Dealing with the "Otherness" of Your Own Children. Spanish Children's Books about Transnational Adoption

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Over the last two decades, a considerable number of books featuring adoptees have been published in different Western countries. These books present characters meant to serve as models for identification for young adopted children, who are believed to be in need of stories about their origins to explain how they belong to their families and to their adoptive countries, in order to be framed in a broader social and cultural context in which their personal stories and biographies are emphasized. Children who do not look like their parents are recurrently asked to explain this difference (which in most cases of transnational adoptions is also a difference with the symbolically white context in which they grow up). It may well be the case that the numerous books having internationally-adopted children as protagonists not only cater to the needs of these children, but they also cater to those of their parents. The books may be regarded as being targeted to those White middle-class couples who feel unable to navigate the complexities of 'race' in society and experience the need to understand, justify, and culturally construct their adoptive bonds with their children.

In this chapter, I focus on a number of books published in Spain over the last fifteen years that have been recommended for children up to 11 by a prestigious institution that promotes reading, the Fundación Germán Sanchez Ruiperez. Spain presents a very interesting case study for adoption narratives since between 1995 and 2005 it was the European country adopting the largest number of children, while Catalonia was the region with the highest percentage of adoptions per live births in the world (Selman 34; Marre 74). International adoption has thus become very visible in Spain, a visibility that was translated into the children's book market, where we can identify a niche of books that normalizes family diversity. These books reflect new discourses circulating that point to the Global North/Global South divide. Research on adoption cultures in the U.S.A. shows that adoptive families are increasingly describing themselves as 'interracial' and transnational. Today the foreign origin of the child is not only acknowledged, but it becomes pivotal in the construction of the adoptee's life narrative. In different Western countries, adoptive parents engage in what psychologists call practices of 'racial/ethnic socialization' that include, but are not limited to, giving their children foreign names, talking to them about the culture of their native countries, buying 'ethnic' books or toys, enrolling them in language lessons, and traveling for holidays to the countries where they were born (see Jacobson). Providing adoptees with specially tailored stories appears to be crucial in these processes of socialization related to the origins of adopted children.

A great number of Spanish internationally adopted children –some 70%, according to a recent study– report having suffered from discrimination, racism, or xenophobia at schools[1].

The media, nevertheless, most often depict a society that welcomes international adoptees and celebrates the diversity resulting from adoption, a diversity that is not only related to emerging multiculturalism, but also to a new landscape of family patterns. It is only in recent years, with the coming of age of the first generation of international adoptees in the country – who are mostly girls adopted from China in the mid 1990s—that this celebratory self-presentation has started to be questioned.[2] Anthropological research with Spanish adoptive families has shown that adoptive parents appear to be unaware of the racism their children experience, yet they do engage in some practices of 'culture keeping' or 'ethnic racial socialization' like the ones described above (San Román and Marre 131-133).

Interestingly, most of the books about adoption recommended in Spain by the Fundación Germán Sánchez Ruipérez are structured upon a recurrent story, a "masterplot" (47) as conceptualized by Herman Porter Abbott. The analysis of this plot not only reveals features of the dominant discourse on international adoption, but also sheds light onto how books and cultural production play a role in the making of the family, or, to borrow a concept from Norwegian anthropologist Signe Howell, in the '*kinning* of foreigners.' These books may be read as responding to what American anthropologist Sara K. Dorow phrases as the "impossible contradictions" of international adoption. Dorow argues that the identity and sense of belonging of the adoptees will be always haunted by: a) how, as children, they are at once both a commodity to be exchanged and an object of care and compassion; b) the contradiction between biological origins and artificial kinship; and c) how adoptees are both citizens and foreigners in the countries where they grow up (Dorow *Transnational Adoption: A Cultural Economy of Race, Gender, and Kinship* 16-23).

In this article, I shall first outline the structure of this recurrent plot in these books and argue that in these stories, adoption is narrated as relating to the biological process of having a child, that is, as mirroring the processes of conceiving, expecting, and delivering a child. Next, I shall analyze the narrative voices and "focalization" layers (Bal 160) to explain how the points of view employed by the authors enable the performance of kinship and justify international adoption at a time when the practice is becoming increasingly contested.

