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**ASAC News**

The Alliance for the Study of Adoption and Culture

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## Announcements

### ASAC Conference in Tallahassee in March 2014

Florida State University in Tallahassee will be the site of ASAC's next conference, March 27-30, 2014, on the theme of Adoption: Crossing Boundaries. We are interested in new perspectives on adoption transnational, transracial, and also domestic and same-race (which cross boundaries as well), and also on foster care, assisted reproduction, and removal of children from custody.

We have confirmed two keynote speakers: Jackie

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### Next Issue of Journal

The next issue of *Adoption & Culture* will feature bibliographies of major adoption-related scholarship and primary texts across disciplines, along with book reviews of recent publications. We are still seeking coverage in several areas, including but not limited to Women's Studies, Anthropology, and Activism. If you are interested in contributing or have further suggestions, please contact Cynthia Callahan ([callahan.138@osu.edu](mailto:callahan.138@osu.edu)) and Emily Hipchen ([emily@hipbo.org](mailto:emily@hipbo.org)). Look for the issue early in 2014 and at ASAC in Florida.

### MLA 2014 Panel: Adoption & Disability

The Alliance for the Study of Adoption and Culture will present the panel *Metaphors of Dual Citizenship: Adoption and Disability* at the 2014 MLA convention in Chicago, January 9-12. The panel will explore the ways and degrees in which cultural imaginings of disability define the parties in the adoption triad and their relationships with each other, social institutions, and larger culture. The panelists will present a variety of approaches—anthropology, philosophy, personal narrative, literary analysis, cultural studies—to reach an interdisciplinary understanding of the ways in which cultural ideas about

*Continued, Pg. 5*



## 2014 Conference Continued...

Kay, Scottish-Nigerian adoptee, author of the groundbreaking volume of poetry *The Adoption Papers* and recently the memoir *Red Dust Road*, and Laura Briggs, Professor and Chair of Women, Gender, Sexuality Studies, University of Massachusetts Amherst and author of *Somebody's Children: The Politics of Transracial and Transnational Adoption*.

We will show and discuss two films dealing with transnational adoption from different perspectives: *Somewhere Between* (2012), a documentary which follows four teenage girls adopted from China; and *Resilience*, another documentary which focuses on the difficulties an American man and his Korean birthmother have in developing a relationship after their reunion. We also will show *Any Day Now* (2012), a fictionalized account of a gay couple's attempt to adopt a special-needs child they have fostered (the script is based in part on events in Florida, and we hope to have some of the parties at the conference).

See the complete Call for Proposals elsewhere in this issue for more details.

## LATE BREAKING NEWS!

**ASAC has launched a new website at:**

<http://www.adoptionandculture.org>

## Calls for Papers!

### ESSAYS ON ADOPTION AND DISABILITY -- DEADLINE EXTENDED!

Co-editors Emily Hipchen and Marina Fedosik are seeking submissions for a collection of critical essays exploring cultural meanings of adoption through the combined lens of adoption and disability studies.

Please send MLA-formatted full essays with 250-word abstracts to [adoptiondisabilitycollection@gmail.com](mailto:adoptiondisabilitycollection@gmail.com) by June 30, 2013. 7500-11000 words with Works Cited included. For more information about the project email Marina Fedosik at [mf107@nyu.edu](mailto:mf107@nyu.edu).

The overall ubiquity of the disability discourse in adoption culture is hard to deny. It is explicit, for instance, in constructions of single motherhood as psychopathology in the middle of the twentieth century in the U.S.—an ideology that intensified social pressure on single mothers to relinquish their children for adoption. It is also present in the cultural perceptions of infertility as a physical impairment, which adoption can remedy and conceal. It is employed within the context of the adoptee rights movement by the searching adoptees that support their claims to the knowledge of personal history by identifying with the debilitating condition of “genealogical bewilderment.” Such pervasiveness undoubtedly points to the importance of understanding how cultural ideas about disability

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*The Alliance for the Study of Adoption and Culture announces:*

## **The 5th International Conference on Adoption and Culture**

*Adoption: Crossing Boundaries*

**March 27 - 30, 2014**

Florida State University, Tallahassee, Florida: <http://www.fsu.edu/>

### **Call for Proposals**

ASAC's biennial conferences feature stories and histories of adoption as explored by writers, artists, and scholars across the disciplines, especially the humanities. Adoptions and the lives of adoptees always involve crossing boundaries, whether the boundaries of families, the boundaries of races, the boundaries of nations, the boundaries of aboriginal peoples and others, the boundaries of communities, the boundaries of law, or all of these borders. This conference takes up these themes and threads, and also encourages other kinds of boundary-crossing—boundaries between disciplines; between adoptees, birthparents, adoptive parents, and social workers; boundaries between creative writers, scholars, and activists. And we extend our topic across other boundaries by considering similar issues with regard to foster care and assisted reproduction.

The conference includes academic work from a wide range of scholarly disciplines and areas—literature, film and popular culture and performance studies, cultural studies, history, philosophy, sociology, anthropology, religion, political science, law, women's and gender studies—as well as film, creative writing, graphic art, music, drama, or productions in other media. We encourage interdisciplinary panels, presentations, and productions.

