

**INTERNATIONAL ADOPTION AND GLOBAL INEQUALITIES: AN
OVERVIEW OF COLOMBIA**

by

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT	vi
1 INTRODUCTION	1
2 AN OVERVIEW OF INTERNATIONAL ADOPTION	7
The Development of International Adoption	7
Players of International Adoption	14
International Adoption Policies	16
A Critical Outlook on International Adoption.....	19
Abuse	20
Identity.....	21
Stigmatization of Poverty	25
Children as a Social Commodity	28
Alternate Forms of Child Circulation.....	29
Eurocentrism.....	32
Drive to be a Member of the Global Community.....	34
Future Direction.....	36
3 NAVIGATING INTERNATIONAL ADOPTION IN CYBERSPACE	38
Methods	39
Analyzing the Major Players	40
Government Websites	41
Private Adoption Agencies.....	46
“Save the Children” Agencies	47
“Rights of the Child” Agencies	52
“Creating a Family” Agencies.....	57
All Three Approaches.....	61
Colombian Orphanages	63
Children Focused.....	64
Community Focused.....	66

International Entities	71
All Actors within International Adoption.....	74
4 CONCLUSION	76
My Adoption	76
Closing Remarks	82
REFERENCES	86
A GOVERNMENT WEBSITE QUESTIONNAIRE.....	91
B ADOPTION AGENCY WEBSITE QUESTIONNAIRE	92
C COLOMBIAN ORPHANAGE WEBSITE QUESTIONNAIRE:.....	94
D INTERNATIONAL ENTITIES WEBSITE QUESTIONNAIRE.....	95

ABSTRACT

The flow of children throughout the world reflects how policies about international adoption, both domestic and international, remove power from one population and transfer it to another, even if they are on opposite sides of the world. The phenomenon of international adoption is the outcome of specific historical events, Euro-American ideals, globalization, neoliberal policies, and the great disparities between the upper echelons of the world and the poor of third world countries. While protecting or saving children who live in poverty is a noble cause, many outside parties have taken note of the many factors contributing to this circulation of children that may raise other ethical questions. These questions center on the theories of identity, structural violence, the pathologization of poverty and the use of children as a social and monetary commodity. There are many actors within the international adoption process: the adoptees, the adoptive parents, the birth parents, the governments of the countries they are being transferred to and from, and the international entities that regulate these transactions. The discourse of international adoption in relation to the specific role of the actors within the process reflect these various influences on adoption. They also demonstrate how international adoption is a quick remedy to a much deeper societal problem. There is no conclusive solution that would eliminate the need for international adoption, but a closer inspection of the underlying factors that contribute to this process may give insight into what changes need to be made in the future. I will discuss how websites of the various players in the

international adoption system reflect the discourse of international adoption in relation to historical events and the aforementioned theories.

Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

International adoption has had a relatively short lifespan in world history. From a classical anthropological view of kinship, the integration of another person from a different culture into a new kinship system will seem farfetched since it is contradictory to other methods of creating kinship ties. For example, in western culture kinship is seen as a biological link a person is born into, whereas in other cultures there are rituals that mediate relationships between sets of kin groups to create additional types of kinship ties. Yet, the people who are integrated into new kin groups all identify with the same cultural group. Most examples of people being adopted into families throughout history were for political and sociological needs, rather than emotional and family needs. For example, if a patriarch was about to die without any biological heirs, he could adopt another younger adult to be his heir (UN 2009:25). The person being adopted was not a child and the adoption did not occur to benefit his or her welfare. In fact, laws that allowed adoption of children into new families that were meant to benefit his or her welfare were not created until the mid-nineteenth century (UN 2009:35). Another form of child circulation occurs when a family member dies and the children that are left behind get passed around the rest of the extended family. Yet, international adoption stems from different causes and motivations.

I was interested in studying international adoption history, policies and development because I was adopted from Colombia by a family in the United States

when I was just an infant in 1991. Everyday I am faced with the fact that my life could have been drastically different if it were not for this recognized system of international adoption. The nuances of all the policies, internationally and domestically, relations between Colombia and the United States, and programs in Colombia for expectant mothers are only a few of the things that influenced my path in life. This summer I was able to return to Colombia to visit the city where I was born, explore other parts of the country, visit the children's home from where I was adopted, and even volunteer at a children's home. I got to see first hand how adoption policies, economic realities and ideals of adoption affected the management of the children's home.

I originally went to Colombia with the intention of conducting short-term fieldwork and interviews at the children's home from where I was adopted, as well as another children's home where I was planning to volunteer. Yet, I ran into many problems in trying to do so. International adoption is a sensitive subject and every aspect must be carefully considered. This was clear during my interview with one of the people in charge of the children's home from where I was adopted. The meeting began by her giving me files about my own adoption because she assumed that was all I was there for. When I told her about my preliminary research she seemed more than happy to help. However, as was revealed from my interview, she was merely telling me facts about the institution that ran the children's home without going into much detail about actual policies or the workings of the bureaucracy behind international adoption. It was all very recited as if from a book and all information I could have easily learned from brief research. At the second children's home where I made an attempt to conduct an interview, I had the opposite problem. I explained to them that I was doing preliminary research on international adoption policies. Yet, as

soon as I brought out the consent forms and the tape recorder they said they would do the interview but not if they had to sign anything or if it were recorded. In the first place I was not taken seriously and in the second I was taken almost too seriously. The reactions to my research question were clearly thought out responses because of the delicacy of the situation. This is despite the fact that the questions were general and not intrusive about the way in which the specific organizations were run. While my experience there did not produce much information, it did grant me a better understanding of the nuances of international adoption discussions from the unique perspective of the sending country. My own tale of adoption and my experiences in Colombia motivated me to study the international adoption process and how it reflects larger socio-economic and geopolitical relationships. Because my fieldwork experience was limited, much of my research is bibliographic and based on the theory of Critical Discourse Analysis. This is a way to analyze discourse on multiple mediums (such as websites) in the context of the larger societal structures these discussions reflect (Saichaie 2011). However, my experiences in Colombia and throughout my life as an adopted person have informed my interpretation of the information I have collected.

Anthropology is unique in having a holistic view of situations and I believe that using an anthropological lens is perfect way to interpret the many facets and influencing factors that all work together to create the unique practice of international adoption. There are the many individual players, such as the adoptees, the natal parents, the adoptive parents, the governments of the two countries and international bodies such as the United Nations. Yet, they all operate within a structure that perpetuates a system in which the receiving countries have more power and

influence than the sending countries. I argue that even though international adoption language and ideas are, on the surface, well-intentioned, the policies and the real life effects of international adoption reflect an ever continuing uneven distribution of power between sending and receiving countries. The circulation of children between these two cultures only solidifies the dominance of one over the other. I am not challenging the “goodness” or “helpfulness” of adoption policies, but rather, how these policies right now reflect the balance of power between Latin America and the United States. While international adoption occurs between many different countries, I will focus specifically on the relations between Latin America and the United states with a special focus on Colombia.

The international adoption process is a very lengthy and intricate one. I will begin my analysis with an overview of the history of the creation of international adoption and how paradigm shifts in the attitude towards children, world events and crises, and the formation of international entities have culminated in the formation of the international adoption system. Then, I will address the various actors that have major roles within the international adoption system. This would include the adoptee, the birth parents, the adoptive parents, the governments of the sending and receiving countries and the international entities that have created agreements to regulate the process. There have been many ways in which international adoption has been criticized that have shaped how new policies about it are formed. The criticisms include: the reports and scandals of child abuse; black market babies and child trafficking; identity crises for internationally adopted children; the stigmatization of poverty and how it unfairly frames birth parents as unsuitable parents because of their poverty rather than framing poverty as an outcome of an unjust societal structure; the

use of children as not only a monetary commodity but also as a social commodity with which one can gain social prestige through the adoption of a needy child; the failure of adoption policies to recognize alternate types of child circulation that do not necessitate the cut of all former kinship ties or moving a child to another country; the dominance of euro-centric views in adoption ideals and policies, and the over compliance of sending countries to neoliberal ideals in order to seem modern on the global playing field to the detriment of its population. All of these criticisms of the international adoption system reflect the ideals of “saving the children” because of the perceived superiority of the United States over Latin America. They also reflect the inherent structural violence that occurs with any power imbalance, in which the people of the sending country are given less of a right to raise their children than the people in the receiving country. Finally they show the overall power imbalance between the sending and receiving countries in which the priorities of the receiving country are more important than those of the sending country.

I will then use these critical perspectives and the theories they encompass in direct correlation with the Colombian international adoption system. I will do this by analyzing the discourse on international adoption on the various websites set up by the actors within the system. These actors include: the governments for the United States and Colombia that address international adoption, the 23 Hague and Colombian Institute for Family Welfare (*Instituto Colombiano Bienestar Familiar*) (ICBF) accredited adoption agencies, the eight orphanages that are both Hague and ICBF accredited in Colombia, the international entities of UNICEF Colombia and the Hague Convention. I will analyze this information within the

framework of Critical Discourse Analysis theory set forth by Fairclough.¹ I divided the adoption agency websites into three different categories based on which ideal of international adoption they were the most focused on: “save the children”, “rights of the children” and “creating a family”. The orphanages were also divided into two different categories depending on the scope of their services, whether it was just the children in their care that they served or the wider community from which these children were coming.

After my analysis of the Colombian adoption system I will compare the international adoption system from 21 years ago when I was adopted with current policies and trends in international adoption. The changes made in the last couple of decades are drastic and have attempted to address the many criticisms of the international adoption system. Yet, my findings show that there are many constructs, ideas and policies still in place that outline this imbalance of power relations between the United States and Latin America. The changing policies address these issues on the surface but there are many drastic paradigmatic shifts that need to take place before these relationships become truly balanced.

¹ To see the breakdown of what CDA entails see chapter 3

Chapter 2

AN OVERVIEW OF INTERNATIONAL ADOPTION

The Development of International Adoption

International adoption is a relatively new phenomenon that was only developed in the twentieth century. Adoption by other family members after the loss of a parent has been seen throughout history: also the adoption of older adults in order to be an heir has been used for thousands of years. Some of the most famous examples of this are Octavian Augustus and Moses (UN 2009:25). According to the UN report on adoption, in the past, people “regarded adoption as a means for preserving family lineage, enabling the continuation of ancestor worship, creating political alliances and ensuring care for adoptive parents in their old age” (UN 2009:27). The eighteenth Century BCE Code of Hammurabi contains one of the oldest records of adoption; it “established that adoption was a legal contract that could only be executed with the consent of the birth parents” and which also granted adoptees the same rights as the kin of the adoptive family (UN 2009:29). Although, these adoptees were not children as they are in modern society.

The plight of orphaned and abandoned children became apparent during the Middle Ages. By the twelfth century there were “foundling” homes in many major cities that continued service well into the first half of the nineteenth century. There were not many options for these children. During the Middle Ages, many times children who were born into families who did not have enough resources were brought to these foundling homes, abandoned or left in the care of the church

(UN 2009:32-33). The French Civil Code of 1809 stated that adoption was restricted only to adults and thus the plight of these children in these foundling homes was stigmatized (UN 2009:32). It was not until there was a paradigm shift in the view of children and children's welfare, that modern adoption laws and policies began to be formed (UN 2009:33). One of the first laws to address adoption as it is currently viewed is the *Massachusetts Adoption of Children Act of 1851*. It required written consent from the birth parents, mandated a complete severance of kinship ties, regarded adopted children as if they were biological children of the adoptive parents, and "gave the judge the authority to assess whether the prospective adoptive parents had sufficient ability to bring up the child, and furnish suitable nurture and education" (UN 2009:35). There were many factors influencing the development of international adoption as a viable method of child circulation. First, in the early twentieth century there was a social movement that encouraged parents not to treat their children as miniature adults, but rather as developing human beings who need more protection than grown adults (Briggs and Marre 2009:2). This change in the view of children is what led to new laws, such as child labor laws to protect them from exploitation. The epidemics and the World Wars of the early twentieth century led to many countries creating new adoption laws or amending pre-existing ones to more fully integrate adoptive children into new families. England and Wales passed the Adoption of Children Act in 1926, the Soviet Union created the Family Code of 1926 and countries and colonies abroad, such as India and Tanzania, created laws that were based on the previously mentioned laws (UN 2009:37). World War I and the devastation it brought to the European nations made it clear that laws and policies must be created to protect the children of these countries because modern warfare targeted civilians and not just

soldiers on the battlefield (Briggs and Marre 2009:3). The Fight the Famine Council and Save the Children were created in England but were meant to help the children in Germany and Austria who were suffering post-World War I (Briggs and Marre 2009:2). Once the League of Nations was created after World War I, laws were passed to specifically protect the rights of children, such as the *Declaration of Children's Rights* in 1924 (Briggs and Marre 2009:3). In 1967 the *European Convention on the Adoption of Children* was held, and by 1984 there was the *United Nations Declaration on Social and Legal Principles Relating to the Protection and Welfare of Children, with Special Reference to Foster Placement and Adoption Nationally and Internationally* (UN 2009:40).

These international ideals made international adoption more commonly accepted. They created the idea that children should be protected, even if that entails removal from their birth countries. Even before these, however, there were many other movements that have generated an environment in which children are transported to different parts of the world, originating in the European countries. During the Spanish Civil war, 4,000 children were evacuated from Bilbao to Britain (Briggs and Marre 2009:3). The widespread devastation of World War II generated many of the same initiatives as World War I. Thousands of children were evacuated throughout Europe and even to the United States and Canada (Briggs and Marre 2009:3). Many of them were Jewish children escaping the Nazis. Although the laws in the United States at the time were very strict and made it especially difficult for these children to enter the U.S., exceptions were made for a couple thousand children (Briggs and Marre 2009:4). Even though this was a mass migration of children, they were not placed for

adoption but rather went into foster care and then most returned to their families in Europe after the war (Briggs and Marre 2009:4).

Post-World War II and the beginning of the Cold War created a new world view in which the United States emerged as a hegemonic power. With this newfound power, came many perceived responsibilities of the government and the citizens of the United States. According to Christina Klein, while the Cold War era is usually characterized as a time of isolation, there are many ways in which the United States used outreach programs to perpetuate their influence, particularly in the developing world. According to Brigg's (2009),

Klein argues that these kinds of impulses [those to adopt children from Asian countries after disaster struck, like Hiroshima] helped transform the United States from an isolationist nation to one whose citizens could imagine themselves with a somewhat paternalistic responsibility for the rest of the world. (5)

The United States government used many instances of relocating children to advance its political agenda but all behind the façade of saving the children in these war torn countries. For example, in 1945, 1,300 children from Hungary were resettled by the U.S. State Department while the Soviet Army was fighting in Budapest (Lovelock 2000 in Briggs 2009:5). Many Grecian children were put up for adoption after the United States supported the Anticomunist forces during the Greek Civil War from 1946-1949 (Briggs and Marre 2009:5).

