quashed both his fathers' hopes, becoming neither a respected farmer and future heir to Donato's land, nor an educated professional. He longed for a place that did not exist within the confines of his proximate kinship network and extricated himself from it altogether when he eventually migrated to Brazil. If one takes what constitutes kinship and incorporation into a family to its logical conclusion, then Ernesto's was, by all accounts, a failed adoption.

Inclusion/Exclusion and the Racialization of Family-Making in the United States

How does the Andean case described above compare with adoptions taking place in the United States? My current research, which has involved a combination of interviewing and participant-observation, investigates cases of parents across the United States who have adopted children from China and Russia, and those who have transracially adopted African American children. China and Russia have been among the top three sending countries of children to the United States for adoption over the last 15 years and the high numbers contrast sharply with the low number of transracial adoptions of African Americans within the United States.[4] The cases I discuss below do not involve the circulation of children among close kin. Nevertheless, adoptive parents encounter challenges as they deal with different kinds of borders in the process of incorporating children into their families, especially because of the emphasis on compensatory and biological kinship models, the deep history of racism in the United States and the concomitant lack of everyday in-

teractions between African American and white families, and the intervention of ideas about model minorities.

Transracial Adoption: White Parents, African American Children

In my research, the vast majority of white adoptive parents who adopted African American children struggled most prominently with how to deal with racism in the United States, and in aiding their children in identity construction. I asked Brandy, one such parent, if she thought mixed families like hers were making any difference to racial attitudes in the United States. She reflected and then commented,

> Most of the people that we've come into contact with that have subtle racism either never had a conversation with a black person in their life and it's generational racism, or we have a few that we've met who are police officers in some of the worst areas of Chicago and their opinions are formed by the black people that they meet. They don't deal with the moms and the kids … I think the more people we know, the more people that have a relative that's not white—more white people have relatives that are not white, and then more blacks have a relative that's not black, then the less the dividing line, and the fuzzier it's going to be … At what point, what is the critical number when there are six degrees of separation where everybody knows somebody and racism will start to fall ….

The journey toward "fuzzier" dividing lines is hardly a smooth one as Betty, the adoptive mother of an African American child from Birmingham, Alabama, admitted emotionally to me. She explained that both her family and her husband, Ryan's had been steeped in racism across the generations. Yet because they had seriously considered adopting a child with HIV, they decided they could take the risk of adopting a child of color, which they did:

> *R:* We were prepared to parent a child with the social stigma of HIV. Why are we not willing to parent a black child?" And it was like, how am I going to get out of this? You know? I mean, just woo … that was kind of in your face. I was just like, well because we can't do that. I said no. I remember saying, "No!" I was so mad. "No, I'm not doing this …. How would my family feel? And I was like, "Ryan, we will be a public spectacle". I'm tearing up now just because it's … it's just such a huge change in our lives because … *(Crying)* Just thinking about that hate that's in your heart. Maybe we could do," I can't believe the words coming out of my mouth, "maybe I would do a biracial child but not African American. Not full African American." And so we went home and we talked more …. I just had this war going on with it inside of me. I can just hear the …, "you are going to be a public spectacle."

> Everywhere you go people are going to … to look at you. You know, what my dad ended up echoing, you know, I thought, "people are going to think you slept with a black man."

While still a minority among adoptive families, the tentative steps that white adoptive parents are taking to connect with black birth relatives and communities across the color-line are noteworthy. Many of these families are struggling with incorporating everyday black cultural practices into their lives, seeking neighborhoods and schools in which they think their children will feel more comfortable, and learning the intricacies of hair and skin care and gossip by going to black beauty parlors. This, despite their own discomfort.

Alise told me how she began to try to make connections for herself and her child with "blackness" by "searching the yellow pages for black churches or anything like that where I could find some people who were black." She found a black hairdresser in a black neighborhood where she now spends the day periodically, despite the disapproval of her white girlfriends, and describes going there as "a very nurturing" experience. She concludes that in these forays, "you've got to work that much harder coming outside of yourself …. It's a lot of driving … a lot of talking to people that maybe you don't feel like talking to everyday."