Keynote speakers:

**Jackie Kay**, Professor of Creative Writing, Newcastle University (UK), Scottish-Nigerian adoptee, author of the groundbreaking volume of poetry *The Adoption Papers*, the adoption memoir *Red Dust Road*, and many other works of poetry, prose, and drama.

**Laura Briggs**, Professor and Chair of Women, Gender, Sexuality Studies, University of Massachusetts Amherst and author of *Somebody's Children: The Politics of Transracial and Transnational Adoption* (Duke UP, 2012), the winner of the James A. Rawley Prize from the Organization of American Historians

Featured films will include: *Somewhere Between* (2012), a documentary which follows four teenage girls adopted from China; *Resilience* (2009), which shows a Korean birthmother who searches for and meets her son in the US; and *Any Day Now* (2012), a fictionalized account of a gay couple's attempt to adopt a special-needs child they have fostered (the script is based in part on events in Florida, and we hope to have some of the parties at the conference.)

We invite proposals for papers and panels that:

□ Analyze literary, cinematic, dramatic, musical, visual, dance, popular culture, or performance art representations of boundary crossing in adoption, foster care, or other nonstandard means of family formation or child care, and boundary crossing in narratives of the lives of adoptees, adoptive parents,

*Continued, Pg. 4*

## Calls for Papers continued...

inflect meanings and functions of adoption, kinship, family.

**The co-editors invite the essays that may consider the following topics among others:**

- Disability and domestic, transracial, and/or transnational adoption
- Disability and adoptive identity
- American family, disability, and adoption
- Adoption, disability and social/cultural institutions
- Adoption and disability in film, literature, and other media
- Adoption, disability, and kinship ideologies
- Adoption, disability, and performance
- Adoption and disability in history
- Adoption, disability, and gender
- Adoption, disability, and citizenship
- Global perspectives on adoption and disability; disability, adoption, and birth countries
- Adoption, disability, and age
- Body and affect in the context of adoption/disability
- Disability and adoptive/birth parents

## *Mothering from the Margins: New Philosophical Directions*

**Editors: Amrita Banerjee and Bonnie Mann**

Submission deadline: **July 15th, 2013.**

The last two decades have witnessed growing philosophical scholarship on pregnancy, birth, and mothering – areas in which the discipline of

*Continued, Pg. 6*

## Call for proposals continued...

and/or birthparents

□ Study boundary-crossing in adoption and other reproductive, family and caring structures in historical, anthropological, philosophical, sociological, legal, religious, political, gendered, LGBTQ, and/or psychological perspectives.

□ Promote dialogue between people positioned differently with regard to adoption because of their life experience, profession, and/or discipline.

We expect that most papers will run about 20 minutes and that panel proposals should allow some time for discussion (assuming that panels will be about an hour and fifteen minutes).

We also invite creative presentations (writing, film, drama, graphic arts, other media, etc.) on border crossing in relation to adoption. Writing samples should ordinarily be less than 10 pages.

Please send 200-word proposals for papers or samples of creative work, a cv or resume along with your proposal, and links if you are working in visual or multimedia, to [asac2014@fsu.edu](mailto:asac2014@fsu.edu). Give your proposal, cv, and/or writing sample a title that includes your last name.

Proposal deadline July 15, 2013

Applications from graduate students interested in submitting papers are invited for a travel grant award of up to \$500. Awards will be given based on quality of paper submitted by July 15 (not just 200-word proposal), cost of travel, contribution of papers to scope of conference, and amount we have available.

A conference website is under development and we will soon post information about registration, accommodation, and travel. For additional information, contact Eric Walker at [ewalker@fsu.edu](mailto:ewalker@fsu.edu)

Conference program planning committee includes:

Eric Walker, Department of English, Florida State University, co-chair

Marianne Novy, University of Pittsburgh, co-chair

Karen Balcom, McMaster University

Emily Hipchen, University of West Georgia

Margaret Homans, Yale University



## MLA 2014 Panel: Adoption & Disability

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disability inflect meanings and functions of adoption, kinship, and family.

The four papers are as follows: Janet Ellerby, “When ‘Able’ Birthmothers Surrender “Disabled” Infants: Post-Natal PTSD, Disability, Adoption and *The Memory Keeper’s Daughter*”; Julia Vich Toebben, “Special Needs Children in the Chinese Transnational Adoption Program: Local Needs Reformulating the Globalized Market”; Carol Singley, “Adoption and Disability in Context”; and Martha Satz, “Pernicious Narratives or the Portrayal of Monstrous Disabled Adopted Children: Doris Lessing’s *The Fifth Child* and Ann Kimble Loux’s *The Limits of Hope*.”