Meanwhile, in the United States there began a movement towards international aid, which included aid to children around the world living in poverty. Many Evangelical Christian groups started organizations that allowed a person to sponsor a child or to send money to needy children all over the world. They used videos of children in these countries, shown in orphanages with sad background music

to convince United States citizens to sponsor a child. These organizations eventually transformed into modern day adoption agencies (Briggs and Marre 2009:6-7). One of the most notable of these organizations is called World Vision. This organization convinced U.S. citizens to send \$5 a month to sponsor a child, first in China and then in Korea. One couple took this sponsorship to a new level and went to the extreme measures of trying to get visas for nine children, eight of whom they were adopting themselves which meant that (Briggs and Marre 2009:6). This effectively made World Vision one of the first institutions to facilitate in the adoption of children internationally in the United States. These kinds of organizations grew not only because of their appeal to saving children but also because of the newfound influence that evangelical Protestantism was having in the country because of reverends like Billy Graham. They had particular influence because of their use of religion to proliferate strong anticommunist sentiments which supported the agenda of the United States government at the time (Briggs and Marre 2009:6). This extreme use of publicity to act on behalf of children led to laws such as the Refugee Relief Act of 1953 and others like it to allow more children to obtain visas and to come to the United States (Briggs and Marre 2009:7).

These events comprised the beginning of international adoption as it is conceptualized in modern times. These initiatives to “save the children” started not only in the United States, but also in Western Europe. The aforementioned Save the Children Fund which was founded in 1919 in England is still a large non-for-profit organization run world wide that focuses specifically on child welfare. The Vietnam War and the Korean War are two more examples of war creating situations in which countries developed initiatives to “save the children.” After the Vietnam War there

was a campaign called Operation Babylift that garnered support from all parties and was seen as “an opportunity to salvage something from the horror of the war” (Briggs and Marre 2009:7). The origins of this campaign demonstrate how the inequality of power between the two countries facilitated the transportation and circulation of these children out of the country of their birth and into the United States. Since the United States was one of the main players in the Vietnam War, they were easily able to take children off the streets, to “save them.” There were many problems with these original adoptions. Many children were just taken off the street without a proper investigation into what happened to their family because if they were alone they were assumed to be abandoned (Briggs and Marre 2009:7). One could argue these perceived acts of charity are a way for the American people to assuage their guilt for the devastation in those countries in which the U.S. was involved. The publicity surrounding many of these adoption efforts perpetuated the ideal of saving children from the plight of their own, war-torn country. One of the most famous examples of this is the picture taken in 1973 of Tran Thie Het Nhanny who was sleeping in a cardboard box with her brother in Saigon (Briggs and Marre 2009:7). The photographer, “Chick” Harrity, won a Lifetime Achievement Award for this photograph because of its influence on the perspective of the American people in the post-Vietnam period (Briggs and Marre 2009:8).

While these “save the children” campaigns are ways for children living in poverty to receive assistance or be adopted, there are many political nuances that underlie these ideals. For example, the Evangelical Christian groups were able to extend their message so widely because their other beliefs fit very nicely with the conservative

government's view on Communism during the Cold War. It can also be seen as a rationale for the United States to stay involved in these countries: to protect the children. It is convenient to adopt from countries to which one's home country has ties, such as former colonies. For example, there are many United States adoptions from Korea, Vietnam, and Guatemala. Many Italians adopt from Ethiopia and many Spaniards adopt from Morocco and Latin America (Briggs and Marre 2009:14). One must also consider the current state of the sending countries. Worldwide, the countries that send the most children to be adopted overseas vary over time depending on laws and political situations in the countries. First the greatest number of children were being adopted from the defeated countries of World War II, followed by South Korea, Latin America and more recently China and Russia with brief high levels from Romania and Vietnam (Selman 2009:36).

Other factors that influenced the development of international adoption not only occurred in the sending countries but also in the changing social, economic and political terrain of the United States. During the 1950s and onward there were many societal changes in the United States that made international adoption a more feasible option that coincided with the international events that also promoted international adoption. According to Yngvesson (2009), birth rates dropped beginning in the 1950s, meaning there were fewer children available for domestic adoption, which led people to turn to developing countries to become parents (105). The invention and application of birth control changed the way people viewed the creation of a family. Reproduction can be planned rather than an inevitable result. Also, it is no longer the only way to create a family. One can have a surrogate, in vitro fertilization or adoption. Adoption

is a more affordable way to start a family if “normative reproduction”² is not an option because in vitro fertilization and surrogacy can be very costly (Briggs and Marre 2009:15-16). This is not to say that adoption, especially international adoption is not costly. Many websites estimate that up to \$40,000 will be spent on the entire international adoption process (Dillon International). This paradigm shift in the view of childrearing and bearing, along with the realities of modern warfare, colonization and globalization all contributed to the development of international adoption.

Players of International Adoption

One must consider all the players in the international adoption arena. There are three main stakeholders: the biological family, the adoptee, and the adoptive family. These stakeholders must find a way to first get in contact and then transfer the adoptee from one family to the other. Also, all the laws in place in both countries must be followed. In order to navigate and to guide these adoptions there are private and governmental agencies (Ouellete 2009:70). Therefore, these transactions should follow not merely the interests of these three parties, but also of the governments of the countries from which the child is leaving, the one into which he/she is entering, and the international entities that stipulate the general rules and regulations.

Due to the complex nature of the interrelations between the various actors within the international adoption process, it is necessary to consider the various actors in more depth and how they are affected by international adoption policies. The birth family is the source of children that are in the adoption system. So as the origin

² Normative reproduction is conceiving a child without the help of modern science, technology or adoption.

of these children, it is logical to talk about this group first. There are many reasons a child may be placed for adoption, all having to do with the birth parents' circumstances. Both birth parents may be deceased, they may have willingly relinquished the rights of guardianship of their child, or their parental rights may have been terminated due to abuse, neglect or other extenuating circumstances. The international policies are primarily meant to protect the child and birth parents from exploitation due to their vulnerable status. These policies ensure that birth parents are not coerced into signing documentation that fallaciously states that they willingly relinquished custody and that they were not given bribes of any sort for their children.

The adoptive families actively seeking a new family member are another player to be considered when designing policies. All certified adoption agencies require that they pass stringent background checks. They also must spend a great deal of money on travel, lawyers and other expenses during the adoption process. Adoption agencies provide services to help these families face the problems involved in adjusting to adoption (Ouellette 2009:75). There are also some agencies that believe that adoptive parents should go through pre-adoption training before they can adopt, not only to protect them but also their children (Ouellette 2009:75). In addition, it is easier to apply these strict policies and screening to adoptive parents because they are the ones actively seeking a child to bring into their family. The intermediaries are the people that facilitate these adoptions while following the domestic and international laws. They must match adopting families with children in their countries, while navigating the laws of the receiving and sending countries. In the wider scheme of international adoption, the sending and receiving countries are concerned with the placement and treatment of these children in circulation. Finally, the international

entities such as the United Nations also write the general guidelines for these procedures. All these players have integral roles in the creation of policies concerning international adoption. Sometimes there are conflicting agendas or one group may have more influence than another, creating dilemmas that must be considered.

International Adoption Policies

There are many policies in all countries that protect the rights of children, which include the policies and laws behind domestic and international adoption. The guidelines that dictate the laws in each country have been established by the United Nations. Post World Wars I and II, it became clear that modern warfare often targeted civilians, resulting in devastation that was dangerous for the children of these countries. Hence, there were laws, conventions and initiatives created to protect the children. More recent laws came from The Hague Convention and the Convention on the Rights of the Child. All of these conventions tried to delineate the specific rights that children have and what factors should be taken into consideration when creating laws and policies governing the circulation and protection of children. Understanding the development of international adoption policies is an integral part of understanding the international adoption process as a whole, because these policies are the initial framework within which the international adoption process operates.

The Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) had one main goal: to protect children and families in sending countries from exploitation (Briggs and Marre 2009:13). According to its information brochure, the Hague Convention, “was developed to establish safeguards which ensure that intercountry adoptions take place in the best interests of the child and with respect for the child’s fundamental rights” (HCCH Brochure 2012:4).

The Hague Convention on International Adoption (1993) created more concrete rules for adoption policies. It established that all the participating countries must have a central authority as the source of information and the contact in that country for all matters of child circulation. In the United States, this central authority is the Department of State. The main goals of this convention were to prevent the abduction and sale/traffic of children. It also recognized that, “intercountry adoption may offer the advantage of a permanent family to a child for whom a suitable family cannot be found in his or her country of origin” (HCCH 2012:4). This convention stipulated that in order for a child to be adopted internationally the child must have been deemed as available for adoption in their country of origin following an effort to find an adoptive family in their own country. It also stipulates that only adoption agencies that have been accredited on the federal level will be recognized. In addition, all fees and estimated expenses must be released to the adoptive parents beforehand and they cannot be charged extra except under certain circumstances. The accreditation process and the inability for the agencies to charge extra at the end, ensure that no illegal activities or exchanges of money are being made. Finally, it states that every child that is adopted from a country who agreed to this convention should receive a Hague Adoption Certificate or a Hague Custody Declaration. This assures the adoptive family that their child was adopted in a manner that was ethical and followed all the protocol set up by the Hague Convention. There are currently 88 countries that are considered convention countries.

Through these conventions, governments have come to the consensus that when creating policies about adoption, one must think solely of the child that it will affect. This leads to many considerations when making adoption laws. First, there

are two different types of adoption: plenary adoption and simple adoption. Simple adoptions are open adoptions where the guardian of the child changes but natal kinship ties are not dissolved (Ouellette 2009:70). Plenary adoption, on the other hand, is a “complete dissolution of the child’s kinship ties” (Ouellette 2009:69). Most international adoptions are plenary adoptions due to the protocol set by the Hague Convention. A complete dissolution of ties between the birth family and the adoptee is meant to help with legal problems, but in some cases the sending country does not intend for a plenary adoption. Some scholars argue that, especially for older children, a simple or open adoption would be better (Fonseca 2009:164).

As was made clear in the previous section, there are many different groups of people that are concerned with the adoption process. Since there is this complex interplay of all invested groups, there are many problems that arise throughout the process. In order to protect the children and families from exploitation and to ensure the legality of the adoption, there is a lengthy legal and administrative process that adoptive families must go through (Ouellette 2009:71). Nowadays, adoption in Colombia can take up to four years, depending on many variables such as: age of the child, any disabilities or medical conditions, and age of the parents. The governments of the receiving countries became even more involved as international adoption became more prevalent. They have formed special groups that screen prospective adoptive families, which lengthens the process (Ouellette 2009:72).

Since many of the guidelines and policies are outlined by the international conventions and entities, such as the United Nations, they are somewhat difficult to enforce throughout the whole world. These laws are agreed upon only by the countries which have signed it, and all other countries are not bound to comply with these

measures. Even if the countries technically signed the agreement, they may not fully follow the rules because the United Nations can exert only minimal power. Some recent examples are Cambodia and Guatemala. Technically, both countries have signed the agreement made during the Hague convention but they have failed to follow all the rules stipulated in it. Now the United States specifically discourages people from adopting from these countries due to the possible ethical problems raised (Selman 2009:45-47). However, this does not stop these adoptions from occurring. Aside from these logistical and legal problems there are many ethical issues that have come to light since the inception of international adoption.

A Critical Outlook on International Adoption

After the Korean and Vietnam wars, the haphazard adoptions that occurred as a result of initiatives such as “Operation Babylift” were a warning sign for the future of international adoption. However, more concern with the ethical issues of international adoption really did not become an important (or relevant) topic in the public consciousness until the late 80’s. I will discuss how all of these different facets of international adoption produce different ethical problems that must all be considered in the elaborate adoption policies already created and being created, along with the theories that frame them.

There are many facets of the international adoption process that create ethical issues. First, there are blatant abuses of the adoption process that become apparent when scandals of child trafficking and abuse are exposed. Second, changing ideas of identity and how identity is important to the development of adopted children are reflected in the attitudes towards international adoption. Third, the disparity between receiving and sending countries is a great cause for concern because it may

reflect the overexertion of influence of one country over another, and especially over the poor population of these countries. Fourth, the use of children not only as monetary, but also as a social commodity needs to be addressed. Fifth, international adoption policies fail to consider other types of child circulation that may be more effective than international adoption. This results from international adoption ideals and policies that are mostly based on western values. Finally, the drive to be fully integrated into the global arena influences countries' policies in ways that are reflected in the child welfare systems.

Abuse

At its inception, many of the intermediaries that originally facilitated international adoptions were essentially working in a vacuum because there was no precedent for these kinds of adoptions (Ouellette 2009:71). Due to this lack of infrastructure, rules, and regulations to dictate the international adoption process, many concerns were raised about black market babies, child trafficking and abuse. Throughout the seventies and eighties the international adoption scene changed dramatically. The biggest ethical dilemma came from “the fear that the children will be exploited if they are put into a system that gains money from their adoption” (Briggs and Marre 2009:12-13). This fear is what perpetuated the creation of policies to protect parents and children from exploitation within the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Hague Convention. There were many accusations of adoptive parents being abusive, of poor living conditions in the orphanages and even rumors of illegal child slavery. Scandals continue to be reported about the abuse of internationally adopted children. For example, in 2010 a seven year old adopted

Russian boy was sent back to Moscow on a flight from the United States by his adoptive mother (Levy 2010).

These concerns balanced against the need to place children for adoption has caused many countries to open and close their international adoption programs multiple times. A good example of a country in which fear dictated the way that policies changed is the case of Brazil. There was a large market for international adoption and Brazil had churches and “women of the middle and upper classes” who brought in children and placed them for adoption (Abreu 2009:140). They were private go-betweens who did the maneuvering and circulation of children without the help of the government agencies. After rumors of child trafficking occurred, the media pounced on the opportunity and changed the perception of international adoption overnight (Fonseca 2009:157). People in Brazilian society, such as nuns, priests and wealthy matriarchs, who were once highly regarded, were all put under much scrutiny and accused of many atrocities. They effectively went from being considered the saviors of children to child abusers.