The efforts of these families to dive into the prevailing structures of race and power that still permeate U.S. culture are ambitious but strike a minor chord. Kath Weston (1991:7) argues that to understand the cultural significance of how gay people make families, anthropologists most usefully should "move beyond the study of static variations and the celebration of diversity to examine historical transformations in kinship, ideology, and social relations—transformations that could not have come about without conflict, contradictions, difference, and struggle." In a similar fashion, transracial family-making entails experimentation in many cases and a concerted effort to surmount or at least confront existing social barriers to building ties and connections.

U.S. transracial adoptive parents are, as Muñiz (1998:24) states, moving from "proximity" to "propinquity," tentatively calling into question the condition of "intimate segregation" that characterizes neighborhood and institutional settings, such as schools where, at first glance, the student population appears diverse. In the United States, not only has race been predominantly defined by the "one drop" view and physical appearance, but it is also reinforced by segregation that may become its own oppositional culture. In contrast, in the Andes, the social construction of race is not so much based on color as on proper behavior, cultural practices, and a sliding scale of mutual perceptions about racial placement. The efforts of parents who have adopted African American children in the United States and who are entering new kinds of places, are examples that show how boundaries

drawn by society organize spaces, especially those linked to particular activities, such as attending church. They also reveal how a sense of place, at one and the same time, may refer to one place while making arguments simultaneously about another place. These boundaries will not easily shift, but as adoptive parents venture into new kinds of place-making, they come to explicitly recognize the boundaries, thus allowing for them to be called into question (Rose 1995:96).

U.S. transracial adoptive parents encounter borders that are differently inflected than among Chinese and Russian adoptive parents. While children adopted from China are perceived as racially different in the United States, for most adoptive parents, the notion of model minority, and the stereotypes coupled with it, intervene initially in tempering their concerns about racism, which by the time their children reach school age, become tangible. For white adoptive parents of African American children, racial and class issues are far more critical than adoption on an everyday basis because of the tangibility of racial segregation, open adoption and child circulation practices, the history of institutionalized racism, known to all in the United States, and in some, but not all cases, the fact of economic inequalities and hardships that gave rise to the possibility for adoption (Wegar 2006) Further, many U.S. transracial adoptive parents cannot afford to adopt internationally. Race and class become conflated in such adoption processes.

While the circulation of children among close kin has always been relatively open in the Andean highlands, as well as among black families undertaking kin care in the United States (Stack 1997), only recently are adoptions becoming more open in the United States. This is in part due to a statement issued by the National Association of Black Social Workers (1974) in 1972, in which they argued that the transracial adoption of black children by white parents in the United States constituted cultural genocide and should be prohibited.

Betty and Ryan are one example of a couple, however well intentioned, who have almost no idea of what it would mean to engage in border crossings that would permit their child to gain these weapons of racial navigation. More and more families who choose to adopt in the United States have decided that it is healthier for their children to have an open relationship with their birth parents. Adoptive and birth parents (usually, the mother) may draw up a formal contract specifying exactly what degree of openness both parties want. Adoption brokers in the form of agencies or private lawyers play key roles in encouraging open adoption and in defining borders that participants in adoption decide whether or not they can cross.

Fran turned to transnational adoption because "there was a fair amount of press about how difficult it was to adopt in the United States because a lot of agencies were developing a program of open adoption and that sounded like it was something we were both uncomfortable with." By contrast, openness is a virtue in transracial U.S. adoptions. While some parents I spoke with expressed initial anx-

iety about open adoption, many sought out connections with birth kin: Betty, explained that "I can be all things to Sarah but I can never be black, period, end of story. I want to keep as much openness with her birth mother as possible …". Beryl and Sean and their family interact regularly, not only with their children's birth parents, but with their relatives. They have three children and the degree of openness varies with each one, ranging from communication by email and phone to visits three or four times a year with birth relatives: "We have great relationships with the birth moms; …. We have a lot of extended families with the birth family, grandparents …. We visit with all of them …. Cecilia has some siblings, so they all come and … spend their whole weekend together …. I send out packages of photos of the kids …." (Fig. 3).

Indeed, close to 70 percent of the parents I spoke with who had adopted across the color line within the Untied States, have maintained an open relationship with birth parents, phoning them, e-mailing, sending them photos, mentoring them, having them babysit, and in a few cases, getting together with them and with children and relatives from both families regularly. In some cases, birth mothers requested that the adoptive parents consider adopting another child if they became pregnant again or could no longer take care of a child they already had and this, indeed, transpired in four cases. The formal and informal notion of "kin" appears to be expanding among U.S. transracial adoptive families, although by no means are they the easiest or most comfortable of relationships.