Janet Ellerby, Professor at the University of North Carolina Wilmington, is the author of *Following the Tambourine Man: A Birthmother’s Memoir* (Syracuse UP, 2007) and “The Happy-Ending Myth: *Juno* Re-Embroiders the Scarlet A,” *Adoption & Culture* (2009). Her paper combines both autobiography and literary analysis to address disability’s effects on infants who are judged to be “disabled,” birthmothers who are judged to be “able,” and adopting parents who navigate these verdicts. By way of her own experience and Kim Edwards’ novel *The Memory Keeper’s Daughter*, Ellerby demonstrates how stereotypes of ability and disability can deleteriously encumber all parties in the adoption triangle, in particular, by becoming a reality for seemingly healthy and mentally sound birthmothers.

Júlia Vich Toebben is a PhD. from the Cultural and Social Anthropology Department at the Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona. Her research interests concern children and childhood, kinship, transnationalism and migration. Her PhD dissertation is an original case study of the China/Spain Transnational Adoption Program. It is the first systematic, in-depth ethnographic analysis of the various ways in which Chinese children born outside the One Child Policy—who are mostly unregistered, and thus “hidden” and devoid of legal rights—circulate between households, families, and private and public welfare institutions both inside China and abroad. Her paper explores the impact of China’s economic boom and high global demand for Chinese adoptees on the changing patterns of Chinese adoptions. The paper is based on ethnographic data Vich Toebben gathered during more than two years of intensive fieldwork in central China. The data reveal that around and after 2006 the profile of minors adopted internationally from China has been radically transformed, with an increase in the number of healthy boys and the proportion of special needs children. As a result, the earlier discourse of Chinese transnational adoption as a way to “save” abandoned baby girls has lost its legitimacy and has been replaced by discourses of rescue and desirability that emphasize the adoption of special needs children. In this presentation Vich Toebben shows how changes in transnational adoption from China have directly impacted the value of special needs children through the “Waiting Child Program”, even before they are ready to be placed abroad. She argues that this remodeling of the program not only has responded to a complicated overlapping of care and “children’s best interests” with practices of commodification in a globalized market, but also has fundamentally altered the lives and the value of certain kinds of children inside and outside the institutions, as well as the patterns of child circulation within the country.

Carol Singley is a Professor of English at Rutgers University-Camden. Her latest book on adoption is *Adopting America: Childhood, Kinship and National Identity in Literature* (Oxford University Press, 2011). She is also the author of “Teaching American Literature: The Centrality of Adoption,” *Modern Language Studies* (Spring/Fall 2004). Her presentation explores the extent to which a lack of genealogical continuity may constitute a handicap or disability given the preeminence of genealogical connection in American kinship. She examines how the feelings of loss or anger documented by Betty Jean Lifton in *Twice Born* and Joyce Maguire Pavao in *The Family of Adoption* align with the concept of disability and interrogates the usefulness of the term “disability” in the context of twentieth-century adoption literature. Singley’s paper not only explores the notion that adoption represents disability for all three members of the birth triad, but also analyzes

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## Adoption & Disability

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evidence that disproportionately links adoption and learning disability. Within this framework, this presentation grapples with some difficult questions. Is the adopted child in twentieth-century American literature less likely to succeed than a non-adopted child? Are adoptive parents so conscious of their child's birth history or feelings of difference, and so fearful of not doing a good job that they over-parent? Does the stigma around relinquishment hinder birth parents even in a climate of so-called acceptance of adoption? What are the shared qualities of adoption vis-à-vis disability, and is resiliency or some other quality an antidote to its destabilizing or limiting effects?

Martha Satz is an Assistant Professor at Southern Methodist University. Her publications deal with trans-racial adoption, mothering, adoption and disability. She is a contributor to *Disability: Major Themes in Health and Social Welfare* (Routledge, 2007). Currently she is teaching undergraduate and graduate courses *Culture and Literature of Disability* and *Readings in the Culture of Disability*. Her paper focuses on two narratives that deal with children marked by differences that society would deem disabilities. In both cases, in spite of the parents' purported best efforts to help them, the children eventually destroy their families. This paper explores how these narratives advance wider philosophical considerations about whether certain people fall beyond the scope of human aid and offer public policy recommendations – directly in Loux's book and indirectly in Lessing's. Grounding her discussion in the philosophical tradition most notably represented by Iris Murdoch and Martha Nussbaum, who claim that literature should be considered an essential species of moral philosophy, Satz argues that *The Fifth Child* and *Limits of Hope* present morally objectionable views, and that contrary to the examples cited by Nussbaum and Murdoch, these two novels have a tendency to coarsen their readers, rather than refine them.

Emily Hipchen, Associate Professor of English, editor of *Adoption & Culture*, and ASAC treasurer, will chair the panel, which she and Marina Fedosik, Lecturer at New York University, developed together. They are also co-editing an anthology on adoption and disability. A call for papers appears elsewhere in this issue.

## Calls for Papers Continued...

philosophy has hitherto remained largely silent. Scholarship in these areas is philosophically important since it takes women's embodied experience and maternal practice (a practice that has been historically placed in the realm of 'feminine' work) as serious domains of philosophical reflection and, more importantly, recognizes the potential of these domains for generating new knowledge in ethics, epistemology, ontology, etc. While this work constitutes an important new development in feminist and philosophical inquiry, there are a number of critical gaps in the new literature.

