

# the OPEN ENCYCLOPEDIA of ANTHROPOLOGY



## Adoption

JESSACA LEINAWEAVER, *Brown University*

*What is adoption? To answer this question is to jump directly into one of the key controversies of anthropology: anthropologists, associated for over a century with the close study of kinship relationships, are quite hesitant to privilege 'biological kinship' over 'social kinship', and the category 'adoption' may unwittingly do that. On the other hand, reviewing what anthropologists have learned about adoption, fostering, and child welfare reveals some important understandings of how people make families and become parents and children to one another. Those findings resonate with what the great social scientist Émile Durkheim contended more than a century ago: that kinship is social or it is nothing. Adoptions around the world demonstrate that the intentional claiming of a kinsperson or a kin group, and the everyday acts (both by 'adopter' and 'adoptee') that are associated with bringing that person more fully into that family, are not practices limited to adoption but are in fact the stuff of all kinship. Because examining 'adoption' reveals the processes of social kinship, it offers us a direct route into understanding the social practices that are part of how all families come to be.*

*After examining these larger issues, the entry considers what adoptions around the world look like and what they accomplish. The word 'fostering' often describes the practices of raising, training, and caring for a child. By contrast, 'adoption' in its early formulations, such as in Roman law from which many contemporary Western adoption policies descend, emphasised the acquiring of a legal heir and the transfer of property via inheritance. The entry concludes with a discussion of recent critiques of international adoption, which have demonstrated that adoptions may also, among the many things they accomplish, reproduce local and global inequalities.*

### **The basic problem: critique of the study of kinship**<sup>uu</sup>

The problem with defining 'adoption' for an encyclopedia of anthropology is this: on the one hand, what anthropologists know about adoption is evidence for some of our most central tenets; particularly that kinship is produced through social, linguistic, and legal practices rather than asserted through genetic codes. On the other hand, the very category 'adoption' unintentionally runs counter to those tenets. First, I'll explain this central contradiction, then I'll go on to show what anthropologists know about adoption and why it's important – and only then will I define it.

One of the foundational principles of socio-cultural anthropology is its critique of ethnocentrism, which is the assumption that one's own ways of doing things are superior to all other ways, leading to misunderstanding of other cultures and their norms and practices. By studying cultures around the world, anthropologists have learned that diversity is the norm. In other words, every culture has its own assumptions about what is true and what isn't, so our job is to understand each culture in its own terms rather than imposing our own, whatever they may be.

The stated ethical incompatibility between anthropology and ethnocentrism came to a head in the 1960s and 1970s critiques of our discipline, which included as one major component a critique of kinship studies on the basis of embedded ethnocentrism.<sup>[2]</sup> David Schneider, in a critical tone, suggested that the ‘anthropological’ notion of kinship is simply borrowed from a European one (1984: 175). As he wrote, anthropology’s generalised understanding of ‘consanguinity, of blood relationship and descent, rests on precisely...the biogenetic relationship...We have tried to impose this definition of a kind of relation on all peoples...’ (Schneider 1984: 72).

It’s easy to see how this critique can be extended to the term ‘adoption’. Vern Carroll, comparing adoption in the United States with fosterage in Eastern Oceania, asks whether it is wise ‘for anthropologists to use this term [‘adoption’] to label customs that conform only in part to adoption practices in Europe and the United States’ (1970: 4). Adoption, like kinship, has been used to describe a wide range of practices. Yet lurking within this term, it seems, is the subtext of what it means among middle classes in North America and Europe. So if, as David Schneider proposes, ‘[i]n American cultural conception, kinship is defined as biogenetic’ (1980 [1968]: 23), adoption in the U.S. will be a legal and acceptable ‘fiction’ within a larger assumption that ‘[a] son or daughter by definition shares its parents’ biogenetic substance’ (1980 [1968]: 50; see also 1984: 54-55). Later, in his *Critique of the study of kinship*, Schneider suggests pointedly that ‘anthropologists have consistently treated adoption as something quite different from true kinship’ (1984: 171-2).

As such, by even so much as marking out a category called ‘adoption’, this encyclopedia entry runs the risk – amply critiqued by Needham (1971), Schneider, and others – of elevating biogenetic kinship to the unmarked or ‘natural’ category, and studying adoption only as something curious that deviates from the ‘norm’.