Identity

Attitudes towards adoption change drastically depending upon the circumstances surrounding it and the overall culture of the country into which a child is adopted. In domestic adoptions a child maintains ties to his or her birth country. Much of the time, domestic adoptions can also be simple adoptions and thus, not all original kinship ties are broken. Ideally, according to the International Convention on the Rights of the Child, all children have the “right to know their parents, to be reared by them whenever possible, to maintain a personal relationship with them unless it is contrary to the child’s interests and, as far as possible, to enjoy continuity in their

ethnic, religious, cultural, and linguistic affiliations” (Ouellette 2009:76). This is not always possible, and children still are adopted internationally. The policies of international adoption cut off these kinship and cultural ties by requiring plenary adoptions. In fact, a “child’s adoptability requires the cancellation of one identity and its replacement by another” (Yngvesson 2009:109). Yet many people postulate that the continuity of contact between adoptive and natal families could be valuable, especially for children who are adopted at an older age (Ouellette 2009:78). This dramatic change can mean a change in culture, kinship, nationality, and language and therefore, “cannot always provide transnationally adopted children with an identity and kinship affiliation consistent with their personal histories and their particular needs and interests” (Ouellette 2009:69). This creates what many experts see as an identity issue for many adoptees. There were many children up for adoption from Russia and Eastern Europe, especially right after the fall of the Soviet Union. These children are of European descent, so their features are generally similar to those of their adoptive parents. This type of international adoption is much easier to mediate because the children can be easily assimilated into their new home and culture. Now, these are not the only children up for adoption; there are a large number of children from Africa, South America and Asia. It is very clear once these children look at other families that they do not look similar to their family members like many other children do.

This has generated many different approaches to dealing with these identity changes and shifts. When international adoption was in its first stages, many countries did not keep thorough records of the children up for adoption. This made it nearly impossible for adoptees to later discover the identity of their birth parents or

even their own family medical history (Ouellette 2009:76). By the 1970s, many countries unlocked their adoption records as a response to this problem (Ouellette 2009:79). In 1975, England and Wales enacted the Children Act of 1975, with which they granted everyone over the age of 18 the right to their original birth records (UN 2009:36). In contrast, there are countries like China which have high rates of international adoption but have unreliable adoption records. There are other problems surrounding the identity of adoptees. According to Follevag (in Howell 2009:262), “children adopted from overseas are virtually indoctrinated and ‘culture terrorized’ into believing that they must learn about their ‘original culture’ in order to become ‘complete human beings’ with a complete identity.” Many people take a large part of their identity from their parents. However, it is more difficult to see the connections between oneself and one’s parents if one is adopted, and many adoptees may go on long searches for their birth parents if they feel they cannot define themselves sufficiently enough without knowledge of their natal origins. As Legrand (2009) explains, “Many people consider adoptees to be suffering from blood dislocation and genealogical bewilderment” (247). She goes on to state that this is the reason that many adoptees go to find their “roots.”

In order to address these desires of adoptees, it has become more commonplace for parents to take heritage tours to the adoptees' native countries and to talk openly about the countries the children left behind. There have been many studies conducted all over the world that investigate how adoptees feel about their connection to home. There has been a wide range of responses to these interviews. Some children feel a strong connection with their birth place and go in search of their birth family while others state that they identify strongly with whatever nationality they were

adopted into and feel no need to go be part of the culture they left behind. Legrand (2009) cites one of her interviewees, who stated, “I felt like I had come home. It was a very real, physical feeling, not just a sentimental emotion, although it did make me cry. I felt like my soul belonged here” (250). This is one extreme end of the spectrum of responses about returning to one’s birth country. On the other hand, Howell (2009) interviewed many adoptees in Norway and got many varied responses. When asking “[o]ne young Norwegian man who was adopted from Korea at the age of two and a half,” the response he got was quite different. The man did not have much interest in returning to Korea because, “he knows nothing about South Korea, does not speak the language, has no memories of ever having been there, knows nobody there, and knows nothing of its history or culture” (Howell 2009:260). These are two extreme cases and I am an adoptee who falls in the middle of this spectrum, as I am sure many other adoptees do too. Nevertheless, this begs the question of how much information about the birth family should be disclosed. Ingrid Stjerna, a Stockholm social worker with more than three decades of experience with international adoption, puts it in perspective when she argues that, ““there is no such thing as a motherless child -- even if she is dead, she is important”” (Yngvesson 2009:110). Oftentimes there seems to be a disconnection between the adoptees and their birth countries but even more so with their own birth mothers. It is from the birth mothers that these children come into the system. Thus, the balance between keeping the birth mother anonymous if that is her desire, and disclosing enough information to make the adoptee feel more connected with their mother country, is a delicate one. This is even true for children who do not feel a strong need to establish ties with their natal family or country.

Stigmatization of Poverty

When discussing international adoption, one must consider the reasons children are being placed for adoption. This includes the reasons they are not being kept for domestic adoption but also why they need adopting at all. The underlying reason is usually poverty. This is also one of the reasons why people from developed countries, like the United States, tend to travel to underdeveloped countries, like those of Africa, Asia, and Latin America, to adopt. There are many ethical issues surrounding this consistent exchange. The huge economic disparities between the sending and receiving countries have raised some alarm with people studying international adoption and the circulation of children. There are many concerns with how this international adoption route is a one-way relationship. Schachter states one of the primary concerns with this unreciprocated relationship when she says, “reproduction is not just having a child but raising a generation” (in Fonseca 2009:154). These countries are consistently losing children who are being sent away for their own benefit, but to the detriment of the population of the sending country.

The monetary disparities between the countries have provoked some scholars to consider the circulation of children to be taking place in a different context than that of trading between different cultures. Fonseca (2009) cites Modell’s mode of inquiry and says one must apply it to the “question of legal adoption and to a social context in which people are divided not so much by ethnic differences as by class disparities” (154) This perspective is consistent with the idea of structural violence. This is the idea that the structures that govern peoples lives force them to live a less than desirable life. An outcome of this is that they may have to give up their children to people who are not restricted by the same structural constraints. This is a form of violence against the lower classes. Even if a child lives in poverty, one needs to

question if it is ethical to cut off an entire set of kinship ties in order to place them in a new family (Ouellette 2009:79). It is the question whether there is really neglect and abuse if the living conditions for the whole family are limited. The adoptee usually does not get much input in his or her placement or adoption but they are the player that is affected the most. When considering adoption the idea is that it can “provide healthier homes in which children can grow into adulthood without any developmental delays” (Ouellette 2009:74). Fonseca (2009) posits that in order to avoid this type of structural violence, “fosterage may be preferable to the complete and irrevocable rupture of kinship ties implied in plenary adoption” (154). This is considered violence instead of merely an injustice because it creates a paradigm in which one country has more of a right to raise children than another due to economic status. The birth families are stripped of their right to raise their children because of their economic status rather than their abilities as parents.

The structural violence and the inherent discrimination against the poor, are evident when one considers the circumstances of the children being placed for adoption. While some are orphans or may have medical conditions, many are merely social orphans (Briggs and Marre 2009:12). This refers to the notion that the natal parents are not actually dead but due to extenuating circumstances, their children are put in the care of the state. These extenuating circumstances are usually due to poverty and the symptoms of poverty. The parents are being directly blamed by the courts and by the law for their poverty. This is easier than taking a more in depth look into the reasons for their crushing poverty. Therefore the parents are being seen as being unfit, or accused of neglect. While the children may be suffering from

malnutrition or poor living conditions, so is the parent. It is not a lack of care or love, but rather a lack of resources and infrastructure to support the poor.

Many of these countries do not have sufficient welfare programs that would help alleviate the problems that come with poverty. There is a stigmatization of poverty in many of these countries that places the blame on the family rather than society for their poverty. Frequently, people struggling with poverty are a distinct cultural group within a country. For instance, in Peru, it is the indigenous people of the Andes who suffer the most from poverty and therefore it is their children who are adopted most frequently from this country. Some governments, such as Brazil realized that, “many people had lost their parental rights because of miserable living conditions” and therefore they wrote the *1990 Children’s Code* (Fonseca 2009:161). This code states that, “the lack or scarcity of material resources shall not be sufficient motive for the loss or suspension of pátrio poder”³. While this seems to address the previously mentioned problem, the data clearly demonstrates that the code did little to alleviate the issue. Before the code, 81 percent of the admissions were related to poverty, but after the law was made, the reason for adoptability changed from poverty to “malefic influence of their parents or guardians: abandonment, ill treatment, negligence, abuse” (Fonseca 2009:161). It is highly unlikely that suddenly the number of parents abusing children increased drastically. The officials could no longer use poverty as the justification for a child’s need for adoption, but now officials are forced to accuse the parents of being unfit. If anything, this law only reinforces the idea that the perpetuation of poverty is entirely the fault of the parents. This, in turn, removes responsibility from the state and places the burden, fully on the parents.

³ Parental Power

Furthermore, the stigma of poverty is even more evident when one observes the ways in which science is used to justify putting many children up for adoption. In Leinaweaver's article, *The Medicalization of Adoption in and from Peru*, she clearly outlines how the Peruvian government effectively uses "biomedical measures to assess children's natal families as inappropriate" (2009:193-194). There are many ways in which this is possible. For example, children can be taken from their parents because of mild malnutrition (Leinaweaver 2009:195). The problem with this is that up to one quarter of all Peruvian children suffer from mild malnutrition. It is clear that this is not a measure that is used consistently to justify putting a child up for adoption. Since poverty is being framed within biomedical terms one can say that poverty has effectively been turned into a pathology (Leinaweaver 2009:195). It is thus perceived as a disease that is abnormal and to be condemned. Ultimately, there is a fault in the way of dealing with children in poverty. There is an immediate solution for children living in poverty, yet this "fix" only removes them from their home and puts them into wealthier ones. This does not address the underlying problems of poverty that causes these poor living conditions in the first place.

Children as a Social Commodity

Monetary gain and the exertion of power over a weaker community have both been given as reasons for the perpetuation of international adoption. Yet it is not just the monetary value that affects the policies and problems within the adoption process. One must also consider the symbolic value of the adoption process. According to Abreu (2009), before the intermediaries of international adoption were standardized, people like nuns, priests and wealthy upper class women were the ones who facilitated international adoption (151). This was prevalent in Brazil, where these people were

specifically called “storks” because of their role in the transportation of children from one family to the next (Abreu 2009:140). This system worked because of the symbolic value these patrons were gaining from helping these children and families, rather than any monetary gain they were receiving (Abreu 2009:151). It was clear after his work in Brazil that, “the admiration received from Brazilian friends and neighbors for having helped to save so many children are all subtle and powerful mechanisms of reward in this symbolic economy” (Abreu 2009:145). There are the monetary problems and the exploitation that extends from it, but as Abreu (2009) stated, it is the symbolic values that are assigned to the children and the actions of adoption that really affect the adoption process and therefore the policies. Also, when looking into the history of international adoption, the initiation of “save the children” campaigns by Evangelical Christian groups played on these same sentiments. As noted in the section on the history of international adoption, the idea was that one could be a “savior” of children in need all around the world merely by donating five dollars a month. This kind of advertisement worked not just because it appealed to people’s emotions and desires to help children in need, but also because of the validation one would get after merely donating five dollars.

Alternate Forms of Child Circulation

Many of these third world countries have social systems in place that help compensate for the reality of poverty. Many of these systems have been around for hundreds of years, but the policy makers create laws that fail to keep these in consideration. In Jessaca Leinaweaver’s book, *The Circulation of Children: Kinship, Adoption, and Morality in Andean Peru*, she explains how the indigenous culture of the Andes Mountains uses an intricate and widely accepted system of child circulation

based on *Compadrazgo*, or god parenthood (2008:5-6). These children are placed with relatives or godparents who help support the family if the parents are unable to care for them. The system is built to improve the children's lives but also to build social ties by using the children as trading goods. This system of child circulation is even more crucial when one considers the devastation that the civil wars and guerilla warfare has caused in the past two decades along with the crushing poverty that many of these people endure. Unfortunately, these systems of child circulation are not considered when children are being taken by the state. If a mother leaves her child with someone who is technically not related by blood, but rather through these social ties, it is seen as neglect or abandonment (Leinaweaver 2008:46). If the birth mother does not return in time, the child can be taken and placed for adoption because the child is considered officially abandoned (Leinaweaver 2008:45). The lack of understanding of this type of child circulation and the close relationships that are formed through the *compadrazgo* system has been known to tear apart families.

Hawaiian culture also had their own version of child circulation that helped protect children and form social ties before they were colonized. This type of child circulation is still practiced to this day, but to a lesser extent. This system is called *hanai* in which a child is exchanged from one household to another through an oral agreement between parents (Schachter 2009:57). The primary purpose of *hanai* is "to provide a child with security, love, and the continuity of kinship" (Schachter 2009:58). In the case study done by Schachter of Sam's family, he and his wife Loretta built a family of biological children, adopted children and *hanai* children (2009:59). The circumstances of each case shaped how they went about adopting the child, and in this case they used the American legal system to help them validate their

position of adoptive parents already established through *hanai*. Even though Hawaii is a part of the United States, it consists of indigenous people that have been carrying out their own cultural practices much longer than the United States has even existed. They were a state level society before being defeated and have one of the most complicated kinship systems studied.

While these child circulation practices work well within the culture where they are implemented many laws and policies do not take them into consideration. Schachter (2009) explains the problem with not considering these different forms of child circulation when she states,

Until we acknowledge the range of ways in which children can be cared for safely and permanently, we conserve a system in which hegemonic ideologies of kinship reinforce vulnerability. These ideologies eliminate the vital practices that allow many peoples of the world to sustain, in safety, a generation of children. The perpetuation of hegemonic ideologies of kinship through adoption convention and law deprives individuals from extending the making of kin to the making of community, on a global scale. (66)

In simpler terms, she is stating that the inflexibility of the United States and European countries in their definition of “good child care” prevents people from keeping their children in their families, even if it is an unconventional family. This blatant dismissal of whole kinship systems that are different from the standard western one is not only imperialistic, but also forcibly conforms these people to western culture and creates a hierarchy in cultural values. While these methods of child circulation may seem unconventional to us, they have been working for hundreds of years and should be considered as an alternative to foster care or adoption. Much of the literature about different types of cultural child circulation was dismissed for much of the 90’s, which created the impression that adoption was the only course of action that would “save”

these children (Fonseca 2009:163). According to Schachter (2009), “belonging may be a better concept than permanence for guiding the circulation of children, locally as well as internationally”(65). This addresses the earlier problem mentioned earlier of identity loss and also helps maintain kinship ties that would have otherwise been dissolved. There is a difference between having a stable home and belonging in a home, and this is an issue that should be considered by policy makers when creating new laws.