The volume we propose seeks to redress these deficits by focusing on 'non-normative' maternal subjects and contexts of analyses and/or 'non-hegemonic' philosophical traditions in philosophizing about pregnancy, child-bearing, and mothering. We would like to open up a space for philosophical reflections that take the perspective of maternal subjects who are lesbians, 'non-Western' women, women of color in the United States, women that find themselves as part of mixed race and multiracial families, migrant women that are part of the global workforce such as nannies and transnational surrogates, mothers with disabilities etc. as their critical points of departure. For the purposes of this volume, therefore, we welcome approaches that not only take maternal subjectivity and maternal experience seriously, but are committed to an 'intersectional approach' (that is, ones that approach the issue with sensitivity to multiple axes of oppression and privilege). Essays on any aspect of maternal experience or practice "from the margins," which contribute to "new philosophical directions" on the topic are welcome.

Papers should be no more than 8000 words, inclusive of notes and bibliography, and accompanied by an abstract of no more than 200 words.

- Please submit your paper to [elixiramrita@gmail.com](mailto:elixiramrita@gmail.com). If you have any questions, please email Bonnie Mann at [bmanna@uoregon.edu](mailto:bmanna@uoregon.edu) or Amrita Banerjee at [elixiramrita@gmail.com](mailto:elixiramrita@gmail.com).



## Member News

JANINE BAER's newsletter linking adoption and feminist analysis, *Chain of Life*, published from 1989 to 1997, is now available online. She writes, "I haven't announced it in any public way, because I don't especially want the public to read it, but I'm telling people who might be interested about it. If you have long since recycled your old adoption newsletters and want to remember some history, you can now go to this link in the UC Berkeley digital archives: <http://digitalassets.lib.berkeley.edu/chainoflife/index.html> which has all 42 issues.

This one is the official description: <http://oskicat.berkeley.edu/record=b20235214~S1>

LEE CAMPBELL, the founder and first president of Concerned United Birthparents, has sent an extensive archive of CUB's history to Radcliffe's Schlesinger Library at Harvard. Meanwhile, CUB has digitized a lot of the collection: newsletters going back to 1976, 61 papers and booklets going back to the '70s, and 243 questionnaires completed by birthparents in the early '80s about their surrender and post-reunion experiences. Members can access all of this at [www.cubirthparents.org](http://www.cubirthparents.org).



While collecting CUB's historical artifacts, Lee also began to tell the full story, to narrate her own and CUB's work. She divided the story into two books. The first – *Stow Away* -- is now available as an e-book on Amazon.com and other e-book outlets.

E. WAYNE CARP has recently published three articles: "The Atheist and the Christian: Madalyn Murray O'Hair, Jean Paton, and the Stigma of Illegitimacy in the 1950s," *The Journal of the Historical Society*, 12:2 (June 2012): 205-227; "A Revolutionary in the Making: Jean Paton and the Early Decades of Sealed Adoption Records, 1949–1977," *Adoption & Culture*, 3 (2012): 33-62; and "Jean Paton, Christian Adoption, and the Reunification of Families," *The Journal of Christian Legal Thought*, 2:1 (May 2012 ): 20-22 (abstract). Full article online: <http://www.clsnet.org/document.doc?id=357>. His new book, *Jean Paton and the Struggle to Reform American Adoption*, will be published by the University of Michigan Press in the Fall of 2013.

MARY CLAYPOOL has completed her dissertation at the University of Wisconsin, Madison. The title is "At the Crossroads of Identity: Intersections Between Adoption and Colonization in Nineteenth Century French and Twentieth Century Francophone Literature." Discussing novels from countries as diverse as France, the Congo, Algeria, and Canada, she shows how the process of individual or national identity formation for the colonized subject mirrors that of the adopted subject.

PAMELA FOX gave a talk at the 2012 NWSA Conference entitled "The 'Telling Part': Mirrors, Mothers, and Markings in Jackie Kay's *The Adoption Papers* and *Red Dust Road*" and will be presenting an expanded version of that paper at the "Post- 1968 European Women's Writing on Motherhood" conference in London in October 2013.

SHEILA GANZ writes, "The documentary *Unlocking the Heart of Adoption* continues to

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## Member News Continued...

air on [www.documentarychannel.com](http://www.documentarychannel.com). Check listing for time and channel in your area. This 56 minute film explores the lifelong process of adoption for adoptees, birthparents and adoptive parents in same race and transracial adoptions with illuminating historical background. Watch trailer and info [www.unlockingtheheart.com](http://www.unlockingtheheart.com)." On Saturday, May 11, 2013, in San Francisco, CA, Sheila Ganz took part in the "Our Place at the Table: Honoring Birthmother Stories," a groundbreaking exhibit about mothers who have placed or lost a child to adoption, a collaboration with The Adoption Museum Project and On Your Feet Foundation. Sheila showed a photo of the life size sculpture "Ten Minutes" of a mother holding her baby in a hospital bed, which she constructs throughout the course of the film.