### **What adoption does**

And yet, anthropological research on that very category of ‘adoption’ has revealed two crucially important points: adoption is neither curious in terms of rarity, nor is it curious in terms of supposed deviation from a norm that is biological kinship. Rather, adoption is widespread, and is brilliantly revelatory of the processes central to the making of all kinship.

Firstly, adoption is far from unusual – over time and across place, it has been crucial to maintaining power relations, ensuring [social reproduction](#), and forming alliances, and it has been and continues to be numerically significant as well. For example, Elise Berman has reported that for the 250-person village in the Republic of the Marshall Islands where she worked, a quarter of children are adopted and an astonishing ‘90 percent of households include someone adopted in or out’ (2014: 579).

But secondly, and perhaps more importantly, studying adoption has helped anthropologists to demonstrate that all kinship is adoptive. In other words, no matter whether blood ties are asserted or recognised in a particular relationship, that relationship requires upkeep, assent, and intentional or matter-of-fact fostering. As Émile Durkheim wrote more than a century ago, kinship is ‘a social bond or it is nothing’ (1896: 318).<sup>[4]</sup>

Durkheim’s discussion of adoption makes clear why adoptions are such an important piece of evidence for kinship theory. Writing of adoption in small-scale societies, Durkheim notes ‘[b]y itself, birth is not sufficient *ipso facto* to make an infant into an integral member of the domestic group – religious ceremonies must be superimposed. The idea of consanguinity is thus secondary... All kinship is social, consisting essentially of socially sanctioned legal and moral relations’ (1896: 318).<sup>[4]</sup> Another similarly pithy way to say this comes from the groundbreaking work of Kath Weston in 1980s San Francisco on gay and lesbian ‘families we choose’: groups of close friends and companions who were sometimes described by anthropologists as partaking of ‘fictive kinship’ (a term that has been part of anthropological usage at least since the nineteenth century<sup>[4]</sup>). ‘All kinship’, Weston says, ‘is in some sense fictional’ (1991: 105).

By itself, as Durkheim proposes, birth is not sufficient to establish belonging to kin: ‘kin work’ is required. This latter phrase is Micaela di Leonardo’s; she coined it in a groundbreaking essay, where she used it to mean

the conception, maintenance, and ritual celebration of cross-household kin ties, including visits, letters, telephone calls, presents, and cards to kin; the organization of holiday gatherings; the creation and maintenance of quasi-kin relations; decisions to neglect or to intensify particular ties; the mental work of reflection about all these activities; and the creation and communication of altering images of family and kin vis-à-vis the images of others, both folk and mass media (1987: 442-3).

To di Leonardo’s useful intervention we might simply add that ‘kin work’ need not be limited to ‘cross-household kin ties’ (e.g., writing to in-laws or inviting a cousin to your [house](#)). Similar to the process of kin-work, ‘kinning’, as proposed by Signe Howell writing on transnational adoption in Norway, can indicate ‘the process by which a foetus or new-born child is brought into a significant and permanent relationship with a group of people, and the connection is expressed in a conventional kin idiom’ (2006: 8). Within one’s household, ‘kin work’ or ‘kinning’ can involve activities as wide-ranging as teaching a child manners (claiming that child as yours and representative of your household, concerned about how he or she will interact with the social world), or giving a sibling the silent treatment (withholding the normative [relations](#) of kinship from someone who, perhaps, has failed to act like a sibling is expected to act).

One form that kin work or kinning can take is verbal. Linguistic and cultural anthropologists have paid close attention to how talk can establish or attenuate kinship. An excellent example is provided in Sallie Han's writings on 'belly talk'. In middle-class U.S. households, fathers-to-be receive advice to 'talk, read, and sing to the baby [that is, the foetus]' so that they are recognised by others as expectant fathers, and so that they can be involved with their future children. Such 'belly talk', Han argues, 'accomplishes important cultural work for American mothers and fathers alike...[it] socializes women and men as parents' (2009: 312, 316). Yet speech and representation are equally mobilised to accomplish similar work in adoptive relations – for example, in Japan, Kathryn Goldfarb's research participants often highlighted physical resemblance between foster parent and child as a way of signalling the "self-evident" proof of a connection to a non-biologically related child' (2016: 48). This is one example of a feature of many adoptions, though not all: they are often partly produced through and supported by the involvement of mediators, from the official (social workers and attorneys) to the everyday (like those Goldfarb describes, who participate in conversations about family resemblance).