The journey to parent (you)

If we look at the list of books recommended about adoption by the Fundación Germán Sánchez Ruiperez, we note that half of the titles are structured upon a very similar story. This masterplot starts with the presentation of a heterosexual couple —there are very few examples depicting single-parent families and none presenting same-sex partners. The story first tells us about the couple's strong desire to parent a child and the long and difficult process they face before being able to travel to pick him or her up. In Aristotelian terms, we may understand that the presentation of characters is that of the expecting parents, and the action of the plot is the adoption process, which ends with the journey to the origin country.

The climax, therefore, is the parents' encounter with the child, experienced as if giving birth; a final denouement comes once they are all back 'home.'

The adoption masterplot thus begins by constructing a powerful desire to parent a child, which takes the form of an immeasurable love for the imagined child to be adopted. The expecting parents get prepared and overcome different hitches, as if they were enduring a (difficult) pregnancy. The child, on the other hand, is also portrayed as expecting, but lacks agency and individuality.

I Love You Like Crazy Cakes, a children's bestseller about adoption translated into Spanish as *Te quiero, niña bonita*, and *En algún lugar de China*, a book written by a Spanish adoptive mother, recount the experience of adopting a Chinese girl. Both stories begin with the mother handling the bureaucracy and preparing the trip and end after they arrive 'back' home with the child.

The first pages in these two books give us good insight into the organization of agency in these stories. As stressed by scholars working on the semiotics of picture-books,' visual elements often have the role of 'saying' what the verbal text does not (Nikolajeva and Scott 12). In these double-spreads, the adoptive mothers are active while the children wait in impersonal orphanage rooms (Picture 1). Those images denote the children's family-less existence in orphanages and speak of the lack of identity of these children, who are transformed into individuals only when they are encountered by the new parents. The beds in a row may also recall images of industrialized production. Strikingly, both books describe adoption from China, the principal origin country of adoptees and, as we know, also the main producer of commercial goods for a globalized market. However, the textual account in these books avoids referring to orphanages or to any of the geopolitical issues that favor overseas adoption: the texts only mention that a child has been 'waiting' for parents.

La Galera – a Catalan publisher that specializes in dealing with diversity— presents a collection about adoption with six titles targeted at the most common origin countries of Spanish-adopted children: China, Russia, Ethiopia, Nepal, Ukraine, and Colombia. They were all written by different authors but follow very closely this masterplot of international adoption by first presenting the couple, then continuing by describing the journey, and ending happily at 'home.' These stories avoid delving into the parents' desire to adopt a child, but focus instead on how much they wanted to become parents and how this desire took them on these unusual journeys.

The main event of the adoption masterplot is the trip to pick up the adoptee; books often include drawings of airplanes or suitcases and describe this journey as a very long one. In *Llegué de Colombia*, the narrator explains: "el viaje fue largo, muy largo y muy

emocionante. Tuvimos que coger tres aviones y volamos sobre pueblos, montañas y ciudades; incluso sobre el inmenso océano Atlántico" [the trip was long, very long and very exciting. We had to take three planes and flew over towns, mountains, and cities; we even flew over the huge Atlantic Ocean] (unpaginated). *Llegué de… Rusia* uses the same resource: "tuvimos que coger dos aviones y atravesar toda Europa" [(we had to) take two planes and cross all of Europe] (and an illustrated world map shows how far away Siberia is from Spain) (unpaginated). The geographical distance is stressed as evidence of the fact that adopting is not an easy way to get a baby, but rather, a process to be compared to the biological process of having a child. The adoptive mother in *Isha, nacida del corazón* is afraid to fly but manages to travel twice to India —a trip that requires two connecting flights, which she explains— before being able to bring her daughter home. In some cases, these difficulties also include an account of the hitches faced at home when applying for adoption. The narrator of *Llegué de… Rusia* also recounts that the couple first had to marry in order to adopt him: "¡Quéjaleo! (…) Lo hicimos por ti, ¡y fue un día muy feliz!" [What a hassle! (…) We did it for you, and it was a very happy day!] (unpaginated).