Figure 3 "*Blended*" *family in context of open adoption: adopted and birth children of Beryl and Spence, together with siblings of adopted children and birth siblings—four families intertwined*

Transnational Adoptions I: White Parents, Chinese Children, and Unknowable Origins

In contrast to the increased openness in adoption within the United States, transnational adoptions, such as those from China, are accompanied by the reality that "the circumstances of the child's abandonment are profoundly hidden, unknowable" because "abandonments, which are illegal, take place in secrecy" (Volkman 2005:86). Hence, the kinds of borders parents who adopt from China cross, and their place-making activities differ, both from many transracial adoptions in the United States, as well as the Andean case we have described. Place tends to be romanticized, yet the sheer number and density of networks among Chinese adoptive families ironically means that new kinds of cultural pathways and communities are taking form (Volkman 2005). At the same time, assumptions parents hold about model minorities and their emphasis on cultural practices that have little to do with the realities and history of China elide the undercurrents of racial tensions, class stratification, and the consequences of truncated biological ties with birth parents (Anagnost 2000).

Few of the children adopted from China have any knowledge of their early years, let alone their birth parents, and they do not have the ability to fill in memories or to ever make connections. None of the parents that I interacted with explicitly conveyed to their children that a regime of population control, poverty, and gender discrimination created the availability of their daughters for adoption from China. This would actually require a move away from "ethnicity" to an acknowledgement of the political economy of Chinese culture.[5] Despite the variations in their narratives, adoptive parents, in literally constructing memories for their children (most of whom are daughters), almost always mentioned a birth mother who loved the child, unknown reasons for why she could not keep the child, and in a few cases, they focused on fate as a reason they were able to adopt the child. While some parents alluded to poverty, only one father mentioned the government's role in creating conditions that allowed them to adopt their daughter. Some parents made explicit reference to pain, such as Rachel, who said it was hard for her to tell her daughter about her adoption because "when I talk about it, it reminds me that in order for us to have adopted a child, other people, including our daughter, had to experience a tremendous loss. So that's hard"(Fig. 4). Like many other parents, that pain and loss is replaced by a focus on China (Dorow 2006). Rachel also mentions "… I guess as far as the adoption, well, we've just—we've tried to say, 'China is—oh, from China. It's a beautiful place, a special place.' I want her to feel positive about her birth country."

During the adoption process itself in China, some families engaged in limited and structured sight-seeing, but most were sheltered within hotels, shuttled to and

from notary offices, the U.S. consulate, and sometimes, the social welfare institutes (what orphanages are called in China) (Dorow 2006). Yet parents were already thinking carefully about how to structure place—mediated by adoption brokers and information circulating on the worldwide web—as part of their children's identity. They gathered items for memory books and took selective photographs—of tourist sites and of key moments in the adoption process, such as the handing of the child from the child's Chinese caretaker or from the director of the welfare institute, to the adoptive parents. Madison explained "I don't think my daughter is going to be able to know about her place of origin …. I don't want her to feel like she's just sort of floating in space and not rooted in any way to family … I'm carefully filing away every piece of information that I have about her life, about our visit … so that she can have it later …. It seems really important to me for her identity formation." Parents also purchased Chinese pajamas, silk embroidery, chopsticks, jade bracelets, and calligraphy, symbolizing their child's connections to China. The imaginary that prospective adoptive families constructed has also fueled demand for a particular kind of "China," now being produced as a cottage industry within a defined touristic space within China (Traver 2006).

Almost all of the parents who have adopted children from China or Russia are upper middle-class and white, and their class and racial positioning are shaping to a large extent what the American experience of adoption currently is. The Chinese government, in the terms of the Hague Convention regulating international adoption (1993), also plays a role, explicitly desiring that children who are adopted by

Figure 4 *Norma, Elliott, and Madeline, adopted from China*

foreigners have knowledge of and pride in their cultural heritage.[6] At the moment that the Chinese government issues a visa to a child being adopted, the notary makes a speech to the adoptive parents stressing that, now, the parents are "members of a Chinese family." The shared culture that is being constructed by parents with children from China focuses heavily on Chinese culture as parents are able to grasp it within a U.S. context. Almost all of them think that their children's identity will be quintessentially hyphenated—as Chinese American. This contrasts, as we will see, with the view of parents whose children are adopted from Russia but who think of their children's hyphenated identities, not so much in terms of any infusion from Russia, but rather from their own mixed ancestry.[7]