The 'kin work' done by these individuals incorporates newcomers – children and children-to-be, parents and parents-to-be, and still other kin as well – into families. That work of incorporation, I propose, is adoption.

### **What is adoption?**

More than a quarter of the way through this entry, I can finally come to define the topic. Adoption is, I suggest, the purposeful taking on of a kinship role, responsibility, or duty vis-à-vis another person. I've tried to make that definition as simple and open as I can, in part because there is a lot of variability in what anthropologists might label 'adoption'. It could be primarily about – as seen in the earliest adoption laws in ancient Rome – formally identifying an heir. It could be, on the other hand, a kind of fostering – taking [care](#) of a young person – not focused on inheritance but instead on the acts of raising.<sup>12</sup>

So, one way of answering 'what is adoption?' is with another question: 'Well, it depends – what needs and expectations do people have of their families in the cultural context you are wondering about?' In much of North America and Europe, a 'sentimentalization' or 'sacralization' of [childhood](#) (Zelizer 1985) has occurred over the course of the last century, so that what adoption is for residents of those regions today is a parent-centric institution that provides children to adults who eagerly want to love, raise, and care for a child.<sup>13</sup> Marilyn Strathern, observing the cultural implications of assisted reproductive [technologies](#) (which, depending on how they are defined, can include adoption), remarks that a child in such a context embodies 'the desire of its parents to have a child' (1992: 32). Problems or challenges within adoption in this setting will arise when the model of parental desire for a child conflicts with other aspects of social reality: for example, if prospective parents want infants whom they can raise and mould (Leinaweaver 2013: 38-46;

Stryker 2010), but the available children are toddlers or school-age.

But in other cultural contexts around the world and throughout [history](#), adoption is something else. There are several different ‘purposes’ for which adoption happens, and it is useful to distinguish them. Raising, training, and caring for a child is one purpose – often called fostering. Acquiring a legal and spiritual heir is another – for example, for many Hindus, sons fulfill both religious and property-related roles, and adoption is one of the potential substitutes for ‘legitimate’ sons in ancient Hindu legal codes (Bharadwaj 2016: 53, 158). In the following two sections I will describe each of these categories, before moving to a broader discussion of how adoption – among the many things it accomplishes – can also reproduce local and global inequalities.

### **Fostering: feeding and supporting a child**

The word ‘foster’ comes from Old English, and its original referents were food, nourishment, sustenance, and nursing.<sup>[4]</sup> Anthropologists have long been attentive to food – its [sharing](#), production, withholding – and the kinds of social relations that food facilitates. This awareness of the social significance of food has resulted in excellent analyses linking food to kinship. For example, Mary Weismantel’s essay on fostering in an indigenous community in highland Ecuador includes the wonderful line, uttered by a man about a child he had only recently brought into his household, ‘I am going to be his father...Aren’t I feeding him right now?’ (1995: 690). Weismantel’s interlocutor was saying that feeding creates kinship, over time.<sup>[5]</sup>

The concept of ‘fostering’ or ‘fosterage’ has also been amply studied in socio-cultural anthropology, with a focus not solely on food but on the daily practices of caregiving, tending, and nurturing. Anthropologists have documented fostering, or ‘child circulation’, as a widespread phenomenon around the world from West Africa to Oceania to the Americas.<sup>[6]</sup> The ubiquity of these fluid and flexible movements of children from one [home](#) to another, and the cross-cultural data on process and outcomes, show how effective fostering can be at bringing up children in an extensive family context while responding to structural conditions such as poverty or political upheaval.

For example, Esther Goody has studied fostering at length in West Africa, among the Gonja people of Ghana. In her analysis of fostering and adoption (1984), she aligns the uses to which fostering is put with the complexity of the political and social organization of a community. According to Goody, in a unilineal descent group (a system where relatedness is traced either through fathers or through mothers, but not both<sup>[7]</sup>), fostering outside of the kin group is rare, being unnecessary for the child’s training, and undesirable because it would imply the descent group’s loss of a child’s [labour](#); however, in other kinds of societies, a range of spatially dispersed relatives may have rights to a child, so depending on resources in a kin group and on existing labour needs a child might be asked to move. But the child’s movement is not

only meant to serve the labour needs of dispersed kin; simultaneously, Goody explains, 'parents arrange for their children's training and sponsorship in the way which will place the children in the best possible position as adults with respect to those skills and resources which are required to "succeed"' (1984: 275). As such, this kind of fostering is thought to provide opportunities to children; it is seen elsewhere in West Africa as well (Bledsoe 1990, Gottlieb 2004).