Eurocentrism

Many scholars complain that the international adoption system and all the laws and policies that support it are too euro-centric. They fail to take into consideration alternate forms of child circulation in practice and cultural views of kinship. These forms of child circulation would keep the children in their country and help them maintain ties with their natal families. According to Ouellette (2009), “adoption is now defined as a child protection measure rather than a kinship institution” (69). Or rather, the kinship ties and the support systems they form outside of the immediate family are not given consideration in the discussion of children’s rights. While the United Nations is an international entity, it is run by primarily European nations and the United States. Therefore, all the international codes are made by the people in these countries. Yet, the majority of the sending countries in the adoption process are in the other continents of Africa, Asia, and South America. Another concern is that the views of kinship and childcare taken into consideration are not those of the sending country but those of the Euro-American culture. Yngvesson (2009) shows that when adoption policies are created there are strict dichotomies in place such as “nature” versus “nurture”, “blood” versus “law”, “biogenetic” versus “adoptive” families”

which are specific to Euro-American kinship ideals (115). These are then all manipulated in ways that, “transform everyday practices of relatedness” (Yngvesson 2009:115). In Schachter’s conversations with Sam, a Hawaiian informant, she realized that his view of kinship and use of kinship terms are strikingly different than that of the United States. She states that, “his description of modes of having children points to the significance of terminology and to the denotations and connotations of concepts that frame a discussion of adoption policy and practice” (2009:54-55). There have been many studies into different forms of kinship and terms of relatedness done all around the world. Yet, when adoption policies are created these different cultural views and ideals are not considered. Mosse (2011) proposed a reason for this lack of change, regardless of a wealth of knowledge about different views of kinship; namely that there is an, “ideological control through structures of incentives or internal career-building, and the self-disciplining of aid bureaucrats that give resilience to expert ideas at the centre in the face of contradictory evidence” (60). So it is the bureaucratic system of international entities that prevent any drastic changes to be made in policy.

The legislators and lawyers in sending countries are the ones running the adoption system and are usually affluent males of society. The legal system has a distinctly different view of the circulation of children and adoption than that of the poor birth mothers or adoptees. As Fonseca (2009) states, “The political dimension of cultural difference becomes glaringly apparent when we consider that many of the gatekeepers, particularly lawmakers, are from the national elite and may or may not share values in common with people to whom laws are applied” (160). It is clear that there is a lack of communication between the legislators and the people the laws and policies are affecting. Whether due to status or cultural differences, there are striking

differences between the law makers and the birth families. This can be seen as an oversight or an abuse of power depending on how the families are affected.

Drive to be a Member of the Global Community

The difference between the developed and the developing world is usually framed as one having to do with modernity and how well a country is integrated into global trade and discourse. The developed nations are at the peak of influence within this global arena and use their influence to push countries that are still developing to reach a “civilized” level of development which is defined by the level that the hegemonies of the world have obtained. “Civilized” is a very general term and can be applied to almost any aspect of a country. Yet, most countries perpetuate their image as “civilized” through economic and political changes because these are highly visible in the international arena. According to the international economic policies of the United States in the past thirty years, free market trade and extreme privatization of industries will not only bring wealth to whichever country they are applied to, but it will also mark that country as one that is fully integrated into the global arena. To be viewed as “civilized” by the international community, a country must conform to the international bylaws and agreements put in place by the UN and the community the country wishes to join. The problem with these attempts at becoming a global player is that many times these changes are only applied to the surface so they create a facade of advancement. Due to these policies there were many changes made to the everyday workings of the country but the countries still lacked a strong infrastructure that would support its population.

All across Central America and Latin America the implementation of neoliberal policies have created problems for the poor rather than alleviated any of

their burden. In some countries amenities as simple as water and electricity were privatized (Shah 2010). This has led to many people being unable to afford them, and spending more energy to pay for amenities rather than caring for their children. Civil wars, guerilla warfare, and drug violence have disrupted numerous Latin American nations, leaving their populations more vulnerable than before. Neoliberal policies are creating a system in which there is no social welfare system to support the families who are facing even more pressure from their crushing poverty. Thus, this resolves itself in, “the coercion involved in the surrender of children” which “extends from the impoverished and disempowered single mothers who bear and try to raise them to the relatively underdeveloped nation-states that are unable to fund social policies supporting disadvantaged families” (Collard 2009:135).

Another aspect of western “civilized” ideals creating problems for the disempowered rather than assisting is in the semantics used when addressing problems. We currently live in a society driven by science. Leinaweaver (2009) points out that “drawing attention to the medical [issues] situates the Peruvian state as scientifically advanced and progressive; unhitching the medical from power imbalance, social marginalization, and bodily hardships ensures that the state can be viewed as blameless, as well as modern” (197). Hence, poverty becomes stigmatized. In the pursuit of western notions of progress, the government must use biomedical terms to determine the suitability of parents. By doing so, the state removes blame from the deeper rooted societal and governmental problems. This has led to somewhat racist policies in countries such as Peru. The indigenous population of the Andes represents "old" Peru, maintaining some of the indigenous languages of the ancient Incans, such as Quechua, and traditions that have been passed on for hundreds of

years. The indigenous population contrasts with the more modern and cosmopolitan Peruvians of the cities. This bias against the indigenous peoples led to policies that do not consider their system of child circulation as a viable method of insuring childcare. Peru also has, “aggressive adoption policies coupled with mass sterilization campaigns” (Leinaweaver 2009:198). While the laws were enacted to protect children, they failed to recognize the crushing poverty that neoliberal policies exacerbated and, “provided a new set of justifications for the removal of poor, indigenous children from their families.” (Leinaweaver 2009:193)

Future Direction

It is even more clear how the intricate policies of international adoption reflect the underlying currents of international relations due to the “paradox that the countries sending most children in recent years have not been the poorest or those with the highest birth rates” (Selman 2009:38). This seems contradictory, but the interconnectedness of countries and the power roles they play are much more complicated than just which country is the richest versus which country is the poorest. It is the previous historical influence that these countries have had with each other, the goals of both governments, the strength of the infrastructure to support the population of the country, and the compliance with international norms. Colombia is a relatively prosperous country in comparison with many other Latin American countries, yet the United States has had a strong influence in Colombia for the past century, so an international adoption connection between the United States and Colombia is more feasible. There is clearly a connection between countries of origin and receiving countries. Whether it is through historical colonization or through targeted policies of

the sending and receiving countries, the international adoption circuit demonstrates the interconnectedness of all these countries.

All these factors have contributed to the international adoption policies of different nations. I will focus primarily on these issues and how they are semantically represented in the information that is readily available for anyone looking into international adoption in Colombia. It is important to focus on these various facets of the international adoption process because, “Shelee Colen (1995) reminds us that families should not be studied in isolation; they should be situated within the wider context that involves asymmetrical power relations of class as well as nationality” (Fonseca 2009:169). In addition, since we live in the cyber-era, the most accessible information is on the internet. All the different stakeholders within the international adoption process portray themselves in a manner on the internet that reflects their own ideals. Some of these ideals shown in the semantics of these websites, can be linked to the history of international adoption as well as some of the theoretical issues addressed in this chapter. Colombia is known for having one of the best international adoption programs in Latin America and historically has a relatively strong relationship with the United States. Therefore it serves as a consistent country in which to investigate. Additionally, I personally was adopted from Colombia in 1991 and I spent the summer of 2012 exploring and doing volunteer work in an orphanage there.

Chapter 3

NAVIGATING INTERNATIONAL ADOPTION IN CYBERSPACE

I have limited access to the full records of the numbers of international adoptions from Colombia to the US. Therefore, I have used collected and analyzed data about trends of international adoption and interpreted them in connection with my own observations and interviews while working at children's homes in Colombia. I have also looked at the various websites of the different entities involved in the international adoption system. These include the US Department of State, the *Instituto Colombiano Bienestar Familiar*, the various private adoption agencies, the accredited orphanages of Colombia, the Hague Convention and UNICEF Colombia.

The internet is the way to obtain information quickly and efficiently on any topic in the twenty-first century. The first thing any person looking into adoption would most likely do is to Google "international adoption" and proceed from there. Therefore the impressions these websites give about international adoption influence the attitudes held by these organizations which in turn influence the adoptive parents. According to Schachter (2009), "Legal requirements and the language of the law influence people's perceptions of their options as parents" (53) and I postulate that the same holds true for any type of dialogue of authority on international adoption. The design, semantics and objectives of each website, individually and as a whole, reflect the various attitudes towards international adoption within the United States and Colombia. These perspectives of adoption reflect the ethical issues previously addressed such as the imbalance of power and structural violence of international

adoption, the focus on saving children rather than fixing the problems that perpetuate the need for international adoption, and the Euro-American centrality of many of these policies.

In this chapter I will conduct an analysis of the major players within the international adoption system through the semantics they put on their websites. These include: the sites for the United States Department of State and the Colombian Governments *Instituto Colombiano Bienestar Familiar*⁴, 23 United States adoption agency websites, seven sites for orphanages accredited for international adoption in Colombia⁵, and the websites of the Hague Convention and UNICEF Colombia. There are many similar themes that run throughout the websites that reflect the various current viewpoints towards international adoption. The types of information that are the most developed show which attitude is reflected the most within that website and in the ideals of the organization that created it.

Methods

I used the theory of Critical Discourse Analysis, set forth by Fairclough in order to analyze the vast amount of information available on each website. Critical Discourse Analysis is an ideal way to analyze the information on the websites because it provides a means to analyze the rhetoric but also includes the analysis of this rhetoric in the context of global inequalities. This approach has been used to analyze how inequalities in access to education are reflected in University websites in the United States (Saichaie 2011). There are three basic stages that one must go through

⁴ Colombian Institute for Family Welfare

⁵ There are eight institutions that are accredited by the ICBF but *Fundación Centro de Adopción Chiquitines* does not have a running website.

when using CDA. First, one must describe the images and words on the site in detail. Second, one must interpret and analyze the language of the websites to “understand and interpret the connections between the role of language and the greater social structures it reflects and supports” (Saichaie 2011:3). Third, one must look at the wider historical, cultural and social theories that help to interpret the data one has collected. In conducting my analysis, I first did a quick review of all the websites that I was going to use. I then created a set of questions to be answered when I read through each website to ensure I was collecting the same information of each website. I used slightly different questionnaires to analyze the websites of the different players.⁶ Once the questionnaires were thoroughly filled out for each website, I recorded the data found and looked for trends. It was from this information that I created the subgroups within the larger groups and drew contrasts and comparisons on which I have based my analysis.

Analyzing the Major Players

There have been many trends in international adoption. As many scholars, such as Peter Selman (2009), have pointed out, it is difficult to find many statistics on international adoption due to lack of information and non-uniform methods of collecting information. Now, more stringent procedures are being applied to international adoption policies, and countries that signed the Hague Convention are beginning to follow the regulations that it established. Even though the Hague Convention occurred in 1993, and most countries signed it within the following 2 years, the United States did not begin to implement the regulations of the Hague

⁶ See Appendix I

Convention until April 1, 2008. Colombia had changed its policies to match those set by the Hague convention by 1998. In this new era of internet and Google, information is easily accessible. The information we look up online quickly influences our thoughts on the subject being researched. The internet and the information disseminated on it is a good reflection of modern attitudes towards institutions such as adoption. This is because it can be updated at a moment's notice and can be a way to navigate the vast amount of literature on international adoption.

An analysis of websites about international adoption in Colombia demonstrates the presence of several players. There are the governments of the sending and receiving countries such as the *Institución Colombia de Bienestar Familiar (ICBF)*, the government welfare agency that is in charge of adoptions, and the United States Department of State. There are also the private agencies that are accredited both by the Hague Convention and the ICBF to conduct international adoptions between the United States and Colombia. There are 23 adoption agencies in the United States that are accredited and there are 7 orphanages (with accessible websites) in Colombia that can conduct adoptions besides the ICBF. Finally, the international entities that influence international adoption also disseminate information on international adoption to Colombia. This would include the website for the Hague Convention and the UNICEF Colombia website.

Government Websites

The websites of both the ICBF and the US State Department both make sure to keep their language straightforward, unbiased and purely factual. These sites are mainly focused on keeping adoptions ethical. They monitor this by gathering statistical information about international and domestic adoptions within their

countries and by making sure all their advice and information follows the international laws, rules and regulations as closely as possible. The United States Department of State opens the adoption process page with a direct quote from the preamble of the Hague Convention, “Recognizing that the child...should grow up in a family environment, in an atmosphere of happiness, love and understanding.” On the second portion of the home page there is the definition of adoption: “Adoption [is] the judicial or administrative act that establishes a permanent legal parent-child relationship between a minor and an adult who is not already the minor's legal parent and terminates the legal parent-child relationship between the adoptive child and any former parent(s).” This is interesting because the *Instituto de Colombiano Bienestar Familiar* (ICBF) uses the same definition of adoption, “According to Article 61 in Law 1098 of 2006,⁷ ‘Adoption is primarily a means of protection under vigilance of the State, that establishes an irrevocable paternal relationship between people who do not have it through biological means’ (translation). The government websites maintain a relatively neutral tone for the information provided without overtly stating the power dynamics between the countries. They do this by sticking to the international codes and stating the step-by-step process according to the regulations of each country. While the formats and rules stated on the sites are uniform and follow each other very closely there are slight differences between the two sites. These differences can reflect the slightly different images being portrayed by each government.

⁷ “Según el Artículo 61 de la Ley 1098 de 2006,-¹“La adopción es, principalmente y por excelencia, una medida de protección a través de la cual, bajo la suprema vigilancia del Estado, se establece, de manera irrevocable, la relación paterna filial entre personas que no la tienen por naturaleza”

On the US State Department site, the introduction to international adoption states, “Each year thousands of U.S. citizens adopt children from abroad and many families in other countries adopt U.S. children.” This is a little known fact about international adoption that would be surprising to most. Yet the thousands of children that are adopted abroad by United States citizens vastly outnumber the children being adopted from the United States. These children being adopted from the United States are placed in countries that are mainly importers of children as well, such as Canada, Germany and other Western European countries. No other websites I visited mentioned that children from the United States were being adopted abroad. This focus on adoption of United States children abroad could be seen as an attempt to avoid the reality of the inequalities between the sending and receiving countries within the international adoption process. Yet when one investigates which children are being adopted abroad from the United States, Shellee Colen’s (1986) theory of “stratified reproduction” still applies. She defines this as, “A transnational system of power relations that enables privileged women to bear and nurture children while disempowering those who are subordinated by reason of class, race, and national origin (in Briggs and Marre 2009:17). The children being adopted from the United States are African American children, meaning they represent a historically repressed group within the United States (Davenport 2004). Even though this is not adoption from a different country, it still falls into the same structure of power relations that frame international adoption.