Parents with children from China have thus generally ignored issues of race, instead emphasizing the beauty of Chinese culture and building new kinds of kinship ties that range from incorporating the group they traveled with to China as extended family with whom they get together regularly, or labeling children who have been adopted from the same orphanage as siblings. Nevertheless, critical race theory shows the near impossibility of not reinscribing race as a significant category in response to the burden of race in the United States. Adoptive parents with children from China pursue practices quite different from those taken by adoptive parents in the Andes or white parents adopting African American children. Pride in cultural distinctiveness, strategic quests for racial indifference within the family; and heritage journeys as a way to restore the past to the present are steps adoptive children and their families embark upon in the face of the burden of racism in the United States. In all of these place-making activities, ghosts, losses, denials, and exclusions remain ever present (Dorow 2006).

Transnational Adoption II: Russian Children, Ideal Families and Multiculturalism

Russian adoptive parents are more likely to be motivated to adopt from Russia itself due to their views of both adoption and race, as Kyle put it:

> I don't perceive the international dimension to be significant at all …. If you adopted an African kid or a Chinese kid … I can imagine there are issues … In our case … you can't physically tell, at least at quick notice, unless you study our kids, they are not biologically related to us. If you walk into a restaurant or something, nobody is going to turn heads because we look different …. I assert there is still a bit of stigma in society … If I am totally honest, even me, as a father of adopted kids, when I see other families or know about families that have adopted kids, the thought crosses my mind, how cohesive is that family? I'm civilized enough to suppress my thoughts in terms of any behavior … but when I think about my own family, I honestly have forgotten that our kids are adopted.

Another father, Michael, put it: "I did not want to be a walking around advertisement for adoption, as you have with children from China …."

It appears that especially with adoption of Russian children, a furtive biological model makes itself felt at the very inception of identity building through place. This is not to say that all Russian adoptive parents ignored connections with Russia, but for most of them, their efforts to establish connections took place before adoption rather than subsequently. At least one-third of the families I interviewed selected Russia because they themselves were of Eastern European ancestry, they had visited Russia, or they or their parents had studied Russian history or literature, as Fran explained:

> My mother had her Ph.D. in Eastern European history and she's studied the Russian language and inevitably done a lot of Russian history and literature as a part of her course. I studied Russian in college for a year and a half or so and went on a trip there in 1982. So I was also fascinated with the place. Then my older sister is married to an Englishman and lives in London and he is a Russian scholar. He almost finished his Ph.D. on Russian history, speaks fluent Russian and has a business that has a Russian office. He travels there a lot and one of his clients—he is a literary agent—was Boris Yeltsin.

Ellen explicitly made a remarkable connection between place-making and personhood, on one hand, and genetic links, on the other. She explained she had adopted from Russia because she had studied there and loved it in college:

> I wanted a child from St. Petersburg, where I had studied. Since the child would not have my DNA, I wanted her to be from a city that I loved and was attached to. Russia itself was a DNA substitute … When I adopted a second time, I chose Russia again, because I wanted my children to share an ancestry.

Parents with children adopted from Russia created linkages between their autobiographical timelines and places. This work of creating a sense of place as an ingredient of "kinning" for their adoptive children was fused with how the parents constructed the past from their timelines and those of their ancestors. Even more dramatic was the number of parents, both those with children from Russia, as well as a lower number with children from China, who promoted the discourse and practices of multiculturalism, emphasizing not heritage or origin of their adopted children, but rather their own hyphenated ancestry—Irish American, French American, German American, or some combination of "ethnic mix," for example.[8] Helen, a mother I interviewed in Texas, explained that her contribution to her child's identity would be to build in him a strong openness to the importance of

culture, rather than a specific culture and that she luckily had the tools to help him with that. When I asked if she intended to offer him the option of learning Russian, she felt that exposing her son to a wide range of cultural perspectives and practices made far more sense than trying to have him learn Russian: "We do cultural stuff … the Moscow ballet … we do what we can to expose them to various world cultures … going up to Hopi with a former Hopi chairman and he showed us … piki bread, pottery, dry-farming … That's our cultural substitute."