Yet fostering has other implications too, some of them quite provocative. In an essay on 'milk-kinship', Peter Parkes recounts epics and legends from Greek, Celtic, and other pasts to demonstrate what he calls 'allegiance fostering' – how, for example, medieval Irish nobles would foster their children serially, to multiple foster parents, in order to ensure the children's education in a range of skills and arts while simultaneously strengthening adult alliances that broadened the nobles' own political reach (2004: 599-600).<sup>122</sup> And alliances between relatives are forged in everyday settings as well, as I learned from Milagros, a teenager who participated in my research on child circulation in the city of Ayacucho, in southern Peru. Milagros told me she had moved into her mother's sister's house at the age of nine. I observed that her mother's sister's family was financially better off than Milagros's mother – who lived in a squatter settlement across town – and keeping that relationship strong and flowing would have been important for Milagros's mother. In that context, child circulation served to 'solidify relationships that adults rely on for day-to-day survival or backup emergency plans' (Leinaweaver 2007: 175). It also results in a robust and culturally-appropriate form of support for young people, though it is a form that many of them express some ambivalence about. Milagros told me both that she had gotten accustomed, and that it was 'not the same' as being with her family of origin (2007: 171, 172).

### **Finding an heir: ensuring disposition of resources according to one's wishes**

Legal adoption is a different story, though of course legal adoption need not preclude the feeding, raising, and nurturing of a child. As Jack Goody shows, adoption laws in many Western nations today derive from principles established in ancient Rome, where 'the institution was one whereby the great families provided themselves with heirs to their property and worship, successors to office or a political following' (1969: 60). Property and its felicitous disposition was thus a significant motivator for early Western formulations of adoption (Hann 1998).

In Roman law, such adoptions were complete and irreversible. Adoption law in many nations today includes a provision where a child is formally, completely, and legally detached from a 'first family' before being incorporated into another ('full' or 'plenary' adoption). This model differs from fostering, where a child retains connections both to the 'first family' and to other subsequent caregivers (Goody, J. 1969: 59). It also differs from legal adoption practices in a number of other nations, including France (whose civil code permits 'simple', or additive adoption, where the adoptive relationship is added to, rather than replaces,

existing biological relationships) and Japan, where in “regular adoption” (*futsu yo shiengumi*), adoptees are often children of extended family members or are adults’ (Goldfarb 2016: 49).

The implications of inheritance, permanent affiliation, and rights take on intriguing meanings in a case described by John Borneman. In the late 1990s, Borneman knew a same-sex couple in Germany – fifty-five year old Harald and thirty-five year old Dieter. Harald, knowing his [death](#) was near, wanted to adopt Dieter; in the court hearings, Dieter’s mother insisted that the men’s relationship was ‘like a marriage’. But in that period, the two men could not legally marry, and adoption was the only formal route available for Harald to effectively confer his belongings to Dieter, which in turn formalised and officialised their relation. Borneman highlights the principle of custody – in which ‘the right to inherit wealth [is made] effective through a right to care and be cared for’ (2001: 34). Harald eventually adopted Dieter, which, in its startling contrast with child adoptions, beautifully highlights the social and felt significance of formalising and materialising ties of [care](#).

Also, in many ways far removed from ancient Rome, a Norwegian case study demonstrates the continuing importance of formally making a child into an accepted family member, even through some of the more everyday labours of ‘kin work’ or ‘kinning’. In adoption, kinning may be marked because of what Howell calls the ‘open and public nature’ (2006: 64) of the newly forming relationship or what Modell described as the self-consciousness of adoption: ‘for a parent and child to be related by arrangement, and not by nature, compels an alertness to the terms of relationship that is unusual in an American context’ (1994: 3-4). So, in Norway, one of the arenas in which kinning of transnationally adopted children occurs is through attiring them in the traditional Norwegian clothing called *bunad* (2006: 75). The use of clothing as a symbolic and formal way to affiliate a child from another place to a Norwegian family is the emphasis here, in contrast to the focus on caring, feeding, and raising seen in the previous section’s discussion of fostering.

### **Political economy of adoption and inequality**

As anthropologists study adoption and kinning around the world, whether in fostering and daily acts of care or through formal alliances and the demands of property disposition, political economic inequality often turns out to be an important dimension of how adoption is experienced and understood.