The difficulties do not fade out after landing in the country where the child was born; cultural differences impose new problems which are, nevertheless, treated as minor ones. In *Llegué de… Ucrania*, the narrator says: "De nuestra estancia en Ucrania recordamos mucho los platos típicos: el kéfir, la *smetana*, el *borsh* y unos pasteles muy dulces. Pero costaba encontrar la comida, y siempre teníamos que caminar mucho para ir a comprar" [From our stay in Ukraine, we remember a lot of the typical dishes: the kefir, the *smetana*, the *borsh* and some very sweet pies. But it was very difficult to find food, and we always had to walk a long way to buy it] (unpaginated). It is unclear to the reader whether it was also difficult for Ukrainians or if it is a problem uniquely faced by Western tourists, unaccustomed to the local food. In any case, this account stresses the parents' ability to get by in that country as well as their respect for the local culture, while remarking upon those differences as obstacles for them to overcome.

The difficulties are forgotten the very moment the couple meets their child. The climax of these stories is this encounter, a moment usually told by emphasizing the uniqueness and singularity of the child and how parents and child prove compatible from the very first moment. In *En algún lugar de China*, the couple meets the Chinese girl sitting outside the orphanage and the three are united in a hug: "Madre mía ¡qué alegría!" (22) [Oh my God, what a joy!] (unpaginated); The parents adopting in Ukraine tell the girl "enseguida nos robaste el corazón" [you stole our hearts right away], and those in Nepal that "en tus ojos brillaba una luz muy especial" [a very special light shone in your eyes]. The mothers in both *Tell Me Again About the Night I was Born* and *I Love You Like Crazy Cakes* shed tears of joy when holding the baby for the first time.

If there is a driving force behind the masterplot of international adoption, it is the force of love. The infinite love of the adoptive parents is put forward not only to explain how children born to a foreign mother can be parented by a Western couple, but also to weave the family together: the love of the parents creates that indissoluble parent-child tie. This is perhaps implicitly in opposition to the progenitors who relinquished the child while the adoptive parents are presented as loving him or her unconditionally. That powerful tie of love is born from the desire of having a child —it is, therefore, born from the power of imagination. The narrator in *Llegué de… Rusia* opens up by telling the adopted children: "Mientras imaginábamos como seríais, ya os queríamos mucho" (unpaginated) [While we were imagining how you were going to be, we already loved you a lot]. This vast love of the parents is in consonance with contemporary discourses on the family as described by sociologists Ulrich Beck and Elisabeth Beck-Gernsheim in *The Normal Chaos of Love.* Beck and Beck-Gernsheim make the point that the transformations of sexual life, domestic labor, and equal rights for women in the second half of the past century have had a huge impact. Among other effects, the potential instability of couples' love for each other turns the child into the "unique, primary love object," (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 37), a bastion against the vanishing chances of loving and being loved. Such love narratives inform the cultural construction of parenthood at the turn of the 20th century. In the case of adopted children, the absence of an undeniable blood tie makes this performance of love even more necessary, and in the encounter with the child, this love first manifests itself as if it had a magical force: parents are surprised by the uniqueness of their children and tell a story in which the children respond by accepting this love promise. The journey home and the child's successful adaptation — represented by a good night's sleep— reassures the reader that what began as presumably fragile infatuation will last forever.