Circuits of Exchange and Adoption Practices

These cases, from the Andes and the United States, suggest that place-making and border crossings are elaborately culturalized yet intensely racialized and punctuated by the recognizable diacritics of status and class differentiation, and the centrality of different kinds of kinship models. In the Andean case, adoption is a flexible transaction in which Donato and Anselma, the adoptive parents, had aspirations for reproducing their capital and gaining access to labor that they needed to take advantage of their relatively large landholdings. Donato also spoke fervently of "his desire for a companion" and when Ernesto was growing up, Donato cared for him with tenderness and pleasure. Informal adoptions are not unusual in the Andes, but in this case, the contrast in the social and economic standing of two brothers within the same family created intense conflict, not only for the parents and their extended families, but also for Ernesto, the child. Was Ernesto to grow up herding in the puna or become a middle-class farmer in the district capital? And was not his adoption a boon to all sets of parents, alleviating the poverty-stricken circumstances of the puna-dwelling brother and contributing to the perpetuation of his well-off brother's "house"? And what about Ernesto's rights as he grew old enough to exercise them? He dreamed of another life, easy money working in a restaurant or construction work. Yet his very identity as an "indio" without skills would prevent that time and again. Despite the discourse about children's rights, even while recognizing the absolute benefit of physical survival and well-being of a child, the case of Ernesto, caught between worlds, powerfully signifies the psychic costs of adoption across borders constituted by inequalities, even when the practice is characterized by openness (which as we have seen in the United States is presumed to assuage some of the potential tensions).

Globalization processes in all their contradictory dimensions contribute to a preoccupation with adoption and the uneasy discourse and practices that accompany it. One common idea that circulates in U.S. culture and that adoptive parents express is that those who are better off should "save" those who are not, and one way is through transnational adoption. Brenda, who had adopted an African American child in the United States, thoughtfully reflected on this when I asked her

whether she had any feelings about the many parents who choose to adopt internationally rather than from within the United States. In her response, two things stood out. She recognized that crossing racial borders, including the potential judgment of the black community, were genuine hurdles. She also alluded to the ideological notion of the ease with which one could "save" a child from a needy country: "Who wants to be afraid to walk to the Target and have a black family come up to you and say, 'Are you sure you know what you're doing with her hair?' What that can imply is, "What are you doing raising a black child?" …. Isn't it easier in some ways to adopt a child from another needy country …. I really think sometimes a child should live in the community in which they were born and have that community around them … The rescuing of a child from another country is far more noble than taking a child from another culture right here under everybody's noses, which is how some people look at it. Some black people do as well."

The supply and demand of children thus is politically and economically shaped. Parents adopting children from China and Russia are uncomfortably aware that the social practices in countries with pervasive poverty, corrupt governments, dictatorships, and their own forms of family engineering create conditions that shape the practices of prospective adoptive parents. While globalization is not necessarily the cause of poverty within sending regions, the ability of prospective adoptive parents to take advantage of their economic resources and pursue an adoption internationally is a result of globalization. It is one way that translocal flows simultaneously structure multiple locales, some of which are emergent.

Paths, Border-Crossings, and Places in Family-Making

Practices in transnational adoption are, literally, built out of what is lost, missing or suppressed. In the course of being built, they do result in the materialization of translocality. While such undertakings may be of great assistance to the process of constituting identity building among adoptees and to forging ties that cross borders and potentially create novel sites, trajectories and communities in the future, they do not necessarily challenge the underlying inequalities that create the situation in the first place.

Andean parents cross class or racial lines and the fissures in their kin networks as they incorporate a child into their family to ensure their social reproduction, not only as individuals but as part of a larger network of households and community. White parents adopt black children in the United States, crossing class and ethnic lines, and rupturing the bubble of secrecy wrapped around adoption. Alternatively, white parents find comfort in a lack of knowledge that haunts them as they build an internationally adopted child's past out of her cultural heritage. Some, mostly those who adopt from Russia, prefer to embrace a biological model of family formation

and the prototypical immigrant identity—hyphenated and masked. While their border crossings and place-making connect Russia to the United States through economic circuits primarily, these activities do not tilt in the direction of a new kind of shared translocality. Parents who adopt from China, go to great lengths to make sure that their children are Chinesified. In this way, they appear to be substituting building a heritage linked to their birthplace for biological ties. They are also explicitly trying to construct a culture that accords well with the child's appearance and truncated roots, and they state they are demonstrating their gratefulness through these practices—to unknown birth parents and to the Chinese government. It is important, however, not to overstate the case. As we have seen, some families, once they have embarked on these kinds of family-making processes and confront inequalities or disjunctures in their daily lives, try to challenge them.