In the contemporary West, adoption is a process that sometimes uncomfortably entangles child welfare services on one end (the removal of children from birth families that are found to be unsuitable) and the desire for ‘social progeny’ (Goody, J. 1969: 57) on the other.<sup>13</sup> Critical adoption scholars have identified how adoption tends to reproduce a social hierarchy between deserving receiver and inadequate giver of a child (Briggs 2012, Gailey 2010, Solinger 2001). The inequalities between those who adopt and those whose children have been removed are perhaps most evident in cases of transnational adoption. Linda Seligmann observes for U.S. families that ‘the ability to pursue adoptions across borders – racially,

economically, or nationally – is the consequence of geopolitical inequalities that are themselves the result of particular histories and policies that the United States has helped create’ (2013: 11).<sup>[14]</sup> For example, Guatemala became one of the most numerically significant ‘providers’ of children in international adoption to the U.S. as a consequence of poverty, violence, and corruption traceable to U.S. involvement in Guatemala during the Cold War (Grandin 2004, Briggs 2012).

Given this unequal flow of children from less-developed to more-developed countries (Frank 1966), it’s particularly important to identify the processes through which international adoption can be narrated as wholly positive. Considering explanatory language like ‘God said one day, “...I found you a baby but you have to go to China”’, Seligmann gracefully demonstrates how many parents’ emphasis on metaphysical connections can preclude a full-on examination of geopolitical inequalities that make international adoption possible (2013: 72). Paloma Gay y Blasco analyses the writings of middle-class white Americans on their personal Internet pages, in which the prospective parents ‘portrayed their adoption as an extraordinary journey, a “wondrous adventure,” not only a particularly significant episode in their lives, but one that transformed them into or revealed them to be extraordinary people, different from those who surrounded them, forever marked as the creators of a “special” or even “miraculous” family’ (2012: 330-31). Supporting these narrations is the conceptual inheritance that Karen Dubinsky has described as ‘an adoption system premised on rescue’ (2010:19). Laura Briggs further argues that this ‘rescue’ framing effectively ‘directs attention away from structural explanations for poverty, famine, and other disasters, including international, political, military, and economic causes’ (2003: 180). In this way, international adoption not only benefits from global inequality – it can also work to foreclose critical discussions of such inequality.

This critical global political economy perspective can also be applied to both historic and on-going forms of domestic adoption that equally reproduced social hierarchies and inequalities. A famous and tragic example is the widespread practice during the mid-twentieth century in which Native American and First Nations children were removed from their [homes](#) in what was said to be their ‘best interests’, ‘rescuing’ them while forcibly extracting them from their families and communities (Jacobs 2014). And, in the 1970s and 1980s, the legal mechanism of adoption was used to disguise the criminal appropriation of the children of the disappeared and murdered in Argentina’s Dirty War (Villalta 2009). For example, in a well-documented case described by Carla Villalta, a woman and her eight-month-old infant were captured by the police in Buenos Aires; when the child’s grandmother brought the birth certificate to the police station to claim the child, her documents were challenged and she was not permitted to retrieve him. The child’s parents remain missing, while the child was, in a routine fashion, defined as ‘abandoned’ and placed in the care of a distinguished attorney and his wife, who later adopted him (Villalta 2009: 156-58).<sup>[15]</sup> And still more recently, the overrepresentation of African-American children in the U.S. child welfare system reflects, as



legal scholar Dorothy Roberts has argued, a policy choice to emphasise punishment for poverty over possibilities for family unity (2002). In each of these examples, structural [racism](#) shapes which children are declared to be legally abandoned and therefore 'adoptable'. Of course, not all adoptions recorded by anthropologists involve such stark inequalities – recall the West African fostering that is meant to support children's development (Goody, E. 1984; Bledsoe 1990) or Harald and Dieter's same-sex partnership officialised through adoption in Germany (Borneman 2001). But one of the themes in recent anthropological scholarship on adoption has been how adoption, like so many other practices, expresses and confirms existing socio-political relations of inequality more than it innovates new, creative, transnational relations of 'diffuse, enduring solidarity' (Schneider 1980 [1968]: 52).

## Conclusion

John Terrell and Judith Modell wrote in their 1994 review essay, 'Anthropology and adoption', that 'adoption is about who belongs and how – a subject of immense political as well as disciplinary significance. It is also, and increasingly, about power, privilege, and poverty...' (160). The question of who belongs and how is another angle on the question posed above about adoption, that is, 'what needs and expectations do people have of their families?'