The presentation of rules and regulations on the two sites is slightly different. On the ICBF website, when presenting the adoption process and the various factors that dictate who can adopt and who can be adopted, the laws of Colombia are cited

instead of international laws. The website shows how the laws of Colombia are sufficient to justify these regulations but also how they follow suit with international regulations. In contrast, when the United States mentions the rules established by the Colombian government they mention the Hague Convention many times in sentences such as:

Because Colombia is a member of the Hague Adoption Convention, children from Colombia must meet the requirements of the Convention in order to be eligible for adoption. For example, the Convention requires that Colombia attempt to place a child with a family in Colombia before determining that a child is eligible for intercountry adoption.

On the ICBF website they merely state, “Colombian citizens in Colombia and abroad have priority [in the matter of adoption]” (translation)⁸. The difference between the ways of relating the same idea shows how each government views the power of the government of Colombia. The US State Department, through the semantics of their statement, give more power to the Hague Convention regulations than to the written laws of Colombia.

The discussion of international adoption varied on each site. The U.S. Department of State refers to it as international adoption and carefully makes a distinction between that and domestic adoption. On the ICBF website all the adoption information is under the same section and it rarely makes any distinctions between the laws for international versus domestic adoption. It also does not refer to it as international adoption but rather just adoptive parents who are “extranjeros”(foreigners). The US State Department, by talking about international

⁸ “Tienen prelación las solicitudes de familia colombianas residentes en Colombia y en el exterior.”

adoption and domestic adoption as two separate processes, suggests that these are two separate acts that may be perpetrated for different reasons. Since it is called international adoption instead of just adoption, which happens to be abroad, this may create hierarchy in the minds of the readers. This slight difference in addressing adoption can be linked to the “save the children” approach. This entails that these countries abroad are less developed than the United States, so, as an adoptive parent, you are doing them a favor by saving their children. The perceived superiority of the United States implicitly elevates the act of international adoption. The ICBF removes this dichotomy by grouping international and domestic in the same domain, and therefore avoids the hierarchy. As Fonseca (2009) points out, “In Brazil, as in many other sending countries, media coverage generally depicts foreign intervention in the adoption process as predatory” (156). This attitude is reflected by the use of “foreigners” as a way to refer to families adopting abroad rather than calling it international adoption.

A final distinction is that there is only one page of the ICBF website that is available in English. There is not a translation button and in order to even find this page that is translatable, a person would have to understand the links they are pressing in the first place, which are all in Spanish. This conveys how inaccessible the ICBF website is to many United States citizens. On one hand, this clearly shows that the Colombian government is very focused on placing the children in their care domestically, thereby effectively cutting off direct contact and influence of the international adoptive parents. Yet, on the other hand, they are granting more power to the adoption agencies that must mediate between ICBF and the adoptive parents.

Private Adoption Agencies

There are 23 adoption agencies that are listed on the ICBF website as institutes in the United States that have both Hague and ICBF certification⁹. This means they are allowed to perform international adoptions between the United States and Colombia. These organizations range in location, scale, functions, countries they reach and other services. Some are just a small part of a larger organization and others are solely small private adoption agencies. Once a family decides to look into adopting internationally, they usually do research on nearby adoption agencies and what they have to offer. That is why the appearance of the home page, what their mission statement is and other pieces of information they present can affect the perceptions of the audience. By comparing the messages promoted on the websites, one can make observations about the various views of international adoption that these websites reflect. These perspectives on international adoption will then shape the perception of the adoptive families that use these agencies.

All of them are non-profits and therefore they ask for donations. The types of donations can vary. Some request one-time donations or gifts; in others a person can become a member and pay a fee and in others a person can sponsor a child. Some of these sites play to the predisposition of their audience by using phrases such as “give to a child” or “help a child in need”. Agencies that do this are: The Alliance for

⁹ The sophistication of the sites is drastically different. Some sites like Adopolis are reminiscent of websites from the early 90s with just plain colored text with various tabs, but not formatted beyond that. There is not even a photo of a child on the whole website, just a sketch of a child running in their logo. Others are very complex and most have slideshows with information on them accompanied by pictures. The information on the first page also reflects the mission and ideals of the agency. On the Gladney Center website, it is clear that they are focused on this aspect of international adoption because one of the slides on their main page is an advertisement for this campaign, along with a preview video for the whole documentary that it accompanies.

Children, Spence-Chapin, Children's Hope and Bethany Christian Services. Also, all of them use many different images of children. Some include pictures of just the children and some include pictures of happy families together. It is assumed that people considering adoption you want to help children who do not have a family and at the same time create a family of their own.

There are three major categories that these adoption agencies can be sorted into. The category they are in reflects the ideals that are the most prominent on their website. The first category is the "save the children" ideal, the second is the "rights of the children" ideal and the final is the "create a family" ideal. The varying degrees to which each of these aspects is focused on reflects different facets of the international adoption process and the conflicting attitudes, motivations, and influences within the system.

"Save the Children" Agencies

The sites focused on the ideals of "save the children" can be seen as evoking the idea that some people are more deserving of having children because of where they live. It can be concluded that it is the responsibility of people in the United States to go and "save" the children of these third world countries to bring back into a happy and loving home which they can only find in the United States. Fonseca (2009) paints a picture of the "save the children" media as images of " stark halls in sordid, Third World orphanages, filled with dirty cribs and usually dark-skinned toddlers stretching out their arms, as though begging for a charitable soul to adopt them" (156). This image is the one that has been perpetuated by Evangelical Christian groups in the last 60 years. Since many of these groups eventually became adoption agencies, this ideal still permeates many adoption agencies' discourse on international adoption. This is

also the category into which most adoption agencies can be classified; here, almost half (11) of the adoption agencies received this categorization. They are: Gladney Center for Adoption, Carolina Adoption Services, Journeys of the Heart, Embraced by Grace, Wide Horizons for Children, The Alliance for Children, Spence Chapin, Bethany Christian Services, Little Miracles International, Lifeline and Children's Hope. Even though they fall under this category they all vary in the degree to which they support this ideal. Some, like Journeys of the Heart, Lifeline Children's Services, Bethany Christian Services, The Alliance for Children, Embraced by Grace and Children's Hope would fall under the traditional "save the children" ideals. The ideals they are trying to portray to the prospective adoptive parents are clear when one reads their mission statements. For example the mission statement of Bethany Christian Services states, "Many children in our world urgently need safe, loving families. You can help a child escape a life of great need to have a new beginning in your home. Adopting internationally through Bethany can give a vulnerable child hope and a future." The extreme dichotomies in words used in these two sentences creates an image of a helpless child being saved from the darkness of their "life of great need" and coming into the light of "safe, loving families". Little Miracles International uses actual statistics and numbers to appeal to this ideal. They state that, "around 37% of Colombians live below the poverty line, and the country continues to face large income disparities and inadequate social services." This is the reason to adopt the children and save them from these hardships.

Another particularity of these websites is the use of the word "orphan". Many of the children classified as "orphans" in the world nowadays are social orphans. Yet, in the Children's Hope mission statement they say, "You can bring Hope to one of the

millions of orphans worldwide...” without addressing the various situations in which these children find themselves. Some of the websites that are not classified as having a the “save the children” emphasis, such as Bay Area Adoption services, state “Our mission is to find and support loving, able parents for orphaned, abandoned or relinquished children.” They classify the children as orphans but also address the other ways in which a child can be put up for adoption. The agencies that fail to recognize the varying familial statuses of the children placed for adoption can be criticized as Euro-centric because they fail to recognize other forms of kinship, and they may indirectly be supporting a system of structural violence. They do not consider different types of child circulation and kinship because they label all the children as orphans instead as relinquished, or just adoptable. When one thinks of an “orphan,” the literary character of Oliver Twist is one of the first to come to mind. He was without a family and lived on the streets with a ragtag team of ragamuffins until he was so graciously taken in by wealthy gentleman (Dickens 1992). This is the image of an orphan that popular culture has perpetuated in the United States, yet this is far from the case for many of these children. These children are classified as “adoptable” due to external forces such as poverty. In this way, calling the children orphans also strengthens the structural violence and the pathologization of poverty, continued by the international adoption system. The parents of these children have to relinquish their children or have their parental rights taken away because of a lack of resources. As Leinaweaver (2009) states, “[Government agencies] frame malnourishment as evidence of a parent’s ‘moral abandonment’ [of their child]” (195). These children are then placed for adoption and the adoptive parents abroad now have more of a right to raise the child than their birth parents due to this economic disparity (Fonseca 2009:154).

There are the exceptions to this traditional “save the children” mentality. For instance, Wide Horizons for Children’s mission statement states the typical, “We are dedicated to the well-being and security of vulnerable and orphaned children worldwide” but then qualifies this statement by explaining the ways in which they do this. Instead of just mentioning adoption, they state that they do this by also “strengthening families to improve their ability to care for their children and improving outcomes for children living outside of parental care.” Instead of framing international adoption as the only way to help these children, they also provide many different programs throughout the world and in the countries they adopt from that focus on preventing the causes that lead children to end up in the welfare system. According to their website, “To date, we have provided more than \$15 million to stabilize vulnerable families and support orphan care programs.” One of these programs is at *Chiquitines* in Cali, Colombia where they facilitate a pre-school and elementary school that is for local children, most of whom live below the poverty line. By indicating the exact monetary amount that they have provided these programs they are focusing on their wealth and generosity and by contrast the poverty of the places they are helping. This furthers the image of a hierarchy and clearly shows a power relationship between these two groups. They also specifically market themselves as different than most other adoption agencies because, “While there are hundreds, if not thousands, of non-profits working with orphan populations, WHFC is one of only a handful of organizations focusing on *solutions* that address how the lack of a stable or permanent family affects a child’s development and prospects for a fulfilling future” (emphasis added). Another adoption agency that has the same kind of philosophy is Spence Chapin. It is an adoption agency but it also has a so-called “Granny Program”.

This is a program “which identifies the problems of many institutions in foreign countries where children lack basic human interaction and care in the children’s homes.” These “grannies” are local women who interact with the children on an individual basis. The Gladney Center for Adoption also goes beyond the basics of adoption. They help *Chiquitines* and *La Casa de Maria y el Niño*. They provide funds to start programs that help local children, especially through education. While the “save the children” approach seems dated, these new approaches to it show how it can drive people to give even more aid to these areas so they will not need to save any more children. However, by helping these communities and creating programs that would benefit the children, they are maintaining close ties between the orphanages and the adoption agencies and a relationship in which the orphanages depend on the funding and help of the adoption agency. This creates a dependency that will not lessen the amount of adoptions between that agency and the orphanages with which they work.

Both types of “save the children” agencies can be said to also reflect Abreu’s theory of children as a social commodity. “The admiration received from Brazilian friends and neighbors for having helped to save so many children are all subtle and powerful mechanisms of reward in this symbolic economy;” this applies not only to the Brazilians but to anyone participating in the international adoption system (Abreu 2009:145). The adoption agencies are gaining prestige because of their efforts to place the children. Some, such as WHC, the Gladney Center and Spence-Chapin can be said to gain even more social validation because of their efforts to go beyond merely placing the children by also creating programs to help the ones who cannot be “saved” through adoption.

Another facet of this “save the children” mentality is that these institutes want to see immediate action on behalf of the children. One of the main complaints about the new international adoption policies is that adoptions take even longer now. These policies were put in place to safeguard against child trafficking and to ensure that children are given the best possible options. Some adoptive parents feel that this extra time is not helping the children because they are stuck in an orphanage without a family for longer than seems necessary. There is a new campaign going on now that is called STUCK which is advocating for a more streamlined adoption program. This is an instance of “save the children” becoming the main focus without as much consideration for the many instances in which abuse of the system can occur. While the protection of these children is the ultimate goal, there are many different factors that influence these policies. As Ferguson (1994) suggests, there is an “anonymous constellations of control” in the international adoption process. This theory suggests that there are different policies that all work together to create an “apparatus” or framework; thus, in order to change one of the policies one must be able to navigate the whole “constellation” (Feldman 2011:44)

“Rights of the Child” Agencies

Sites focused more on the “rights of children” ideal tend to mention the Hague convention and have the seal of the Hague convention indicating they are able to conduct adoptions with other convention countries. This group of websites is very similar in its motives to government websites and the Hague Convention website. There are five websites that are classified in this category: European Adoption Consultants Inc, Across the World Adoptions, Adopolis Inc, Pearl S. Buck International, and Dillon International Inc. While this moves away from the older

ideals of “saving the children” and being a champion for the poor, it focuses on the laws and regulations that are meant to prevent the trafficking of children, as well as, international regulations and conformity. Conformity with the laws is seen as a safeguard and highlights the rights of the children. This compliance with international laws is also seen as a modernization method for staying updated on current ideals surrounding international adoption. It is also these safeguards that draw out the already lengthy adoption process even longer. Dillon International’s website said that these new regulations are a “blessing in disguise” because “children who were previously forgotten now have a real chance to grow up in a loving, permanent family.” These are the children with disabilities, sibling groups and older children. These are the children that most of the adoption sites emphasize in Colombia, because now, since the Hague Convention, the Colombian government is making a concerted effort to place infants and younger children with adoptive families domestically. In this way, there seems to be a shift in power from the adoptive parents and adoption agencies to the Colombian government. This is because now the Colombian government is dictating which children they are letting out of the country, rather than United States citizens getting to chose the child they want the most. However, this does not represent a complete paradigm shift. As I will discuss, the regulations and policies that come from the Hague convention also indicate the power that the Euro-American ideals in the UN have over the policies of Colombia. It is a complex balance because the Colombian government still wants to allow their children to be adopted, but in order to focus on the children who need it the most and who may not be adopted in their own country, the Colombian government must follow the laws and regulations set down by the Hague Convention.

All of the sites concerned with the legality and ethical issues of the adoption process make sure to display the Hague Convention insignia on the home page of their websites. The Across the World Adoptions shows this trend to call attention to their accreditation and the fact that they follow the Hague Convention by posting right under their name on the website “A Hague Accredited, Licensed, Non-Profit, International Adoption Agency.” The European Adoption Consultants Inc website advertises in a prominent place on their website the fact that they are not only accredited by the Hague Convention, but also that they are Colombia and Haiti Accredited. Another problem with international adoption policies that are reflected in this type of focus is the fact that international adoption policies and regulations are too Western. That is because the UN and the governments of Colombia and the United States formulate these policies. While trying to look out for the welfare of the children they are moving from one family to another, the adoption agencies and the governments seem to disregard the various hardships these children may face by being in an institution. It is interesting to note that these adoption agencies are very invested in the fact that they are accredited and ethical to the highest standards because the Hague Convention did not come fully in effect in the United States until April 2008 even though they had signed it in 1994 (HCCH Status Table), while Colombia had signed it in 1993 and it was already in effect by then. Leinaweaver (2009) mentioned in her article, “The Medicalization of Adoption in and of Peru” that the countries of Latin America want to seem modernized and so they do everything in their power to change their policies to reflect this modernity (197). Although this refers specifically to Peru, one could postulate that Colombia signed the agreement quickly and were very active in implementing it immediately because of their desire to be up to date by

complying with the international agreements proposed to them. The United States on the other hand took 14 years to implement these new regulations and this may be because they felt no pressure because they are a world hegemonic power.

