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The theme of the sixth biennial conference of the Alliance for the Study of Adoption and Culture (ASAC) – “Building Communities, Changing Discourses” – invited attendees to reflect on the many ways efforts to examine and reimagine identity, belonging, and family are dynamic processes that take place in multiple national and international contexts. Held at the Crowne Plaza Minneapolis Northstar Downtown Hotel, venues in downtown Minneapolis, and on the campus of the University of Minnesota from October 27-29, 2016, the conference brought together participants who represent the kind of diversity in both backgrounds and methods that is a hallmark and strength of the interdisciplinary approach ASAC has encouraged from its founding.

Journalist, blogger, and activist Lorraine Dusky’s plenary session “Reunion, Before and After,” illuminated the experiences of first mothers, like her, who relinquished their children during the 1960s and 1970s when the laws and customs of adoption in the U.S. encouraged them to keep their decision a secret. As Dusky noted, she and many of these women were “exiles in our own lives.” The pain and isolation they experienced led some to successfully challenge the legal and cultural mechanisms that prioritized secrecy over the rights of first families and adoptees to find each other. For Dusky, the public act of telling her story led to the creation of networks to support increasingly visible communities of first mothers but it also caused disruptions for her daughter, Jane, and her adoptive family as they worked to come to terms with the challenges of reunion. Dusky’s description of the obstacles she navigated to meet her daughter and the hard questions they faced together, highlighted the ways reunion can be a step in the process of repairing the ruptures that adoption often imposes but that it can also create new dilemmas for adoptees trying to define their place in both families. Dusky reminded us of the heartrending nature of this kind of struggle when she recounted a time Jane explained, “I feel like a magnet torn between two sides. The closer I get to one the further I am from the other.”

I thought about Lorraine and Jane’s story when Shawyn Lee and Amanda Schaller mentioned Maria Yellow Horse Brave Heart’s concept of “historical trauma and historical unresolved grief,” which was useful for their assessment of the needs of individuals and communities also attempting to overcome the complicated legacies of adoption. Their study identified the roles social work practitioners played in the development of race and gender specific definitions of maternalism that influenced adoption policies from the late nineteenth through the twentieth centuries in the U.S. Lee and Schaller showed how the social work practices that encouraged the systematic exclusion of women of color (and I would add single mothers) from the category of ideal motherhood influenced the emergence of the numerous so-called child rescue strategies, including the orphan train movement, Korean adoption, and most notably, the removal of indigenous children from their communities. Commenting on the negative, long-term effects of both the ideal and the policies that defined certain mothers and families of color as deficient, they stressed the need for social work practitioners to continue to implement and support culturally sensitive solutions to the family and community problems that make poor children and children of color vulnerable.

Similarly, Veromi Arsiradam focused on the issues raised by contemporary transracial adoptions that place indigenous and minority children with white parents. But Arsiradam outlined an approach that originated in what she described as the relatively new interest among philosophers in questions about family ethics and adoption. Evaluating the tensions between child-based versus group-based priorities in adoption, Arsiradam's research suggested that transracially adopted children in the U.S. benefited from systems that connected their families with ethnically and racially diverse communities. She concluded that the positive outcomes associated with the community-based models for raising transracially adopted children were due, in part, to the fact that parents are not the only factors affecting how children develop strong racial and cultural identities.

However, several presentations addressed the important roles adoptive parents do play in adoptees' identity formation. In their study of white, middle-class, college educated mothers of Chinese adopted daughters, Janie Victoria Ward and Ivy George found that these women actively engaged in behaviors they believed would foster important cultural connections and positive identity development for themselves and their daughters. To these women, eating Chinese food and taking cultural trips was a way they could acknowledge and manage the significance of the racial and cultural differences present in their adoptive families. Ward and George pointed out that these decisions made the adoptive mothers in their study "social consumers" whose abilities to "invest" in their daughters was indicative of the global inequalities that defined very specific adoption flows, namely "from poor countries to rich, from black families to white, and from poor families to rich."

Elvira Loibl also touched on the tension between consumerism and adoptive family building that she observed in the narratives of some German adoptive parents. Through an analysis of the shifts in the language these adoptive parents used pre-placement and post adoption, Loibl illustrated that the realities of adoption led these families to frame their explanations of their desires and decisions to adopt in ways that diminished references to the commodification of children. Indeed, post adoption, phrases like "meant to be" and "falling in love" replaced the references to love, care, and consumption that had marked pre-placement narratives.

Some of the most moving examples of efforts to reimagine the narratives and discourses of adoption came from the portrayals of Korean and German international adoption in the documentaries and stage readings featured at the conference. Deann Borshay Liem's latest documentary, *Geographies of Kinship*, is a truly spellbinding chronicle of the efforts of five Korean adoptees to reconnect with their Korean families, and in the process, make sense of the history of war and poverty that led to their adoptions. Rosemarie Peña's presentation on the documentaries *Brown Babies: The Mischlingskinder Story* and *Brown Babies: Germany's Lost Children* explained why it is important to pay attention to the consequential personal and political issues at stake in documentary filmmaking about adoption. Her analysis revealed the ways that contests over representation and identity shape when, how, and why people remember and talk about this unique cohort of German adoptees. The staged readings of sections of theatrical works about the Korean adoptee experience presented by members of Mu Performing Arts Company portrayed adoptees working through conflicts over the meanings of family and identity, and navigating issues of reunion that made the audience laugh, in some cases, cry. Although the scenes Mu members performed described topics specific to Korean adoption, the

relevance of the questions they raised was affirmed by the emotional comments of an adoptee in the audience who could relate to the struggles the stories depicted even though she was not Korean.

The 2016 ASAC conference offered many opportunities to learn about the exciting ways adoptees, adoptive parents, and biological parents are using blogs, memoirs, social networking, and storytelling to redefine the themes and questions that inform adoption studies. Panels also incorporated the work of activists, adoption practitioners, and scholars from multiple disciplines (many of whom also have a personal connection to adoption) who are tackling contemporary issues of adoption through explorations of subjects including disability, infertility, and surrogacy; which suggests important topics that warrant further consideration. Likewise, a number of presentations demonstrated why it is still important to evaluate anew the historical contexts in which transracial and transnational adoption schemes began and how and why these practices have evolved. While taking part in the Archival Adoption Research Roundtable that highlighted the incredible staff and collections of the Social Welfare History Archives (which houses the records of several organizations that played key roles in the development of U.S. and international adoption), I was reminded of how important this type of integrated approach is. Hearing people describe the new questions they are investigating using evidence including archival sources, oral interviews, literature, art, and media to better understand or explain complicated aspects of adoption, confirmed my belief that the work featured at ASAC conferences will continue to transform how we think about the representations, practice, and study of adoption.