This is to say that, if belonging is important, the mechanisms through which that belonging occurs are going to be crucial for both anthropologists and for adopted persons and their families. But this entry has suggested that for anthropologists, adoption is not only about belonging but also about what families do – transfer property, [care](#) for children, convey identity, and more. Adoption is therefore an extremely revealing and important lens for understanding human existence, both because of what it can tell us about how families work, and because of how its use and misuse reflect the 'power, privilege, and poverty' Terrell and Modell point to. As Vern Carroll concluded nearly fifty years ago, 'the answers to questions [about adoption] are the answers to the question of the nature of kinship' (1970: 15).

Let us return, then, to those very questions about the nature of kinship, and what adoption can mean in the North American and European contexts that have shaped much of the anthropological study of adoption. David Schneider has argued that in the United States, 'kinship is defined as biogenetic' and '[a] son or daughter by definition shares its parents' biogenetic substance' (1980[1968]: 23, 50). In these contexts, then, those who are adopted may experience a dissonance of belonging that their cultural surroundings urge them toward.

In Janet Carsten's interviews with domestically-adopted adults who searched for their birthparents, she was told that the search was motivated by the desire "'to know where I came from", "to be complete", or "to find out who I am"' (2000: 689).<sup>[144](#)</sup> At the same time, those who had completed their searches made statements that would 'disturb that primacy [of birth ties]...strongly assert[ing] the values of care and

effort that go into the creation of kin ties' (Carsten 2000: 691). Carsten showed that these narratives of adoptive kinship actually reveal more general British concepts of 'personhood, time, biography, and perhaps even the process of bereavement' (694) unrelated, or not exclusively related, to adoption.

And for Sweden, Barbara Yngvesson demonstrates the paradox at the heart of formal, legal adoption in the way it is practised in most contemporary contexts: while such plenary adoptions connect child and parent(s) in a manner that is permanent and exclusive, there are other cultural dimensions in which those 'erased' origins are made significant, namely for the development of the child's 'identity' (2010). This is notably significant when – as is the case for many contemporary adoptions – the adoption is transracial. In such cases, adopted persons are frequently racialised through a 'constant bombardment of questions regarding the national, regional, ethnic and racial origin of the adoptees' (Hübinette & Tigervall 2009: 344). And white adoptive parents are asked to take seriously their 'kin work' of – as Christine Ward Gailey describes for U.S. transracial adoptions – 'preparing black children for racism' (2010: 34).

The research of these scholars, like that of several other anthropologists examining adoption in the present day (Cardarello 2012, De Graeve 2013, Frekko, Leinaweaver and Marre 2015, Goldfarb 2016, Kim 2010, Leinaweaver 2013, Lewin 2005, Modell 1994, Seligmann 2013), shows just how powerful 'adoption' is as a site for learning about kinship: how families are made, how belonging is experienced, how persons come to be.

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### Note on contributor

Jessaca Leinaweaver is Professor of Anthropology and Director of the Center for Latin American and Caribbean Studies at Brown University. She is the author of *The circulation of children: adoption, kinship, and morality in Andean Peru* (2008, Duke University Press), which won the Margaret Mead Award. Her most recent book is *Adoptive migration: raising Latinos in Spain* (2013, Duke University Press).

Prof. Jessaca Leinaweaver, Department of Anthropology, Brown University, Box 1970, Providence, RI, United States. [Jessaca\\_Leinaweaver@brown.edu](mailto:Jessaca_Leinaweaver@brown.edu)

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[1] This article draws on material I have published in overview articles on related topics: 'Demography of adoption' (2001) in *International encyclopedia of the social and behavioral sciences* (ed.) J.D. Wright 1<sup>st</sup> vol. (Second edition) Oxford: Elsevier; 'Foster and kinship care: historical and cultural perspectives' (2009) in *The child: an encyclopedic companion* (ed.) R.A. Shweder, Chicago: University Press; and 'Transnational adoption' (forthcoming) in *The Cambridge handbook for the anthropology of kinship* (ed.) S. Bamford, Cambridge: University Press.

[2] Anthropology's earliest beginnings over one hundred years ago were entwined with the study of kinship. The nineteenth-century American anthropologist Lewis Henry Morgan, intrigued by historical linguistic research that showed earlier connections between now-distant groups of people, hypothesised that similarities in kinship systems among even more distant groups of people might allow researchers to push their understandings of early connections in the 'human family' even further back. That is, he thought that kinship systems were even more resistant to change than language (Morgan 1870).