After that first encounter, the story is quickly closed with a trip back 'home,' a trip that may resemble the return from the hospital and the baby's first time at what will be his/her home. The adoptee's sense of belonging is sealed on occasions with references to a broader group of people that celebrates the arrival of the is child as in *Te quiero niña bonita*, when all relatives and friends come to visit the new mother and her baby. Many of these stories end by referring to the first night the child spends at the new home and most include images of the parents at the bedside or at the door's threshold. Some of these illustrations function as meta-narratives, showing the parents reading a book that closely resembles the one the reader has in his or her hands. In *Tell Me Again About the Night I Was Born*, the adopted girl falls asleep under a book with the title "I" that is opened over her chest. The same title had appeared at the very beginning, when the girl first asks her father to read her story again. In a similar way, the last page of *En algún lugar de China* features the mother sitting by the bed of the adoptee reading a book with a very similar shape and size to the one

the reader would have in her hands, suggesting that this mother is reading the same story. In these metanarrative references, we may trace how the fictionalized account of adoption is meant to be performative, to have a real impact on the life context of the adoptee readers.

We may read these stories as having a therapeutic aim: by telling certain stories about adoption, the emotional well-being of the adoptee can be secured, and he or she can have a good night's sleep. This therapeutic aim is to be related with the idea that abandonment and adoption inflict a "primal wound" upon the adoptees that might jeopardize their future affective relationships. In these books, therefore, the children's rather traumatic past is only obliquely evoked in the illustrations, which largely avoid delving into it. Interestingly, in all but one of these recommended books about adoption, the word "orphanage" is avoided; euphemisms such as 'shelter' or 'children's house' are used instead. While the visual depictions of orphanage rooms convey a life of hardships, the textual account emphasizes how the children spent happy days there even if they missed having parents.

Addressing the ideal adopted reader

Children's books about adoption very often take the form of testimonial accounts told by adoptive parents and addressing an extra-diegetic narratee, the adopted child supposedly reading the book. In other cases, they are narrated by the adoptee, yet, very interestingly, the latter appears to lack a point of view of his or her own and, in an inverted way, addresses the adopted parents, asking for the story about his or her origins to be told. It is remarkable that in all these cases the adoptions are told from the point of view of a character within the adoptive family —parents, adoptee, or a sibling— as previous research conducted by Lies Wesseling and myself on books about adoption in China shows. These books aim to assist the family's own storytelling (cf. García González and Wesseling 260-263). Kristin Langellier and Eric Peterson argue that families are small cultures in which certain ways of telling stories are passed on through generations and this passing over depends on the retelling and performance of those stories over time (Langellier and Peterson 40-43). These books may be read as devices meant to be used to perform these stories.

International adoption —whatever precautions are pursued in international conventions— is part of a global market, and parents become aware of it during the process (Dorow *Transnational Adoption: A Cultural Economy of Race, Gender, and Kinship 115*). To counteract this anxiety, to divert this awareness, certain stories are told and performed. By "performed," I refer to J.L. Austin's speech act theory and his categorization of "performative utterances" (Stainton 239) to describe situations in which saying something is doing something, rather than simply reporting or describing it. In the next pages, I shall trace the

performative function of these adoption books regarding the points of views used to render the stories as well as in the ways in which they give cues for a repetitive domestic storytelling.

Mieke Bal's elaboration on Gérard Genette's concepts of 'focalization' and 'focalizors' (163), to be distinguished in function, not identity, from the narrator, are useful to understand the notion of 'point of view.' The focal character 'sees' the narration, and, even if the focal character may coincide with the narrator, they need to be differentiated. Bal emphasizes that even in supposedly objective third-person narrations, events are presented from within a certain vision, so she proposes to complement the question of 'who is speaking' with that of 'whose vision is presented,' a question raised in the awareness that language shapes vision and worldview rather than the other way around (Bal 17). Answering the question of who speaks in a text does not necessarily explain whose eyes are lent to the reader in order to understand the events and the story's inner world. An inquiry into the focalization of narration is, therefore, crucial for an understanding of how the text projects subjective positions onto the readers.

