

Title: "Illegitimate Democracy: Some Lessons from Transcultural Adoption"

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Abstract: "The transcultural adoption of children has never been a democratic act. Administered autocratically by self-declared and state-supported guardians of moral or political propriety, transcultural adoptions are transacted whenever incidences of cultural conflict and disenfranchisement abound. They require us to acknowledge, in the words of transcultural adoptees Julia Chinyere Oparah, Sun Yung Shin and Jane Jeong Trenka, that such adoptions are 'the intimate face of colonization, racism, militarism, imperialism, and globalization'. In my presentation, I engage first with the little-discussed phenomenon of transcultural adoption and its provenance of disempowerment which is often hidden beneath humanitarian discourses of 'rescue' or unimpeachable claims to the 'rights' of a child. But I dwell, primarily, upon the ways in which the vernacular practices and especially cultural representations of transcultural adoption transgressively call into question not only these specific saccharine discourses of rights and rescue but also a wider range of vocabularies beloved of state democracies that are often wielded as enabling rather than ensnaring - notions of consanguineous relationships, biocentric kinship and legitimate personhood. How, I ask, might transcultural adoption push the 'demos' in 'democracy' away from the rationale of blood-lines and natal nativism and towards a transgressive inclusivity modelled on the critical (rather than assimilative) agency of the transcultural adoptive family? In other words, how might some lessons from transcultural adoption invite us to democratise democracy?"