[3] 'Elle est un lien social ou elle n'est rien', my translation. This, surely, is what Schneider was riffing on when he wrote that 'it is the sociocultural attribution of meaning to the biological relationship (real or putative) which is the central conception of kinship. Without the biological relationship there is nothing' (1984: 54).

[4] 'Même, à elle seule, la naissance ne suffit pas *ipso facto* à faire de l'enfant un member integrant de la société domestique; il faut que des ceremonies religieuses s'y surajoutent. L'idée de consanguinité est donc tout à fait au second plan... toute parenté est sociale; car elle consiste essentiellement en relations juridiques et morales, sanctionnées par la société', my translation.

[5] See, for example, Maine 1963 [1861].

[6] In both these examples, it is worth noting that the active subject is the adopter - who is the one identifying an heir or taking

care of a young person. And in general, though the word 'adoption' is often used metaphorically and outside of kinship to indicate claiming something – like technology adoption, pet adoption, adopt-a-park – I'll limit it here to considering the human relationships altered when one 'adopts', or is 'adopted by', another.

[7] As Zelizer points out, nineteenth-century foster children were sometimes like apprentices; they were sentimentally appreciated but at the same time, employed (as seen in L.M. Montgomery's *Anne of Green Gables*). Zelizer notes that in 1870, older boys were most wanted because they were useful; by 1930, cute two-year-old girls were most wanted precisely because they were not economically useful, and rather they were emotional and thus ideal for sentimental parenting (1985: 173, 179, 194).

[8] Though I won't go into all the possible translations, I can add that the Spanish term I would use for an overlapping semantic field – *criar* – derives from Latin term *creare*, which refers to 'to make grow'. I would define the Spanish word as 'to raise', and Spain's linguistic authority (the Real Academia Española) provides multiple examples of appropriate uses, ranging from breastfeeding to educating to producing. See <http://dle.rae.es/?id=BFyuWxK> (accessed 7 June 2018).

[9] For a sampling of other cases of the relationship between food and family, see Allison 1991, Carsten 1997, De Matos Viegas 2003, Pink and Perez 2006.

[10] See, for example, Berman 2014, Bledsoe 1990, Bodenhorn 2000, Carroll 1970, Carsten 1991, Fonseca 1986, E.N. Goody 1982, Guemple 1979, Leinaweaver 2008, Stack 1974, Strong 2001.

[11] For further explication, see [this encyclopedia's entry titled \*Matriliney\*](#).

[12] Moving among a range of foster homes is contrary to the premises of the psychological sciences' notion of attachment theory, or the idea that a stable relationship with a key caregiver is essential in a child's early years (Bohr 2010). However, the majority of anthropologists see attachment theory as reflective of the assumptions of Western child-rearing ideologies (e.g. LeVine 2004, LeVine 2007) and argue instead that multiple caregivers and consequent affective relationships generally support children's development (Seymour 2004).

[13] There is a continuum here, of course: not all adopted children have been removed from their families of origin, although it must also be said that the 'choice' to place a child for adoption is very often circumscribed by economic and social circumstances. In the absence of such circumstances, this 'choice' might well have been different.

[14] The origins of international adoption are usually traced to the Korean war (Briggs & Marre 2009:6, see also Herman 2008, Kim 2010, Oh 2015). Other nations that became known as sources of children for international adoption experienced not so much war as structural violence: poverty in post-Soviet disruptions in the case of Eastern Europe; the heavy hand of state reproduction policy in the case of China; intensely uneven development in the case of African nations.

[15] Interestingly, the documents were in fact false. The child's father had been disappeared a few months before the birth, and the mother had not registered the child's birth right away. As Villalta explains, 'For those who during those years of terrible political repression knew they were persecuted and lived in secret, any contact with a state authority could be signing one's death warrant' ('Para quienes en esos años de feroz represión política se sabían perseguidos y vivían en la clandestinidad, cualquier contacto con una instancia estatal equivalía a ver concretada una condena de muerte') (Villalta 2009: 157). The 'laundering' of disappearances through child adoption also occurred during Francisco Franco's dictatorship (1939-75) in Spain (Marre 2014).

[16] An intriguing analogy comes from analyses of anonymous sperm or egg donations (Bergmann 2011).