Where most critics differentiate between first and third person narrators, Bal suggests that narration is always carried out in a first person's voice, since there is always an "I" seeing the story and speaking from a determined viewpoint, whether or not that "I" is an actual character in the story. She proposes, therefore, to distinguish between an "external narrator (EN)" (22), in the cases in which this voice does not refer to itself as a character and a "character-bound narrator (CN)" (22) when it is identified with a center of consciousness that plays a role in the story. Bal further differentiates between "character-bound focalization (CF)" (148) when the story is seen through the eyes of a character (it may shift from one to another even if the narrator remains the same) and the "external focalization (EF)" (149), when an anonymous agent functions as the focalizer. Bal suggests that the EF may delegate or yield focalization to the characters. Bal's categories help not only to identify the points of view from which the stories are rendered but also when this point of view is transferred, passing over ideological positions within the story. I examine these transferences to illuminate on how these books function as justifications of international adoption, naturalizing the adoptive bond and neutralizing other possible narrations.

The outset of the six books about international adoption published by La Galera reveal this effort of transferring a story and inscribing a memory on the adoptees. Each of these books uses the imagined voice of the adoptee in the title: *Llegué de… (country). Cuéntame mi historia.*[I Came From… (country), Tell me my story], while the 'fabula' inside is narrated by one or both parents. The title, therefore, suggests that the children are asking for this story to be told and promises that they will take it as a foundational block in their biographical constructions.

Children's books about adoption appear to be instrumental to what Norwegian anthropologist Signe Howell calls the 'kinning of foreigners' (Howell 2), that is, the cultural processes and narratives involved in making the adopted child one of his or her kin. As claimed before, these books are not presented as the parents' testimonies but as stories meant to be foundational to the adoptees' (auto)biographies. Possible tensions of parental and children's rendering of the stories of their adoptions are not explored. Yet one of the main points of debate today for researchers on international adoption is the power imbalances in what is called the 'adoption triad' formed by the biological parents, the adoptive parents, and the adoptee. Critics of the legislation and policies on international adoption claim that it has been crafted to fulfill the expectations of the adoptive parents, the most powerful end of the adoptive triangle, while leaving the voiceless, poor, uneducated biological parents out of the picture. Discussions regarding whether adoptions are carried out with the 'best interests' of the children in mind help to obscure how adoption actually follows the interests and needs of the adoptive parents and turn the adopted children into objects of protection rather than considering them subjects with rights (Marre and San Román; Fonseca et al.). These discussions have become more notorious when celebrities are involved, such as when Madonna's or the Jolie-Pitt's adopted children have been claimed by their biological mothers (cf. Jacey).

The titles of the *Llegué de…* collection may have been inspired by Jamie Lee Curtis's *Tell me again…*, a book that also emulates the voice of the adopted child as if asking for her story to be told:

> *Tell me again about the night I was born ... Tell me again how you would adopt me and be my parents... Tell me again about the first time you held me in your arms ... (2-3)*

Every page starts with a "tell me again," indicating that the character narrator (CN) quotes from a previous narration and that the story told by the parents will be appropriated by the child. Pulling from Mieke Bal's classifications, we could say that this CN —the adopted girl— narrates the story while its focalization is through the parents, who are the ultimate viewers/tellers of the story about the child's origins. In this book, and to a certain extent in most of the children's literature about adoption, the process used to provide the adoptee with that story veils the adoptive parents' desire to inscribe their own story as the foundational, origin story of/for the adopted child.

Visual narration is very often also mobilized to convey the child's viewpoint in picture-books. In the *Tell me again…*'s first double spread, we see the parents from the girl's perspective. The father holds a toothbrush and the mother pajamas; we do not get to see their faces, but we know, as does the child, what this means: it is bedtime. Obviously, this

perspective cannot be maintained throughout the book. In the next double spread we have a top-view of the parents' bedroom even as the character narrator carries on: "Tell me again how you and Daddy were curled up like spoons and Daddy was snoring. Tell me again how the phone rang in the middle of the night and they told you I was born. Tell me again how you screamed" (3-4). We know that the scene shown cannot have been seen by the adoptee, but she is able to imagine it with all the details. By telling her complete story while seemingly asking for it to be told again, she reassures the parents that their point of view has been transferred and that she understands her life precisely as they have projected it.