<https://www.facebook.com/events/493767847345256/>

MARGARET HOMANS, ASAC co-chair, has written *The Imprint of Another Life: Adoption Narratives and Human Possibility*, forthcoming from the University of Michigan Press in June. Margaret writes in her introduction: "Over the last decade, since becoming an adoptive parent, I have been reading about adoption in an effort to understand how people talk about their experiences of it: the passionately held beliefs that motivate the choices they make and the joys and sorrows that accompany each stage of life with adoption. In the course of my reading . . . I have come to see that adoption raises the most vital questions about human identity and the value and meaning of individual human lives. This book is my attempt to give order both to what I learned about adoption and to what I think adoption reveals." This book addresses a series of questions about common beliefs about adoption. Underlying these beliefs is the assumption that human qualities are innate and intrinsic, an assumption often held by adoptees and their families, sometimes at great emotional cost. Homans explores representations of adoption that reimagine human possibility by questioning this assumption and conceiving of alternatives. The texts examined include fiction (e.g., classic novels such as *Silas Marner*, *What Maisie Knew*, and *Beloved*); memoirs by adoptees, adoptive parents, and birthmothers; drama, documentary films, advice manuals, social science writing, and published interviews with adoptees, parents, and birth parents.

Along the way the book tracks the quests of adoptees who, whether or not they meet their original families, must construct their own stories rather than finding them; follows transnational adoptees as they return, hopes held high, to Korea and China; looks over the shoulders of a generation of girls adopted from China as they watch Disney's iconic *Mulan*, with its alluring story of destiny written on the skin; and listens to birthmothers as they struggle to tell painful secrets held for decades.

LIZ LATTY has published *Split*, her first chapbook, from Unthinkable Creatures Press in Gainesville. It begins, "She was a question, a dream, a secret, a problem."

FRANCES LATCHFORD's collection, *Adoption and Mothering*, has recently been published by Demeter Press. Among its contributors, in addition to Frances, are Kate Livingston, Jenny Wills, and Elisha Marr.

JESSACA LEINAWEAVER has a book, *Adoptive Migration: Raising Latinos in Spain*, coming out from Duke this September; it can be pre-ordered at Duke at

<http://www.dukeupress.edu/Catalog/ViewProduct.php?productid=50811>.

Here's the description: "Spain has one of the highest per capita international adoption rates in the world. Internationally adopted kids are coming from many of the same countries as do the many immigrants who are radically transforming Spain's demographics. Based on her interviews with adoptive families, migrant families, and adoption professionals, Jessaca B. Leinaweaver examines the experiences of Latin American children adopted into a rapidly multiculturalizing society. She focuses on Peruvian adoptees and immigrants in Madrid, but her conclusions apply more broadly, to any pairing of adoptees and migrants from the same country. Leinaweaver finds that international adoption, particularly in a context of high rates of transnational migration, is best understood as both a privileged and unusual form of migration, and a crucial and contested method of family formation. *Adoptive Migration* is a

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## Member News Continued...

fascinating study of the implications for adopted children of growing up in a country that discriminates against their fellow immigrants." An article based on this research ("Kinship Paths To and From the New Europe: A Unified Analysis of Peruvian Adoption and Migration." *Journal of Latin American and Caribbean Anthropology* 16(2)) won the Jose Maria Arguedas Article Award, given by the Peru Section of the Latin American Studies Association, in 2012.

Jessica has also recently published on a very different topic--"Practice Mothers," *Signs* 38(2). The article examines the "practice houses," or home management houses, that used to be a feature of home economics departments of land-grant universities around North America, and their use of "practice babies." At the Department of Home Economics' practice house at the University of Manitoba in Winnipeg, Canada, during the 1930s and 1940s, thirty-three "borrowed" children (from the city's department of child welfare), referred to as practice babies, were tended to by a monthly rotation of women students who themselves were supervised by a house mother.

(<http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1086/667197>)

NANCY MCCABE gave talks about her book *Crossing the Blue Willow Bridge: A Journey to my Daughter's Birthplace in China* at Spalding University and Xavier University of Louisiana in addition to libraries and bookstores in NW PA and Kansas. An excerpt from the book, published in *Prairie Schooner* under the title "Threads" in 2011, was on the Notable List for both the last edition of *Best American Essays* and *Best American Nonrequired Reading*. Her essay "A Panda Raised by a Goose," about taking her daughter to spend a summer in China, is in the spring 2013 issue of *Natural Bridge*.

Social worker SUSAN HARRIS O'CONNOR recently authored *The Harris Narratives: An Introspective Study of a Transracial Adoptee*, now available on amazon. This book consists of five autobiographical performance narratives that Ms. O'Connor has used as teaching tools since 1996. [http://www.amazon.com/Harris-Narratives-Introspective-Transracial-Adoptee/dp/0984921621/ref=sr\\_1\\_7?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1356183820&sr=1-](http://www.amazon.com/Harris-Narratives-Introspective-Transracial-Adoptee/dp/0984921621/ref=sr_1_7?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1356183820&sr=1-)

**7&keywords=harris+narratives** This book has already become required reading in a graduate course. Susan has also co-authored "The development of racial identity in transracially adopted persons: An ecological approach," *Adoption and Fostering* (Autumn/Winter 2012), by Ung, T., Harris O'Connor, S., Pillidge, R., which explores her racial identity model, consisting of five constructs (genetic, imposed, cognitive, feeling and visual), which she shares in one of her narratives created in 1999.