Of the five adoption agencies that fall under this category, four of them are larger sites that serve multiple functions within their communities and have many different international and domestic adoption programs. Since they are the large adoption groups it would make sense that they would want to show their qualifications and compliance to ethical standards. The mission of Pearl S. Buck International is a perfect example of this worldly image:

Pearl S. Buck International® is a non-profit organization with three distinct functions that operate as one with the common mission of continuing the legacy and dreams of Pearl S. Buck. This includes her commitment to improving the quality of life, expanding opportunities for children and promoting an understanding of the values and attributes of other cultures, the injustice of prejudice, and the need for humanitarianism throughout the world.

The wording of this mission statement is clearly a rewording of the mission statements of the UN and the Hague Convention. It is a very vague mission because it addresses all children and wider problems such as quality of life and prejudices. These larger agencies are focused more on the laws of international adoption because they aim to project their own image as leaders in the international adoption arena, and to do so they need to be accredited and affiliated with as many international and domestic groups as possible. This type of system may lose some of the individuality and individualized attention that many adoptive parents seek.

These international policies are meant to focus on the rights of the child as delineated in the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Hague Convention (1993). According to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the “first legally

binding instrument to incorporate the full range of human rights,” these rights are the right to survival; to develop to the fullest; to protection from harmful influences, abuse and exploitation; and to participate fully in family, cultural and social life (UNICEF 2013). These are the same rights being upheld by these adoption agencies. The problem with these ideals is that the last portion, “to participate fully in family, cultural and social life” does not clarify specifically to which family, cultural or social life they intended to refer. The social and cultural values being followed by current adoption policies are those of the western, developed world. Ouellette (2009) claims that this focus on the rights of the child has redefined adoption, “as a child protection measure rather than a kinship institution” (69). There is a large amount of attention placed on the physical well being of a child without consideration for the many other issues that factor into a child’s well being, such as social or cultural influences. Howell (2009) concludes that this emphasis on the biological aspect of kinship rather than the multiple other benefits it may provide hails from Kantian philosophy that has pervaded western thought with the idea of the “bounded autonomous individual” (261). Yet, as Leinaweaver (2008) has shown through her fieldwork on child circulation in the Andes Mountains of Peru, even godparents who are not blood related to an individual can provide and build a support system that fulfills all of these ideals mentioned by the Convention on the Rights of the Child. The child circulation system allows children to gain a better education because of the notion of “superarse” (to better oneself), which entails living with an individual that is a “godparent” because of their access to a better education system and a more stable living environment (Leinaweaver 2008).

All of these websites are centered around the whole process and how it follows the ethical codes set forth by the Hague Convention. Many of them cite the Hague Convention in their website. Adopolis has a whole section dedicated to Adoption Ethics, in which they state that they “will always operate with the highest ethical standards”. They then outline their approach to remaining ethical in each facet of the adoption process. On the other hand, Adopolis does not appeal to the viewer through the use of photos. It also does not address any of the underlying issues of international adoption and the reasons that the children may have initially been put in the orphanages. They do not mention that the kids from Colombia are usually older, part of a sibling group or have disabilities and that the adoption process length can vary drastically depending on what type of child the prospective parents are requesting. It also lacks even basic information about Colombia to inform the readers about the culture and country of their future children. In fact, all five of the agencies that fall in this category lack any information about Colombia. This site is a prime example of how focusing too much on the political jargon and international conventions can cause the agency to miss the real reason behind adoption; the children and the harsh socio-economic realities they are facing in their own country.

“Creating a Family” Agencies

Sites focused on the “creating a family” ideal are centered around the adoptive parents, their desire to be parents and the streamlining of the adoption process. There are seven websites that are classified under this category: The Barker Foundation, Crossroads Adoption Service, Grace International Adoption Agency, Heartsent Adoptions Inc, Bay Area Adoption Services, Lutheran Social Service, and Adoption by Shepherd Care. All these sites go into extreme detail regarding the adoption

process and how they will be helpful in every aspect of the adoption process. For example, on the Barker Foundation website they make it clear that they are an integral part of the process and they will help their clients through every aspect of adoption. They mention the children, eligibility, the wait, the travel and post-adoption concerns. Also, these sites do not have any outside programs that help the communities from which they adopt. Grace International mentions that they make donations to the “orphanages and foster program for the children remaining behind.” This, however, this is just a note at the end of the introduction by Theresa Barbier, the founder of Grace International, and the other sites do not even mention helping the orphanages from which they adopt. The Barker Foundation has a program called “Project Wait no More” which is specifically geared towards finding older kids an adoptive home in the United States, but this focus is still on adoption, just with a prioritization on placing the older children.

These sites are also the ones with very distinct reasons as to why someone should adopt from Colombia. On the Grace International Site, Adoption by Shepherd Care site, Bay Area Adoption Services site, and Heartsent Adoptions site there are at least four in depth reasons provided about why one should adopt from Colombia specifically. They are reasons such as: the children are all tested for diseases like HIV, Hepatitis and Tuberculosis, they have a thorough medical history, children are older than one year, children with special needs, older children, sibling groups, stable foster care and child welfare system in Colombia, staff that speaks English and the cultural richness of Colombia. These reasons for adopting from Colombia reflect the medicalization of the adoption process and the inherent contradictions in kinship that occur during the adoption process. The adoption agencies are assuring their clients

that the children they are adopting are screened and that any underlying conditions they may have will be mentioned beforehand, therefore alleviating the parent of any unwanted burden and the ability to know how their child's health will be before they commit to the adoption. The last reason of the "cultural richness" of Colombia was mentioned in two sites. Marre (2009) points out that, "[T]he pervasive undervaluation of a place or culture which [the adoptive families] keep saying they want to keep alive for their children seems paradoxical" (238). This is the constant contradiction in the claim about cultural richness. Once a child is adopted, they will no longer have this culture to refer to, but rather the one into which they are adopted. There are also five of the twelve sites that do not have information on the country from which they are adopting (five others being in the previous category). So it is even more contradictory that they would use cultural richness as a reason to adopt from Colombia if they give no background on the culture in question. This could be seen as a way to assuage the pain of the inevitable cut of all ties with the birth families and birth countries that are necessary in international adoption. This creates a contradictory situation in which biological definitions of kinship and parenthood are used as reasons to remove a child from their natal country, and then they are asked to identify themselves with their new culture and family through idiomatic kinship ties rather than biological ones. Pauline Turner Strong characterizes this act of adoption perfectly by stating, "adoption across political and cultural borders may simultaneously be an act of violence and an act of love, an excruciating rupture and generous incorporation and an appropriation of valued resources and a constitution of personal ties" (Briggs and Marre 2009:1).

These sites could be criticized for focusing too much on the adoptive parents rather than on the child. On the Grace International website, the founder begins the

introductory page explaining how international adoption changed her and her husband's life, yet she does not mention where her children came from and under what circumstances. This is the complete opposite of the "save the children" ideal. This approach avoids describing the hardships of the children abroad that represent the adoptive parents as saviors. It removes the center of attention from the children and their hardships and re-shifts it to the desires of the adoptive parents. This spotlight on the parents is especially apparent since these sites are more inclined (5 of the 7) to have an exact price range for adoptions to different countries, in which every aspect of the price is enumerated. This is coupled with the description of the entire adoption process in extreme detail and yet the lack of basic information about the countries they are adopting from, shows this shift in approach from privileging the child to privileging the parent. This creates a very one-sided dialogue on the subject of international adoption that can be seen as Euro-American centric. According to Yngvesson, the attitudes in sending countries advocate for forms of child care that keep the children in the country, while the attitude of receiving countries advised intercountry adoption over domestic forms of care (Fonseca 2009:164-165).

Besides this, referring to the adoption process as a system in which a person needs to pay money in order to get a result yields an impression of a business deal, rather than an exchange. If the adoption agencies are operating like a business then the commodity they are trading is children. That is the problem that meetings and agreements, like the Hague Convention, are trying to prevent. These agreements are made to ensure that during these exchanges the children do not become mere commodities in the system in which they are circulated. While the adoptive parents do not have as much of a choice with younger, healthier children, they can be given

referrals to certain children or groups of children once they submit their dossier. Then, they can accept the child being referred or chose to keep waiting. This systematic approach to adoption is necessary because it makes sure all the various regulations in each country are followed precisely, so as to assure that everything is legal. Yet, it also creates a system and process in which the parents are far removed from the prospective children they could be adopting. It grants some power to the country that is referring children to the parents to be adopted, but it grants final veto power on who is adopted and who is not to the prospective adoptive parents. This is the idea of buying power at its finest. Buyers have the final say on what they will and will not pay for, and this includes children. This is one of the reasons why many of these countries and adoption agencies are advocating for couples to adopt special needs and older children. There are many incentives for adopting older children or children with disabilities. These are the websites with the most information on the entirety of the adoption process. According to Grace International, the adoption process can take anywhere from one year to over 3 years. Lutheran Social Service is one of the many websites that specifically mentions that special needs children and older sibling groups are up for immediate action and these children will be with the adoptive family very quickly, whereas it will take astronomically longer to place the children that are infants and in perfectly good health with a family from the United States.

All Three Approaches

All three approaches have benefits and disadvantages and address different problems with the international adoption system. The “Save the Children” ideal is quite reminiscent of “the white man’s burden,” or in other words how the people of the developed world should save children from the dreadfulness of the underdeveloped

world. As Abreu (2009) points out, one gains prestige in one's society through helping others, especially children who are seen as vulnerable. He states that children can be seen as a "social commodity" in this context. So one may not be benefiting monetarily from an adoption but one may be gaining socially. This shows how the balance of power, both real and perceived, affects the motivations of international adoption. If the United States did not have a perceived power over Latin America, then United States citizens would not feel superior, nor would they feel compelled to adopt from these third world countries. It is noteworthy that, whereas one always hears of adopting from Latin America, Asia and Latin America, but one never hears about Europeans adopting from the United States; that is why it is the perceived patterns that are important and not the actual ones. The United States has the largest amount of adoptions. As of 2001, United States couples were responsible for half of the adoptions in the world, 127,407 adoptions in total (both domestic and international) (UN 2009:89). Of all of these adoptions only 19,056 of them were international adoptions, which accounts for about fifteen percent of the total (UN 2009:91). However, there is such a large number of children in the foster care system of the United States that are not adopted, domestically or internationally. Families look externally for children because the blatant inequalities between developed and developing countries create a broad idea that children will be better off if they are brought to the United States. It is the perceived superiority of the United States that creates this unequal exchange. The perceived power turns into real power through its influence on policies and ideas that are meant to govern society. Paul Farmer frames this idea through the question, "By what mechanisms, precisely, do social forces ranging from poverty to racism become *embodied* as individual experience?" (Farmer

2005:30). These vague, broad ideas permeate society and they are able to directly change the life experience of a person, so that they embody these structures.

Colombian Orphanages

The orphanages and children's homes in Colombia are another player in the adoption process. There are eight listed on the ICBF website as accredited institutes from which one can adopt. They are the *Fundación Centro de Adopción Chiquitines*, *Fundación Centro para el Reintegro y Atención del Niño* (CRAN), *La Casa de Maria y el Niño*, *Asociación Amigos del Niño* (Ayúdame), *Fundación Casita de Nicolas*, *Fundación los Pisingos*, and *Fundación para la Asistencia de la Niñez abandonada* (FANA). Most of them have websites, however, one of the most frequently mentioned centers, *Fundación Centro de Adopción Chiquitines*, has a website that has been hacked and is currently giving out viruses and therefore is inaccessible. Also, the *Ayúdame* website only contains the "Quién Somos?" section¹⁰. This lack of information is a hindrance but it also reflects the fact that they are not as reliant on the internet and their website to help them disseminate information to the public. Also, *La Casa de Maria y el Niño* had a website but the information on it was extremely minimal. Under the "programs" section they just mention their program of adoption and have a definition of adoption that is identical to the one on the ICBF website. There is also no explanation of the children in their care, or statistics as to how many children they have helped. Besides *Los Chiquitines*, all the other websites can be classified by their focus. All programs are focused on the children in their care and their well-being, yet some center solely on the children while others have other

¹⁰ Who are we?

programs that help the whole community, a wider focus that is well established on their websites.

Children Focused

The sites that are mostly focused on the children are those of *La Casa de María y el Niño*, *Fundación Centro para el Reintegro y Atención del Niño (CRAN)*, and *Fundación Casita de Nicolás*. As I mentioned before, the site for *La Casa de María y el Niño* has a whole running site but the information on it is extremely limited. There is no information about the community they are in or what they do for birth mothers - just their mission statement explains their goals. It states, “The Casa de María y el Niño Corporation is a nonprofit non-governmental organization that provides integral protection of children and adolescents who have been made vulnerable and have lost their fundamental rights. We provide special support reestablishing their right to have and live with their family”¹¹(Translation). This site is the most focused on just the children and adoption is their only program listed. The mission statement of CRAN is very similar to that of *La Casa de María y el Niño* because it focuses on the rights of the child by saying, “Helping the children and adolescents grow in a family environment, a loving social environment and with a caregiver that allows them to exercise their rights and to be happy”¹² (translation). They do not mention the birth mothers in their mission statement nor the communities

¹¹ “La Corporación Casa de María y el Niño es una ONG sin ánimo de lucro donde brindamos protección integral por medio de la atención a los NNA (niños, niñas y adolescentes) que le hayan sido vulnerados e inobservados sus derechos fundamentales, en especial es restablecimiento de derecho a vivir en familia”

¹² “Contribuir a que los niños, niñas y adolescentes crezcan en un entorno familiar y social amoroso y cuidador que les permita ejercer plenamente sus derechos y ser felices.”

from which these children come. That is not to say they do not have programs for them, because they do have a maternity home called “Casa Hogar de Protección”¹³ – it is just not the main focus of their mission and therefore not the main idea they are trying to convey on their website.