The ending in *Llegué de…Colombia* illustrates how these books are meant to found a life story. On the left page, a dark-skinned Colombian boy kisses his white parents, while on the right page we read: "Encontrarnos y convertirnos en tus padres ha sido un regalo maravilloso. Nosotros solo hemos escrito el inicio de tu historia. Lo demás aún lo has de vivir". [Meeting you and becoming your parents has been a marvelous gift. We have only written the beginning of your story. The rest, you still have to live] (22-23). We may read this ending as establishing a beginning that is meant to remain unaltered: the adopted child will complete his biography by adding his further experiences upon this story that the parents hand down.

In *Isha nacida del corazón*, the story of how the parents adopted a girl in India, reflects this described masterplot of adventurous parents finding their destined child, and it is an embedded story. The frame-plot of the novel focuses on the new questions and anxieties haunting Isha as she grows up and has to deal with being different from her classmates. We find in this narration plenty of references to how the story of her origin, which she has heard since she was a young child, has been fundamental in her identity formation and how its repeated telling throughout the years has facilitated the adoptee's appropriation. The novel recounts how Isha listens once more to her father's account of the adoption while she is able to complete this narration with her own memories. However, these are not 'real' memories but constructed upon those of the parents. This recalls Marianne Hirsch's concept of "postmemory"(Hirsch), used to characterize the creation of memories when individuals are being socialized in determined (post-trauma) narratives without having had the direct experience, a concept developed in relation to the children of Holocaust survivors. Hirsch introduced this term to analyze the construction of the past and of trauma in the artistic and literary production of the children of survivors, yet I find it useful to understand what appears to be pursued in these books: the inscription and inheritance of the parents' memories by the children.

In *Language and Ideology in Children's Fiction*, John Stephens argues that any analysis about ideology and point of view must address the distinctions between 'author,' 'implied author,' and 'narrator,' as well as the one between 'narratee,' 'implied reader,' and the

'reader' in the actual world (23). The pair constituted by the 'implied author' and the 'implied reader' has no narrative function but operates as the bearer of implicit social practices and ideological positions, since certain ideas and values are taken for granted in the communicative act of the narration. The implied author —a term first coined by Wayne Booth— is differentiated from the author, in that he is not the real author of the book, but the one we can infer from the narration; the implied reader is the reader to whom the book is targeted. This reader obviously differs from the flesh and blood reader, but in these books about adoption, he/she becomes a quite clear figure: that of an adopted child.

As I have sketched out here, in many of the adoption books, the narratee is made explicit when the narrator addresses a 'you' to whom the story is told. This 'you' coincides with the figure with whom the implied reader should identify, that is, the adopted child who will be reading the book. In many of these books, this narratee coincides with the adopted child, while the narrator and the implied author appear to coincide with the figure of the adoptive parent. All these books therefore share what Philippe Lejeune distinguishes as the quintessential feature of autobiographical narratives: the coincidence of narrator, author, and principal character. Even if the books are not overtly presented as testimonial accounts in the paratexts —the cover, front matter or back matter— we learn through reviews or press material that they have been written by adoptive parents, inspired by their own domestic practices of storytelling, who also aim to fill in a gap in the publishing market. The parents aim to pass down the adoption experience to their offspring and believe that other children in similar positions may also benefit from this. These books may not be overtly presented as testimonials, since the stories have been remediated according to what the authors think would make an appropriate children's book. Events are modified according to what would make a better story and details that might be too personal about each instance are avoided, perhaps to facilitate the reading and identification of other ideal (adopted) readers who are directly addressed in these stories frequently.