ELISE PREBIN's book *Meeting Once More: The Korean Side of Transnational Adoption* has just been published by New York University Press. This book analyzes material ranging from popular Korean television shows about reunions to the development of her own relationship with her birth family over time in the light of Korean culture, and shows how South Korea is itself affected by the return of so many adult adoptees from around the world.

MARIAN QUARTLY writes: "The Australian History of Adoption Project is publishing an account of its findings under the title *The Market in Children: Stories of Australian Adoption*. The book includes stories of the experience of adoptees and mothers, and a general history of Australian adoption directed to the general reader. It will be published in late 2013 by Monash University Publishing <http://publishing.monash.edu/>"



### THE MARKET IN CHILDREN

Stories of Australian Adoption

Marian Quartly, Sharlee Swain, and Denise Culbert

The Market in Children: Stories of Australian Adoption tells the history of adoption in Australia from its beginning in the nineteenth century to its decline at the beginning of the twentieth. The authors find that market in children has long existed in the early years supply unmet demand, needy children were hard to place. Mid-twentieth century demand and supply grew together with adoption presented as the perfect solution to two social problems, identity and legitimacy. Supply declined in the 1970s and demand turned to new global markets. Now these markets are closing, but technology provides new opportunities and challenges are being raised in the emerging markets of India and the United States. At the core of adoption in Australia lies a tension, law, and performance across the country are speaking to parents and children to the past, and in past practices, the local, domestic and historical, continues between the past and the present and challenges the view that the best interests of the child can ever be protected in an environment where the market for children is allowed to flourish. The authors of The Market in Children are transnational scholars expert in the history of the family within history and the making of public policy in Australia.

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### THE MARKET IN CHILDREN

STORIES OF AUSTRALIAN ADOPTION

Marian Quartly, Sharlee Swain, and Denise Culbert



MATINE SPENCE has an article forthcoming in the new journal *Women, Gender and Families of Color*, Fall, 2013: "Whose Stereotypes and Racial Myths?: The National Urban League and the 1950s Roots of Color-Blind Adoption Policy."

## Film Review: *Resilience*

SooJin Pate  
Macalester College

Since the 1990s, several Korean adoptee filmmakers have provided nuanced representations of the Korean American adoptee experience. In the experimental short films of Me-K Ahn, Helen Lee, and Kim Su Theiler, and the feature-length documentary films of Deann Borshay Liem, these artists have disrupted conventional narratives of Korean adoption (as a humanitarian rescue project built on love and charity) and challenged dominant depictions of the Korean adoptee (as highly assimilable children who transition seamlessly) through the cinematic renderings of their adoptee experiences.<sup>1</sup>

*Resilience*, the award-winning and highly anticipated second film by Tammy Chu,<sup>2</sup> not only continues this strong tradition of dissent in Korean adoptee filmmaking but also breaks new ground by centering its narrative around two historically absent figures in Korean adoptee films: the male adoptee and the Korean birthmother. The overwhelming majority of Korean adoptee films have focused on the lives of adopted females; therefore, providing the male adoptee perspective is a refreshing addition.<sup>3</sup> But perhaps even more significant than this is Chu's treatment of the Korean birthmother in her film. *Resilience* is the first documentary film that features the Korean birthmother as a lead character in the Korean adoptee cinematic narrative. The Korean birthmother plays just as significant—if not more—of a role as the Korean adoptee in this film. In so doing, *Resilience* breaks new ground in Korean adoptee filmmaking by juxtaposing the experiences and perspectives of the Korean birthmother and her adopted child.

The film begins by showing the parallel lives of our two central characters: Brent (Sungwook) Beesley, who lives in South Dakota, and Myungja Noh, who lives in Cheongju, South Korea. It opens with Brent preparing dinner for his two daughters, Lexus and Alyssa, while they set up a checkerboard



game on the kitchen table. Myungja is introduced to the audience in a similar manner: she is preparing dinner for her daughter Hyojung (who looks to be around a similar age as Brent's daughters), while Hyojung prepares to do homework. This narrative technique serves to set up one of the underlying themes of this film: that despite the distance—geographical, cultural, and linguistic—Brent and his mother Myungja have similar struggles, concerns, and desires. To be sure, after they reunite, Myungja conveys to the audience that while reuniting with her son was momentous, being able to communicate with her son is her main concern: “What I really want is for us to speak the same language. Then we can talk about everything in our hearts.” Brent also speaks of his desire to be able to communicate directly with his mother (rather than through a translator). He wants to get to know who she is and how she feels; he wants to know her beyond the climactic and celebratory affects of reunion.