The mission statement for *Fundación Casita de Nicolas* is much longer than these two, but one interesting statement is: “This within a legal framework, in which adoption is the ideal solution to fill a vacancy that a minor has due to the absence of a family”¹⁴ (translation). Thus, the website specifically mentions adoption as the ideal solution and not just as an option with which a child can be given a family. The *Fundación Casita de Nicolas* is also especially focused on the children because they have the “Programa Raíces” (Roots Program), which is aimed at children post-adoption. They recognize “the concerns that occur to many adopted youth” (translation)¹⁵ and so they go out of their way to provide an opportunity for the adoptees to come back and learn about their adoption and birth parents with the information the foundation has. This is interesting because it is listed as one of their specific programs and is advertised as such. When I traveled back to Colombia and visited FANA I was given a meeting with Flor Angela Rojas, who is the Director of FANA, and I was given my file and she discussed the various sections of it and asked me if I had any questions. Yet, on the FANA website, this is not advertised as a program.

¹³ Home of Protection

¹⁴ “Esto dentro de un marco legal, donde la adopción es la solución ideal para llenar el vacío que un menor tiene frente a la ausencia de una familia”

¹⁵ “las inquietudes que les surgen a muchos jóvenes adoptados”

The fact that all these websites are focused on the children and adoption makes sense because they are put in charge of these children while they are either temporarily or permanently removed from their families. None of them mentions placing the children back with their biological families or doing community outreach programs to promote stronger families. Two of them have programs for birth mothers, but they are not the primary focus and there is limited information about them on these websites. This emphasis is very much like that of the private adoption agencies that are classified as oriented towards “save the children” ideals. Much like those sites, it removes focus from the social issues surrounding international adoption and stresses the immediate problem of finding a home for these children. This neglect of players besides the children reflects the idea that the birth parents that had the children are for some reason less suitable than potential adoptive parents, once again highlighting the inherent structural violence of the adoption structure. Also, as Leinaweaver (2009) pointed out that the reasons for adoption are “maltreatment and abandonment”. The poverty that drives these actions is pathologized instead of addressed as a societal problem (195). This attitude is especially reflected in these websites because the reasons for children being up for adoption given on these sites is merely maltreatment, abandonment and that they were given up by their mother. They fail to mention the poverty that most of these families face that force them to give up their children, or that many children are taken away by the welfare system instead of given up freely.

Community Focused

The other three children’s homes, *Ayúdame*, *Fundación los Pisings*, and *Fundación para la Asistencia a la Niñez Abandonada* (FANA), all have a wider focus.

Their programs address both adoption and community programs. This is clear in their mission statements in which they state,

The association of Amigos de Niño is a nonprofit, linked to the National system of Bienestar Familiar, that provides protection and attention to children between the ages of 0 and 8, by finding ideal families for adoptable children and promotes the reinstatement of rights to birth mothers at risk or neglected¹⁶(translation)

The mention of protecting children and finding families for them, along with a concern for the birth mothers makes it different from the organizations that merely focus on finding an ideal family for the children. In addition, their program confirms this analysis. They have a home for birth mothers and their child to help support them in health care and child care. This enables birth mothers to maintain custody of their child by giving them the necessary resources.

FANA's mission statement seems to revolve around just the children because it says, "We comply with our social duty to give a family to children who do not have one through adoption"¹⁷ (translation). Yet even though this is their mission statement, they make it clear throughout the website that they focus on many more ways of protecting children than solely through adoption. They have a "*Jardin Infantil*" and the *Hogar de Margarita*. The *Jardin Infantil* is a preschool program for local children that provides lunch and child care for them; only a small fraction of the children are in the direct care of FANA. They also mention that many of the children that attend this

¹⁶ La Asociación Amigos de Niño Ayúdame es una entidad sin animo de lucro, vinculada al sistema Nacional de Bienestar Familiar, que brinda protección y atención integral a niños y niñas entre 0 y 8 años, busca familias idóneas para los niños y niñas con situación de adoptabilidad y propicia la restitución de derechos de las madres gestantes en situación de riesgo y/o abandono.

¹⁷ "Cumplimos con el deber de justicia social dándole familia a los niños que carecen de ella a través de la adopción."

program have been displaced by guerilla warfare of their country. This is the only site to have implemented such a program. They are addressing the large problems of the country as reasons for these children's malnutrition and poverty rather than just the parents. Besides the *Jardin Infantil*, they have the *Hogar de Margarita*, which was established right after FANA was founded – my own birth mother used their services before and after my birth. This is a maternal home that provides pre- and post-natal care to women. This website is full of information about the community, their programs and the societal problems that cause the hardships for the children. They focus their wording in the rest of the site on creating stronger families in the community; for example they say, “Our educational programs and counseling have permitted us to reach more than 1,400 adults of our community, allowing us to contribute to preventing family violence”¹⁸ (translation). An important factor of FANA is that they have the most companies mentioned as sponsors. These sponsors and groups such as “Friends of FANA” in the United States and France all provide much more monetary assistance to FANA than other programs in the same vein. This is one of the reasons that FANA is able to have large, updated facilities and additional programs besides caring for the children. When one thinks of the disparity of wealth, it is usually referring to that between the sending and receiving countries, but as FANA shows, there are disparities even between the different institutions in the system. They must rely on outside donations to keep running these community programs. Since the money comes from big companies within Colombia and also foundations from abroad an unbalanced relationship is created. The adoption agencies are able to do more to

¹⁸ “nuestros programas educativos y de asesoría psicológica nos han permitido acercarnos a más de 1,400 adultos de nuestra comunidad, permitiéndonos contribuir a prevenir la violencia intra-familiar”.

prevent children from being put into the welfare system, but in order to do this they must keep close relationships with outside sponsors.

Los Pisingos, in comparison with many other sites, gives adoption a relatively unprivileged status, not at all central to the site. In fact, it was difficult for me to even find information about adoption on their site because there is no direct tab for adoption or even programs. The mission statement mentions adoption but finding the actual information about it was challenging. The mission statement says,

To promote defense of life, by reinstating the rights of children to grow in a family (biological or adoptive) by offering counseling, protection and preparation for women in conflict with their pregnancy, children in vulnerable positions and couples or persons who wish to become adoptive parents, domestically or internationally.¹⁹ (translation)

They are the only site to mention both international adoption and domestic adoption, and they are also the only one to mention that a child could be placed back with his or her biological family. This means they recognize that there are usually extenuating circumstances that prevent children from being with their biological family. *Los Pisingos*, like most other children's homes, also have a *Hogar Materno*²⁰ where they take care of expectant mothers. The minimal information about adoption and the in detail information about the *Hogar Materno* show that this foundation is focused on addressing the problem at the start, even before the child is born. This focus may be the most beneficial to the children of the community because of the multitude of

¹⁹ Promover la defensa por la vida restituyendo los derechos de los niños(as) de crecer en una familia (biologica o adoptiva) ofreciendo servicios de orientación, protección y preparación para mujeres en conflicto con su embarazo, niños(as) en situación de vulnerabilidad y parejas o personas que desean constituirse como futuros padres adoptables a nivel nacional e internacional.

²⁰ Maternal Home

ethical issues that crop up within the international adoption arena. First, if a child does not need to be adopted, domestically or internationally they are maintaining their biological kinship ties and into which culture they were born. They may not have all the benefits of living with a middle class family in the United States, but they also get to maintain their identity, and even with meager means most parents will pursue any means to provide more opportunities for their child. For example, the child circulation system in the Andes may seem callous to us because the birth parents are sending their children away from them to live with another family. Yet these children still maintain their ties to their birth families, have access to better living conditions, and have access to a better education. As Leinaweaver (2008) stated, the *compadrazgo* system, “can be done horizontally or vertically (across class), helps to foster relationships that would otherwise be near impossible” (7).

None of these children’s homes mention the Hague Convention and most of them, with the exception of *Fundación Los Pisingos*, do not even call international adoption by that name. The information for adoption is all on the same page and they merely have another column that applies to “extranjeros” (foreigners). This removal from the idea of international adoption makes these sites seem more domestically friendly and gives them perceived distance from the international laws and ethics jargon that is necessary in any international agreement. Yet even though the semantics of these websites are removed from the international policy realm, its influence is still noticeable in the regulations set by the institutions and in what services they are able to provide through funding. In addition, all stipulate that a child has the right to be living in a loving and stable family. They simply do not go into the extreme ethical detail and laws of the Hague convention to convey this message. There is also not a

clear definition of a “loving and stable family”. Many of the policies, as mentioned before, are based on the biological aspect of kinship and that the family is stable, yet this view of a family misses crucial psychological aspects. Schachter (2009) defines the difference between permanence and belonging; “permanence just talks about the child having a stable home, regardless of the caring and love, its a contract that cannot be broken, while belongingness is more about the care and includes many other ways in which children can be taken care of” (66). It may be more beneficial for the child in the long run if subtleties such as this were taken into consideration more often.

International Entities

The international code that is the most integral part of the international adoption system is the Hague Convention, but UNICEF Colombia is also a major advocator for children’s rights. The Hague Convention website is specifically called Hague Conference on Private International Law. They have a subsection specifically about international adoption. The whole name of the convention is Protection of Children and Cooperation in Respect of Intercountry Adoption. Since this is a convention specifically to talk about international adoption, it goes into minute details, rules and regulations to govern the system of international adoption. It also has recommended models for the forms used throughout the process such as: statement of consent to the adoption, certificate of conformity of inter-country adoption, and a medical report on the child. The main concern of the Hague Convention is to promote uniformity within the international adoption process and to ensure that it adheres to the highest ethical standards. All the intricate procedures are meant to prevent child trafficking or any other way of profiting from the circulation of children. All the countries that signed the Hague Convention were all given questionnaires to fill out

about the various statistics of their country, such as the number of domestic and international adoptions. They then use this information to give suggestions for improvement and to keep track of the children being circulated. All the rules also make sure to promote children staying in their home country before they are adopted internationally. They are addressing the problems many people have revealed about international adoption such as an unfair trade between sending and receiving country and how this could lead to exploitation of birth mothers and children. It also is trying to prevent the removal of the child from the culture of their birth. This addresses the psychological issues of identity that have been observed in many adopted children. Yet by creating these intricate laws, they remove the focus from the individual children in each country and they become numbers within the system. The Hague Convention only addresses intercountry adoption and not the factors that contribute to the need for adoption. The Hague Convention is a part of the UN and the major powers of the UN are the European nations and the United States. Since they are the ones making the rules and laws, they are therefore exerting their power over the countries that sign the agreement. This leads to the concern that many people find the policies to be too Euro-American centric and too static. There are many reasons behind this. The main players may be the “psycho-technocrats” whose professional attitudes have been criticized as being “drawn from a globalizing academic psychology, [which] propagate[s] what pertains to correct knowledge at any given time” (Howell 2009:258). This criticism is of the abuse of expert knowledge within the system and how it may not be the most recent knowledge or the most useful knowledge being applied to policies, but rather the information that suits the ideological bounds of the institution at the time.

UNICEF, on the other hand, takes a very different approach to helping the children in these countries. They did a survey of the various regions and departments of Colombia and analyzed the literacy rate, post birth morbidity in children and mothers, nutrition, education, numbers of displaced children and records of child trafficking. They used these statistics to see how well the needs of children and mothers were taken into account in the development plans of the departments. After collecting the data they analyzed their findings and created a report called “La Estrategia, Hechos y Derechos” (Peñuela et al. 2007). Unlike any other source, they are dictating that children, adolescents, and mothers should be an integral part in helping to make these new development plans. UNICEF is advocating for letting the people who are being affected by these policies participate in the creation of new plans. This is clear in their goals where they state: “That 50% of the programs of early childhood care, Institutional education plans (IEP), public policy and development plans in the 32 departments are designed and managed with the genuine participation of children, adolescents and youth”²¹ (Peñuela et al 2007). This addresses the issue that is found not only in international adoption, but also in many wider societal issues; that the people in power are the ones who make the laws and policies that affect the people the farthest removed from power. This may be an insight into how international entities are beginning to handle problems such as development and maybe is a signal that in the future, creation of new adoption policies may include more of the people directly involved in it.

²¹ El 50% de los programas de atención a primera infancia, de los planes educativos institucionales PEI, de las políticas públicas y de los planes de desarrollo en los 32 departamentos, han sido diseñados y gestionados con la participación genuina de niñas, niños, adolescentes y jóvenes.

All Actors within International Adoption

The differences in the approaches of these three separate groups of actors within the international adoption field show the dramatic differences in ideals between these various entities. The government is concentrated on legality and the intricate process it necessitates, the international entities are concerned with the uniformity of the process and the prevention of abuses of the process, the private adoption agencies are concerned with the wants and needs of the adoptive families and the Colombian Children's homes are concerned with the children in their care. While all the other actors have other focuses besides the children, it is not until one sees the Colombian orphanage websites that the attention is solely on the children, their mothers, their rights, and the societal circumstances that initially put them in that situation. UNICEF is the only exception to this. The varying number and variety of other concerns these actors may have shows where the power lies. This is consistent with Ferguson's "Anonymous constellation of control" in which there is not a single entity in control but the push and pull factors of various actors create a web of influence. For example, the Hague Convention is dictating how the whole adoption process should be run, and therefore they are asserting their power over the whole overarching structure. It is their intricate policies that perpetuate the unbalanced circulation of children, yet it is also these policies that give extra protection to these children. The governments of both the United States and Colombia all must follow the rules of the Hague Convention. The Adoption Agencies in the United States disseminate various ideals of international adoption, such as "save the children", that feed into the perpetuation of the use of children as a "social commodity." This in turn gives power to the adoptive parents and therefore to the country as a whole over the population of the sending country. The children's homes are primarily concerned with the children, the birth mothers and their

community but they are the ones most heavily affected by all the rules and regulations. They must follow the international guidelines, follow the laws of Colombia, and negotiate with foreign adoption agencies. So they have the least amount of power even though they are the most directly involved with the children. There is a flow of power that influences every aspect of the adoption process. To add onto this intricate web of relations Mosse (2011) brings up another point:

Policy ideas gain currency because they are socially appropriate, perhaps because they can submerge ideological differences, mediate diverging understandings of development and so win supporters. In actor network terms, they are good translators. Ideas are cutting edge and able to legitimise financial flows because they have social efficacy as well as intellectual merit or because they function as ‘boundary objects; and allow dialogue but preserve a certain structure of institutional power. (61)

Besides the various influences of the many actors involved in international adoption, the deeply rooted societal and ideological norms that originally formed this system are constantly influencing the policies along with constraining the ones that do not fit within their ideological bounds. The many ethical issues reflected in my analysis will continue to be perpetuated unless there is a paradigm shift in the Euro-American views of childhood and family or there is sudden change in the framework of international adoption that grants control to a different group of people.