Studying adoption narratives in the U.S.A., Margaret Homans claims that adoption is a "fiction-generating machine" in which the question of origin motivates and inspires the family-based storytelling and the creation of the past for the needs of a present (Homans 5). *Usoa, llegaste por el aire* [Usoa, you came by air] does not follow the adoption masterplot sketched here, but it addresses the adoptee directly in the narration: "Te llaman Usoa, Paloma, la niña que llegó por el aire. Y puede que por eso te guste tanto mirar el cielo, porque de allí viniste, de allí te trajeron" (unpaginated) [They call you Usoa, Paloma, the girl that came by air. And maybe that explains why you enjoy watching the sky so much; you came from there, from there you were brought]. This narrator shares with the previous ones the use of interpellation, yet in this case, there is an external narrator who is not focalized on the figure of the parents. Usoa is a girl who reflects on the reasons why her biological mother had to give

her away, and the narrator responds by reorganizing her origin as one that begins in the journey to the Western country, rather than in her bond to that woman. The external narrator is able to tell us what the girl longs for: not so much for her native land or her biological family, but for the journey she went through in that sky, both a transit and a no-place. The narration later includes a letter written by the biological mother in which she explains her decision to give her daughter away to keep her safe from the famine and wars suffered in her African country. This letter is not addressed to the girl, but to the people who will find her on an airplane to a country "donde haya comida y paz" (18) [where food and peace may be found]. After including this letter, the narrator adds: "Tu madre de aquí también es muy buena y ahora mismo te está llamando para cenar. Además sabes que este año no faltará el dinero en vuestra casa" [Your mother here is also very good-hearted, and she is calling you for dinner right now. You also know that this year you won't lack money at home]. The EN focalizes again through the adoptee and asks her to acknowledge that her adoptive family now has sufficient material means, as if that should be enough to dispel her feeling of uneasiness.

Interestingly, the character of the biological mother does not address the narratee in her letter but only gives the child a name —Kazai— which has not been kept by the adoptive parents who instead chose Usoa. This letter written by the biological mother and included in the narration has failed to transfer identity to the child. We may wonder why this piece is then included. This letter allows us to imagine the figure of a biological mother, a figure excluded from the other stories and one that may complicate the univocal narrative of the Western parents. Yet, at the same time, it may be argued that the inclusion of this perspective may be instrumental to counteract the haunting stories about child trafficking by reassuring the reader that this mother has given her baby away, not only voluntarily, but also as part of a strategic plan for the child's future.

In this article, I review how the recommended books about adoption form a homogenous group in which similar strategies are used to provide adoptive families with stories from which the images of child trafficking that surround international adoption are dispelled. The described masterplot of international adoption focuses on the enormous love of the adoptive couple and on how this love —combined with the material means of these families— may be taken as ample justification of adoption and as proof of how well the child will be provided for in the new family and new country. In some cases, the material means of the adoptive family are directly or indirectly mentioned as a guarantee for that happy life as well.

David L. Eng questions the paradoxical position of the adoptive parents, who need to deal with the 'otherness' of their children, one that has been provoked by their own decision to adopt transnationally (cf. Eng 1). In the books we have examined, we may trace an attempt

to overcome the difference between the parents and the adoptee by naturalizing the adoptive bond as if it were a biological bond. In this move, transnational adoption also has to be stripped of any relation to geopolitical imbalances or broader social contexts, while at the same time it is narrated as a magical event that has brought a unique family together.

Our review of focalization reveals how these stories are meant to pass down the perspectives of the adoptive parents to the adoptees. The parents' stories are told as if proudly appropriated by the adoptees; the parent's desire to parent a child is paralleled with a narrative about the adoptee's desire to be parented. With the use of second-person voices, these desires and feelings are projected and inscribed onto the adoptive characters. Such transferences speak of the performative aim of these books: they are meant to weave the family together as instruments of what anthropologist Signe Howell describes as the 'kinning of foreigners' in transnational adoption. The assertive narration of the parents does what biology was unable to do: they transform that child into one of kin to whom they will be bound forever.

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[1]According to a study conducted by the association of adoptive parents "Ume Alaia" in Viscaya, Basque Country, described in Tobella-Mallans, "¿Cómo Vas a Ser Del Atleti Si Eres Negro? ," El País 06.01.2014 2014.

[2]An ethnographic documentary was released in 2014 under the title "Generación Mei Ming: miradas desde la adolescencia"and reviewed byLola Hierro, "La Adolescencia De Las Niñas Mei Ming," El País 2014.