In short, adoptive families wrestle with, sculpt, transmogrify, and sometimes embrace "dominant cultural forms" in the "midst of the field of power relations that links localities to a wider world" (Gupta and Ferguson 1997:5). Most importantly, Gupta and Ferguson observe that "the sense of culture as a space of order and agreed-on meaning … undergoes a transformation of its own in the process. Rather than simply a domain of sharing and commonality, culture figures … more as a site of difference and contestation, simultaneously ground and stake of … cultural-political practices." This is perhaps what is most striking about the circulation of children through adoption—whether in-country in the Andes or the United States, or transnationally, between the United States and China or Russia. They almost always take place on a terrain that is not level and that entail disjunctures. Adoptive parents find themselves having to cross borders. Participants in adoption—and in this article, I have focused primarily on adoptive parents, but I believe the framework could also be applied to the experience of adoptive children and birth parents—interpret and act in the context of these borders and disjunctures. They create maps of meaning that serve as the groundwork for reinforcing or, occasionally, calling into question people's ideas about places and about the border crossings themselves. Whether by praising their child's birth culture and practices, celebrating multiculturalism, entering "dangerous" territory, or challenging prevailing models of kinship, they fuse both local and global concerns simultaneously in contradictory and powerful ways.

I would also take Gupta and Ferguson's description of how "agency" itself is penetrated by fields of power a step further, arguing that rather than linking "locality" to a "wider world," at least some adoptive families are struggling to funnel the "wider world" into a locality that is itself embedded in the wider world. That is, they are actively engaging in identity exchanges involving place-making that creates new, culturally shared sites that appear to go far beyond individual idiosyncrasies. The templates for constructing these connections and communities emerge out of a

dynamic imaginary that shifts over time, initially facilitated by adoption agencies and in-country brokers who depict sending countries and relationships with them in a carefully crafted, selective fashion, especially over the Internet (e.g., Cartwright 2003; Anagnost 2004).

In conclusion, examining the "production of locality" (Appadurai 1996) among these different kinds of adoptive families illuminates the ways in which they are fusing place with kinship, personhood, and identity. They are channeling globalization into the heart of intimate matters that are then inscribed on children's bodies, wrapped around families and communities, publicly displayed, and sometimes privately challenged by birth and adoptive parents, and adoptive children themselves. At the same time, they are confronting the less visible tracks of economic and social stratification and the less celebrated racialized strands that underpin everyday practices. The particularities of these conditions must necessarily be addressed to make sense of the future paths that place-making takes, whether in the Andes or in the United States. Finally, the children who bridge these chasms bear burdens that are often displaced onto them without resolution.

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Notes

[1]How adoptees process and respond to the place-making and border-crossing efforts of their parents requires another article. From my initial findings, though, it is apparent that adoptees' responses often lead parents to reevaluate their original assumptions and practices, and those transnational adoptees who are transracial take more account of and wrestle more with racial border crossings than do their parents.

[2]All names are pseudonyms.

[3]As Ernesto's godparents, we undertook the responsibility of paying for the costly medicines and visits to the doctors in Cusco.

[4]I would like to acknowledge the significant insights and help provided by my research assistant Brian Estes, in collecting and analyzing data for this article.

[5] Kay Johnson (2004) and Kay Johnson et al. (2005) are among the few researchers who have actually studied how children become available for adoption in China, offering concrete tales that stand juxtaposed to adoption narratives. Johnson and her coauthors create a very different, far more nuanced and less Manichean depiction of the history and practices that lie behind infant girl abandonment in China. See also the HBO film, directed by Jessa Neumann, entitled "China's Stolen Children" (2008), which portrays the struggles of Chinese parents to keep their children and the causes of trafficking of children within China.

[6]The United States became a signatory to The International Hague Convention on Intercountry Adoption in 1993 and ratified it in April 2008.

[7]Although it is beyond the scope of this article, significantly, the Chinese American community, especially professional women, and college students, are playing increasingly active roles in assisting parents in conveying Chinese culture to them and their children, creating yet another kind of new "place."

[8]I do not know whether or not this emphasis on multicultural ancestry existed before the transnational adoption of their children.

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