Chapter 4

CONCLUSION

There are many contributing factors to the international adoption process. The historical events and initiatives that led to its creation, the criticisms and attempts to fix these problems of the adoption process, and the various players within the international adoption system have all converged and created a web of relationships and influences that have created the current international adoption system. I have taken an in depth look into each facet individually and in interaction with one another. I investigated this complicated system because of my own international adoption 21 years ago. This system is a dynamic one and the various players, ideals and policies within it have changed it dramatically within these last two decades. I will analyze these differences by comparing my own adoption story with the modern day policies. Finally, I will summarize my findings and come to a conclusion about international adoption policies and how they may change in the future.

My Adoption

Adoption is a part of my everyday life; I have to explain why I do not resemble my parents or why my Spanish skills are not that of a native speaker on a daily basis. I was adopted from Bogota, Colombia in 1991 when I was about four months old. I have grown up in the United States for my whole life with my parents and my younger brother, who is also adopted from Colombia. Exploring the international adoption system was not only due to scholarly interests but also due to personal ones. I have

heard stories of my own adoption since I can remember but the kind of international adoption my parents went through in 1991 is dramatically different from the process of international adoption now. There have been many drastic changes in the international adoption system in the last 21 years since I was adopted and these changes were apparent after observing the child welfare system in Colombia and investigating into the very lengthy adoption process and comparing it to my own adoption. The adoption process has changed in order to mediate the many ethical issues that have arisen in the context of international adoption. This has been done through a change in the access to information about international adoption, changing the type of children placed for adoption, and the length of the adoption process.

First, learning about the adoption process and obtaining information about the different programs and countries is much different. When my parents were looking into international adoption the internet was not as fast and available as it is now. They had to conduct library research, use the yellow pages, talk to friends and then they made calls to the various adoption agencies they found and picked one that suited them the best. In the twenty-first century, by typing international adoption on google over 81 million results appear. The sheer amount of information can be overwhelming but it also makes it even easier to be well informed about the process, the different problems associated with it and the many options one can choose from. However, a large portion of this information may be contradictory or misleading. The scholarly literature on international adoption and the help of the adoption agencies are what really put this vast array of information in focus. This change in the way a person obtains information in modern society is one of the driving questions behind my research. Nowadays, one would no longer go to a library to find out about

international adoption if a person is just considering it as an option to build a family. The governments of the countries are able to delineate the exact process one must go through to adopt a child internationally. The adoption agencies are able to show what services they offer, talk about their staff and the relationships they have with the countries from where they adopt. The orphanages in the countries are able to ask for donations, talk about their children, and what programs they offer in their facilities. News articles and scholarly articles can provide background on international adoption in specific countries. Blogs and forums about international adoption can provide support systems, stories of other families' experiences and advice. The use of the internet and the way it disseminates information is a crucial way in which the international adoption arena has changed.

Second, the type of children being adopted international are a much different demographic than when I was adopted in 1991. The United States Department of State has a section of their website devoted to International adoption. On this site one can look up countries that a person may be interested in adopting from and view the various statistics of children adopted from that country to the United States for the years of 1999 to 2011. Upon first glance the total number of children adopted between 1999 and 2011 stay between 200 and 350 children each year. It is when one looks at the ages of the children being adopted each year that a new trend is visible. The number of children under the age of one who were adopted from the United States each year drops consistently each year from 177 children (76.66 percent of total) in 1999 to only 41 children (18.98 percent of total) in 2011. While these numbers are increasing, the number of children in the older age groups increase dramatically. Children of age one to four increase from only 27 (11.69% of total) of the children

adopted in 1999 to 61 children (28.24% of total). The children between ages 5 and 12 go from 22 children (9.52% of total) in 1999 to 85 children (39.35% of total) in 2011. Finally, only 5 children (2.16% of total) between the ages of 5 and 18 were adopted from Colombia in 1999 but, by 2011, 28 of these children (12.96% of total) were adopted. This drastic change in the age of children adopted is a direct reflection of the initiatives stipulated in the Hague Convention that a country must first look for a family within the country of origin to place an adoptee before they are released for international adoption. This is one drastic change between adoptions now and my own adoption 21 years ago. My adoptive parents were trying to adopt an infant specifically and they knew that the Barker Foundation had a strong and trustworthy relationship with FANA in Colombia. I was in my family's care, in the United States in just under four months after I was born. I have no siblings with whom I was placed in the care of FANA, nor do I have any physical or mental disabilities and I was just an infant. If I were to be placed for adoption now in Colombia I would have most likely been placed with a Colombian family or not adopted until I was much older. This is due to the goal of the Hague Convention to keep children in their country of birth but also because of the extremely lengthy adoption process.

My own adoption was a whirlwind of a year for my parents. They did preliminary research and attended a four-week class with the Barker Foundation to learn about international adoption before they were able to submit a dossier. By May 1991, they had submitted their dossier to the Barker Foundation and it was accepted; by August 1991 it had been accepted by FANA. I was born on September 2, 1991 and my adoptive parents were already on a list of potential adoptive parents. By mid-October my parents received a call from the Barker Foundation telling them that there

was a child that FANA had offered for placement with them. My parents accepted this placement immediately. The law at the time in Colombia was that birth parents had to meet with a social worker in *Bienestar Familiar* (Office of Family Welfare) and sign documents that they relinquished their parental rights of the child and were given 30 days to change their mind. The 31st day after these papers were signed my parents traveled to Bogota to meet me and stayed in Colombia for a week to start filing the proper paperwork with the court system and to interview with *Bienestar*. They had to wait in the United States until the courts had processed my adoption paperwork. The courts close for about a month in December due to the Christmas holidays. Two days before they closed, at 3:00 AM my parents received another call saying that their paperwork had been processed and that they needed to come back to Colombia to finalize it and to bring me home to the United States. My parents and I were in the United States by December 22. From the moment their dossier was accepted by the Barker Foundation in May, only seven months passed and I was with them, officially their daughter, in the United States. Now, when looking at information about international adoption in about anywhere in the world, the total process is projected to take at least 2 years. Many of the adoption websites broke down the wait time for children depending on their age and other characteristics such as a disability. The older a child is, the shorter the wait time is for their adoption to be complete. Yet, the shortest amount of time is still a year. For an infant to be available for adoption and to be placed with a family, most of these websites state that the wait and process could take at the least four years from when a family has submitted a dossier with the adoption agency.

When my mother was adopting she considered international adoption because of many reasons. One, my cousin was adopted from Korea about four years before and she had heard about horror stories of children who were adopted domestically being taken away from the adoptive parents because the birth parents had changed their mind. The wait to adopt me was slightly shorter than normal at the time, but only by a couple of months. There was no deterrent of a four-year wait that my parents had to worry about. My parents are older; my father was 39 when I was adopted and my mother was 33 so a four-year wait may have been too long of a wait and they may have turned to domestic adoption instead.

All of these changes reflect the direct influence of the Hague Convention on the adoption process in Colombia. These changes are very fundamental, affect the whole process and influence which families may adopt from Colombia or just internationally in general. The extreme focus on the plethora of information about international adoption is helpful. However, the reliance on the internet can skew the information available to a western attitude because the people with the most access to this information and with the abilities to disseminate information on it are residents of these countries. Therefore, this may be causing even more of a disparity between western views of international adoption available and alternative views. The difference in the demographic of children being placed for international adoption reflects many changing ideals within the international adoption agenda. The push to keep children in their country of birth addresses the issue of loss of identity due to a drastic difference between the culture the adoptee was born into and the culture her or she is raised in. It also addresses the ethical issues that appear due to the disparity between the sending and receiving countries. Critics such as Fonseca (2009), have said that the structure of

the current global relations creates a system in which one population is given more of a right to raise a generation of children over their birth country (154). This new stipulation, to keep the children in their birth country, addresses this criticism and gives the power to raise children back to the country where they were born. This push means that there are less infants available worldwide for international adoption, but it also means that people are considering adopting children that previously may have never gotten the chance. This includes children in sibling groups, older children and children with disabilities. These children are now receiving more focus and therefore more care within the international adoption realm and this is a clear benefit of this change in demographic. Finally, the extreme lengthening of the whole adoption process is in response to this new initiative to keep children in their birth countries, but also to create more protection for the children and the birth parents. The scandals of abuse and exploitation of both children and birth parents force the governments, the children's homes and the adoption agencies to be even more meticulous when screening parents for adoption. This is meant to protect children but it also has a major setback. Since the process is so tedious and extended, the children who are already in the children's home may be caught in limbo before they are adopted because of this extended process. It is clear that the international adoption realm is changing in response to the many ethical issues that have come to light in the past few decades, but there are still many more problems to address.

Closing Remarks

International adoption has clearly changed drastically over the past decades and it is still changing to this day. These changes are done to address the many criticisms of the international adoption system. There are definitely strides being taken

in the right direction. The reports of abuse and child trafficking are being curtailed due to stricter screening processes, longer processing time and the conformity of the Hague Accredited process. The identity crises that many adoptees face are being addressed by the pressure of the Hague Convention to keep the children in their birth countries before they are placed with a family from abroad and the creation of “roots” programs that encourage adoptees and their families to return to their country of birth. The stigmatization of poverty has been recognized in much of the literature on international adoption and countries like Brazil have passed laws that do not allow for poverty to be enough of a reason for the removal of a child from their children’s care. The focus of new scholarly literature on other forms of child circulation, like that of Jessaca Leinaweaver (2008), serve as a way to make outsiders knowledgeable about these other forms. The western tendencies of international adoption policies are being addressed by organizations such as UNICEF through their advocacy to let birth mothers and the impoverished communities participate in the development of policies that affect their livelihoods. Finally, neoliberal policies have been a favorite target of anthropological prose for decades by now.

However, these changes in policy, public perception and ideals are not going to repair the international adoption system. They are merely surface changes and do not indicate any drastic shift in the focus of international adoption policies. The elongated adoption process that is meant to protect children and birth parents from exploitation prevents this, but it also means that children are in orphanages before being placed with a family for even longer than before. Also, even though there is more literature about alternate forms of child circulation and the harms of neoliberal policies and globalization on developing countries, there has not been much done to address these

issues directly in the policies of international adoption. The stigmatization of poverty is deeper rooted than merely changing a law; as Fonseca (2009) notes since poverty can no longer be a reason for the removal of a child, the parents are labeled as neglectful rather than poor. Therefore, the same number of children are still being removed and it is perceived as the responsibility of the birth parents and not the unequal societal structure they live in. While UNICEF is creating policies with the Colombian government that are created in collaboration with the people it will affect the most, this kind of approach is still not being taken within the international entities that create the international codes and laws that regulate international adoption. The international adoption system's problems are an outcome of much deeper underlying societal problems that are merely reflected in these criticisms. The main issue is the imbalance of power between sending countries and receiving countries. The United States has the most children adopted internationally out of any other country in the world and they are also known as being the world hegemony at this point in history. Colombia, while not as underdeveloped or corrupt as many other countries in the world still does not have anywhere near as much influence as the United States. The "constellation" of policies created around international adoption were built on this pre-existing framework in the western mold of ideals (Feldman 2011:44). The "constellation" formed specifically in the international adoption relationships between the United States and Colombia show that the Hague Convention has the most pull in this relationship because they are what dictates the wider system that everyone else must operate under. The United States government then has more influence than the Colombian government because they are less bound by international laws due to their hegemonic status in the global community. The Colombian government still has a

significant amount of influence in this system because they are the ultimate gate keepers of the children in their country and allow their circulation out of the country. It is the adoption agencies that work on behalf of the United States government and the United States citizens that still have even less influence. Yet, the Colombian orphanages would have the least amount of influence in this constellation of control because their primary concern is with the children and they exert the least amount of power over the larger system that these children must travel within.

This framework is already formed around the reality that the poor people of underdeveloped countries will most likely never find a way out from their current impoverished state, the idea that a western lifestyle and culture are inherently better than that of non-western countries, that a child's rights are foremost to have a stable home in which they can grow up, and that modern science is the best method with which to evaluate the effectiveness of a policy and the quality of a person's life. It is not until one of these general paradigmatic views is shifted dramatically or the group with the most power is no longer a western one, like the United States or the European Union, that there will be any drastic change in the international adoption system. There will continue to be policy changes and the trends of international adoption will follow suit. However, the greater problems addressed within my thesis will not be resolved until a greater change is realized.

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Appendix A

GOVERNMENT WEBSITE QUESTIONNAIRE

1. Appearance of Home page:
2. what they define adoption as:
3. Who can adopt:
4. Who can be adopted:
5. Is it all in the same institution or multiple government agencies:
6. Mission:
7. Needed Documents:
8. Who you need to contact about adoption:
9. Statistics:
10. Process:
11. Other notes:

Appendix B

ADOPTION AGENCY WEBSITE QUESTIONNAIRE

1. Name of Agency:
2. Address, Email, Website, Director:
3. Where is it located?
4. Appearance of Website and Home page:
5. What countries it serves besides Colombia:
6. Mission Statement:
7. What the home page looks like and what it says:
8. What ideals does it appeal to?
9. Does it ask for donations?
10. Specific religious affiliations of the agency:
11. What does it say about international adoption in general?
12. Colombia section:
 1. What does it say as an intro for Colombia?
 2. Any mention of guerilla warfare or the drug war?
 3. Why should you adopt from Colombia?
 4. Why should you use this specific adoption agency?
 5. Does it talk about the cost?
 6. Does it mention statistics of Colombia? No
 7. Does it mention reasons why children are up for adoption in Colombia?

13. Outside resources?
14. Any Other Observations:

Appendix C

COLOMBIAN ORPHANAGE WEBSITE QUESTIONNAIRE:

1. Name, Director, Website and Email:
2. Where are they located?
3. Home page appearance:
4. Mission statement?
5. Does it ask for donations?
6. Other languages available on the site besides Spanish?
7. Sponsors?
8. What problems do they focus on?
9. Any specific mention of adoption agencies in the US that they work with?
10. Reasons given for children in the orphanage?
11. Talk about the Hague Convention?
12. Talk about international adoption?
13. Talk about domestic adoption?
14. What other programs do they have?
15. Do they mention the drug wars and guerilla warfare?
16. Statistics?
17. Adoption Cost?
18. Other Observations and notes:

Appendix D

INTERNATIONAL ENTITIES WEBSITE QUESTIONNAIRE

1. Name:
2. Appearance of website:
3. What it says about adoption:
4. definition:
5. regulations:
6. programs:
7. articles or pamphlets published by them:
8. Colombia information:
9. What is their focus?
10. What extra information do they have: