

# Race and the Violence of Love:: Family and Nation in US Adoptions from Asia.

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## Race and the Violence of Love : : Family and Nation in U.S. Adoptions from Asia

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Author(s): Myers, Kit; [et al.](#)

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### Abstract

My dissertation is about the violence of love in transnational/racial adoptive family-making. I define adoption and any statement affirming adoption as "love"--- or more specifically a loving act, statement, or possibility---that operates at the personal and

familial; agency and industry; and legal and trans/national levels. But I also show how past and present transnational/racial adoptions from Asia to the United States are imbricated in hidden or unmarked structural-historical, representational, and traumatic violence. My project answers the questions: How is "love" defined and employed by the various actors-- adoptive parents, adoption agencies, and the state--who are involved in transnational/racial adoptions? What role does racial difference play in adoptive family-making? How is adoption a "violent" act? More specifically, how are constructions of il/legible and il/legitimate families shaped by adoption discourse, structures, and practices in the United States? Each chapter of *Race and the Violence of Love* examines a different site of knowledge production about the transnational/racial adoptive family. Through archival, legal, new media, and ethnographic methods, I analyze positive adoption language and social scientific studies; legal discourse and practice; popular adoption discourse through blogs and their comments; and birth culture and adoptee summer camps. I make two claims to position how the "violence of love" relates to and functions in adoptive family-making: 1) Adoption professionals and social scientists, government officials, the public, and adoptive parents have imagined and applied the concept of love in personal, symbolic, and (neo)liberal legal ways that transgressed normative biological, same-race, and same-nation kinship. These forms of love have been used to normalize transnational/racial adoption as a form of freedom from violence and "in the best interest," where U.S. adoptive families and the United States are the better family and nation in relation to the birth family and nation (or what I call "opposite" future) for the child in need. 2) Such adoption representations and practices, however, are simultaneously and differently attached to intersecting and overlapping forms of structural-historical, representation, and traumatic violence that happen before, after, and outside of transnational/racial adoption. In other words, *Race and the Violence of Love* interrogates the configuration of the adoptive family as transgressive and non-normative but also the site for which racial and gendered subjects and global geographies as well as the idea of normative families and motherhood are simultaneously reconsolidated. The implications of this research include embracing adoption and family as non-normative and considering the generative possibilities of examining the violence of love within adoptive-family in relation to other sites of family and the "home" that exist such as childhood, marriage, im/migration, domestic work, nursing, and surrogacy

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