And it is this focus—what happens after reunion—that sets this film apart from other Korean adoptee films. Not all Korean adoptee films focus on reunion. Those films that do often frame their narratives around a “search and reunion” trope, ending the film with the adoptee reuniting with her birth family. In *Resilience*, the search-and-reunion journey is completed in the first 25 minutes of the film. The remaining two-thirds of the film is focused on what happens after they reunite, as Chu follows them for nearly five

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## Film Review: *Resilience* (continued)

years after their initial reunion. During this time, we learn that Brent (Sungwook) was not given up by his birthmother. Instead, after her husband had gambled away all their money, she left her infant son with her husband and in-laws to look for a job. When she returned, the baby was gone. The family refused to tell her what happened to her son. Although she recently found out that he was sent to the United States for adoption, for decades, she assumed that he was sent to a rich family in South Korea. The point of Myungja's story is this: she did not *give up* her child. Rather, as Myungja more accurately describes, she *lost* her child and has suffered enormously because of it: "I lost everything when I lost my child... What's the use of living when I lost my child? I lived with that thought every day." So when she gets pregnant again with Hyojung, she decides to keep her baby despite the stigma and struggle of being an unwed mother: "Since I lost my first child and couldn't raise him, I was determined to fulfill my duties to my second child."

While the loss of her son made her determined to raise her daughter as a single mother, gaining back her son (via reunion) inspires her to fight for birthmother rights. The film captures Myungja organizing a petition to "End Overseas Adoption." In addition, we see her working at the Salvation Army Unwed Mother's Home: "I volunteer here to help them keep their babies so that they don't have to send them away. Because there's so much I couldn't do for my own son and because this is a place for single mothers, I started working here to help enable them to raise their own kids so they don't suffer in the same way." She concedes that while everybody wants the best for their children, "adoption is not the answer" because "the heartache doesn't go away. It's always there." The heartache remains because of the cultural, linguistic, and geographical barriers that continue to exist even after reunion.

By featuring the perspective of the Korean birthmother, Chu helps to expand the politics of Korean adoption to include the rights of birthmothers. As a Korean adoptee, Chu uses her film to bring attention to the historically silenced

traumas of the person who is arguably the most ignored party in the adoption triad: the birthmother. Through her film, she not only reveals the suffering that birthmothers experience but also their tremendous resiliency. They are able to turn their endless heartache into activism, channeling their pain to fight for the basic right of birthparents to parent their own children. In this way, the film becomes a clarion call for all of us—adoptees and nonadoptees alike—to become allies to Korean birthmothers so that the cycle of parental separation from their children ends.

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<sup>1</sup> See Me-K Ahn, *Living in Half Tones* (NY: Third World Newsreel, 1994) and *Undertow* (NY: Third World Newsreel, 1995); Helen Lee, *Subrosa* (NY: Women Make Movies, 2000); Kim Su Theiler, *Great Girl* (NY: Women Make Movies, 1994); Deann Borshay Liem, *First Person Plural* (San Francisco: National Asian American Telecommunications Association, 2000).

<sup>2</sup> See Tammy Tolle, *Searching for Go-Hyang* (NY: Women Make Movies, 1998). Her first film recounts the reunification between Tammy's birth family and her and her twin sister (both adopted to the same American family), as well as detailing their trauma of being adopted into an American family that physically and mentally abused them.

<sup>3</sup> Prior to *Resilience*, only two feature-length documentary films have centered on a male Korean American adoptee. See Nathan Adolfsen, *Passing Through* (San Francisco: National Asian American Telecommunications Association, 1998) and Jason Hoffman, *Going Home* (NY: ThirdCat Productions, 2009). Just recently, another film by a male Korean American adoptee was produced: *Finding Seoul* (2011) by John Sanvidge.



## Film Review: *Somewhere Between*

Margaret Homans  
Yale University

Linda Goldstein Knowlton's 2012 feature-length documentary *Somewhere Between* follows four teenaged adoptees from China as they ponder their lives as transnational and transracial adoptees, question the meaning of their adoptions, and search for knowledge about the past. Each girl sees her situation differently with regard to racism, identity, family, nation, gender, and history, and yet the connections and conversations that build up across the film give it a compelling coherence. Early in the film Haley describes herself laughingly as "a banana . . . yellow on the outside and white on the inside;" later Jenna and her sister Sara consider this familiar trope and then revise it. Sara: "I don't really think that's true; I think it's kind of a mix." Jenna: "Like a scrambled egg?" Sara: "I don't like eggs;" both laugh. Framed as the producer-director's own quest for knowledge about China adoption inspired by her young daughter Ruby, with whom the film begins and ends, the film has been greeted with favorable reviews in online forums and by film reviewers who have described it as "emotionally riveting," "intimate and compelling," and "very affecting." In a review circulated by FCC-NY, Martha Osborne of Rainbowkids.com says "I loved it."

I loved it too. Knowlton has positioned the film both as a niche film aimed at the adoption community – screenings in the summer of 2012 included post-film Q and A's with the producer-director and some of the film's poised and eloquent stars, and the DVD includes a second disk titled "Beyond Somewhere Between" intended as an educational resource on transracial and transnational adoption – and as a feature film of intrinsic dramatic interest addressed to a wide audience. At an hour and a half in length and marketed for theatrical release, it is even more ambitious than such powerful yet more modestly scaled documentaries as Changfu Chang's films about China adoption (which typically track one



or two families) and Stephanie Wang-Breal's 2010 *Wo Ai Ni Mommy*. Knowlton has worked as the producer on some wide-release feature films, and her film's production values are very high: the colors are lush and expressive, the original music is haunting, there's an admirably high proportion of dramatic scenes to talking heads, and the film crew expensively followed the girls not only to China but also to Europe where some of them traveled as members of Global Girls, an international organization for China adoptees. At a time when documentary film is garnering increasing respect and popularity (just as is occurring, in literature, with the memoir), *Somewhere Between* might be the crossover adoption film that appeals to a general audience and that by doing so may help to achieve the goal Adam Pertman articulates in "Beyond Somewhere Between," that of normalizing adoption.

The film has two suspenseful story lines that lead to dramatic climaxes: Haley's successful search for her birth parents and Fang's sponsorship of the U.S. adoption of a bright little girl with cerebral palsy whose situation had been deemed hopeless by her caregivers. Both plots resolve in crowded, emotionally fraught scenes in hotel rooms in China. Haley's search casts an especially long shadow over the film, which traces the impetus for her search to her meeting, on the Global Girls trip, with a Korean adoptee who criticizes transnational adoption, and follows the aftereffects of her search on Ann, who now wants to search, too.

For me, however, other scenes stood out

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## Film Review: *Somewhere Between* (continued)

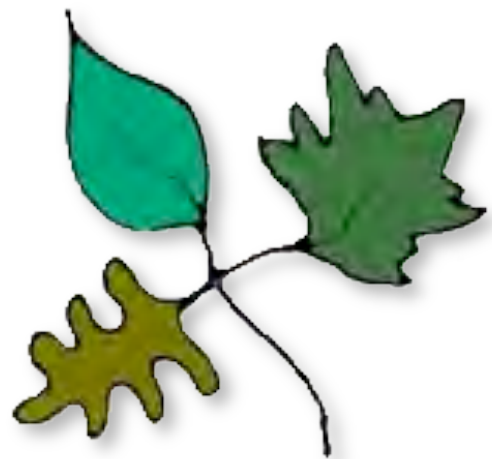
as even more significant than these plot-driven parts of the film. At different points Jenna reads from an exquisitely crafted essay about speaking to groups of parents: “Traveling to talks, I know how to pick out the right pieces – blue for racism, red for culture, green for identity. I can fold the colored squares using just the right words and give the parents a crane, an orchid – some shapely advice out of my sheets of memories.” This essay is published in Bert Ballard’s *Pieces of Me: Who Do I Want To Be? Voice by and for Adopted Teens*; Jenna also provides the film’s title, although you only find that out if you watch the trailer. And in an outtake included in the DVD, Fang poignantly recites a poem titled “I Am the One” that begins “I am a daughter of China” and lays bare her yearning to find her birth parents. Complimenting the girls for speaking “candidly,” one reviewer aptly comments: “Sometimes their words sound like poetry. Sometimes their words are poetry.”

Especially striking, too, are the linked yet contrasting moments when the girls address the gender politics of China adoption. Ann says, succinctly, “the fact that I was probably given up because I was a girl doesn’t really bother me . . . In America it’s more like, I’m a girl and I can do what you can do, and I can do it in heels, so deal.” Talking a less tough line, Fang (given up at age five, able to recall her mother piercing her ears) dwells on her certainty that her mother wanted her although “in China back then my dad, he really needed a son and I was essentially a mistake to him; I wasn’t supposed to be a girl.” Traveling to China in search of clues about her birth family, Fang visits a village of the Dai ethnic minority whom she has been told she resembles; we see the dismay on her face when she learns from a group of villagers that the writing of the Dai language may be learned only by boys. “When you come into the world and you learn that . . . your dad thinks less of you because of your gender . . . it’s wrong and . . . I want to prove him wrong. We deserve fair treatment. And especially in China. I know I can’t change a whole country, but I’d like to,” Fang reflects.

As for the theme of identity that motivates the film (Knowlton’s voiceover at the beginning: “I wonder how I will be able to help [Ruby] build a strong sense of identity when there are so many

missing pieces from the early parts of her life”), Knowlton shows the girls throughout the film using a spatial lexicon activated by the phrase “Somewhere Between” to sort through their identity issues. Fang says “I’m a child stuck between two countries” and that she feels neither Chinese, nor American, nor even Chinese American; Jenna sings “country roads, take me home” while strumming her guitar; a humorous scene between Ann and Haley’s three year old sister raises the serious issue of whether Ann comes from China or just from Pennsylvania; and Jenna, speaking over visuals of a map of China, movingly describes the shared yet individuated “journeys” and “road home” of adoptees from China, who “share two cultures.” At the very end, laughing ruefully, Fang says, “there is no Fangtopia” – her fantasy of “my own little planet” that would combine “most of China” with the best parts of America – “there is only the world.” Time and again the girls are filmed on the move: in buses, cars, on the back of a motorbike, traveling the world over. The world is a big place, and these girls have shown us the whole world is theirs.

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