Introduction

For me, to talk about transracial adoption honestly is to hurt someone.
—ANGELA TUCKER

But love is not merely an interpersonal event, nor is it merely the site at which politics has its effects. Love is a political event.
—ELIZABETH POVINELLI

Growing up in a rural Oregon town as a Hong Kong adoptee, I was presented with the complex experience of having a memorable childhood and being part of an incredibly loving family yet also having to negotiate my Asian and adoptive identities. After being asked by my mom if I ever thought about my birth mother, I told her: "No." Not because I was uninterested in my birth family but because I didn't want to hurt my adoptive family. Being surrounded by Whiteness—in my family, at my school, and in my community—made me desperately want to be White. At times I would forget about my darker skin and differently shaped eyes and face until I saw myself in the mirror as I brushed my teeth next to my older brother, who I looked up to because he was cool and loved me like a brother should. I internalized anti-Asian racism that I saw on television and experienced at school or while playing sports and projected that onto the few other Asian American kids at my school. I never shared this with my parents until recently, and I don't blame them for these feelings because they did the best that they knew, with the utmost love. For people adopted transracially and/or transnationally, this is not a unique experience.

Typically, most—to be clear, not all—transracial and transnational adoptees grow up certain of one important aspect about themselves: adoption was the best thing that happened to them. As we grow older, however, many adoptees slowly begin to understand the complexity of adoption and the violence of family separation, unknown pasts, inaccessible records, secrets, and fabrications, and racial difference that accompanies the loving parts of adoption, and "the contradictions

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of love and commerce."[1] Possessing this knowledge, we are confronted with a dichotomous choice presented by adoption discourse: we stay happy and grateful or we become angry and resentful. Rarely is there space for adoptees who have had a loving—let alone a horrible—childhood but choose to critique or question certain (or all) aspects of adoption. As Black transracial adoptee author and thought leader Angela Tucker, in the chapter epigraph, puts it: for adoptees, to be honest about their experience is to hurt someone. This means many adoptees choose to be less honest to protect their adoptive family, or they choose to tell their truth and risk harming and potentially losing their second family. In short, adoptees' experiences are often filtered through the assumption that love and violence are binary opposites.

Related to these binary feelings is a similar dichotomy that exists in adoption research and discourse that posits transracial/transnational adoption (TRNA) as either good or bad. Advocates of TRNA in social work, psychology, legal studies, and the general public have long argued that such adoptions are a logical and love-infused win-win-win solution for desperate but loving birth mothers, eager and loving adoptive parents, and children who need love and care.[2] Adoption is often perceived as a form of rescue in which harm is mostly attached to early childhood, preadoptive trauma.[3] In this rescue scenario "initial losses are followed by tremendous gains."[4] TRNA, then, is the solution by which children can escape cultural, familial, social, and economic violence such as patriarchy, the "culture of poverty," abuse, institutional care, and homelessness. Research on the "outcomes" of transracial and transnational adoptees has "unequivocally proven" that these adoptions are successful, providing loving homes and families.[5] Researchers also contend that adoptees exhibit strong self-esteem and ethnic identities, are healthy and happy, and have similar if not better outcomes than same-race adoptions or even adoptions by biological relations.

To be sure, there are some supporters who have at times been critical of adoption's past, but they generally believe that adoption practices have changed—from secretive, closed, stigmatized, and isolating to transparent, open, and celebrated, where culture is cultivated and birth family is acknowledged. In this view we have experienced an "adoption revolution."[6] Support among liberals and conservatives alike has engendered an amalgamation of different yet overlapping multicultural, (neo)liberal colorblind, and "postracial" rhetoric that race does not (significantly) matter in adoption, where the good achieved far exceeds or can overcome any potential injury. For those who support and want to facilitate adoptions, the issue at hand is quite simple: There are children in need and families who can and want to provide loving homes.

However, those who critique TRNAs argue that they are violent because they emerge from a broader context of national and global politics of war, imperialism, religion, paternalism, racism, patriarchy, capitalistic exploitation, settler colonialism, and corruption. Critical disciplinary and interdisciplinary research has

pointed to how ideas of race and gender have shaped the uneven processes and institution of adoption, arguing that structural factors are the underlying reasons for the asymmetrical movement of children from communities of color to White homes or from "sending" countries to "receiving" ones. At the same time, some scholars (usually ones who are not adoptees themselves) find TRNA to be a helpful lens that illustrates larger phenomena such as race, culture, nation, immigration, or imperialism. In these broader critiques of TRNA, researchers and readers can miss the depth and diversity of actual experiences of adoptees, birth parents, and adoptive parents, and more important, how people connected to or concerned with adoption might begin or continue political projects that address injustice produced by adoption.

In short, proponents of TRNA oftentimes ignore or diminish the aspects of violence that pervade adoption. Critiques of TRNA, though generative, can miss the complexity of lived experiences and the love and joy—despite the violence—that adoption creates for many (if not most) adoptees and adoptive families. In addition, the aspects of adoption that are often most important specifically for adoptees—such as identity, belonging, and questions about or longing for the past and birth family—are simplified or disregarded by the good/bad dichotomy. This binary mystifies the fact that "life is complicated."[7] Thus my research intervenes by complicating how we analyze the personal and political aspects of adoption. The book is not just about love and violence. It is about the violence of love, how violence creates the conditions for and then infiltrates, permeates, and surrounds the latter.

My research builds on these crucial interventions by reframing adoption away from good *or* bad and instead toward what I call the violence of love in the adoptions of Asian, Native American, and Black children in the United States. What is the purpose of bringing the adoptions of Black, Asian, and Native American children together? My effort is not to merely present that there were three distinct types of adoptions happening simultaneously, albeit true, but to show how they collectively helped shape U.S. society's understanding of non-White families and spaces vis-à-vis White families and spaces. From adoption agency discourse and statistics to social scientific outcome studies that analyzed these adoptions in relation to each other as well as legal and popular discourse, collectively they show how race informed ideas of family and adoption. My conceptual framework argues that these TRNAs were both loving and violent acts and processes, which means that love was constantly operating within these adoptions but that various types of violence were simultaneously and differently attached to or born from them. This framework avoids the pitfalls of the popular sociohistorical logic-of-exclusion framework, which conceptualizes racial subjugation as prohibition, segregation, or marginalization.[8] Instead, I consider how inclusion and love can emerge from, be attached to, and engender violence.

As anthropologist Elizabeth Povinelli's chapter epigraph suggests, love (and in this case, adoption) is not just personal but also "a political event."[9] Like

transnational and women of color feminists before her, Povinelli reminds us that the personal is political such that the loving act of adoption creates more than a new family. And if love is a political event, the production and (lack of) support provided for the family—both symbolically and institutionally—are politically constituted. My research adds to a growing list of critical adoption studies scholars, many of whom are transnational and/or transracial adoptees themselves. Their works improve our understanding of how adoptees are beyond grateful/well-adjusted or angry/maladjusted but are in fact complex subjects who hold a range of identities, experiences, and desires. They look at the social and historical impact of discursive and institutional harms (on society in general) *and* the ways such harms affect adoptees (as well as other marginalized people and communities) from their own perspectives.[10]

Like these scholars, I am interested in how TRNA operates at the level of the individual, the family, the industry, and the nation-state. How is love defined and employed by the various actors—adoptive parents, adoptees, adoption agencies, and the state (i.e., U.S. government officials and agencies)? Who has the right to invoke love? Who has the capacity to provide love? In centralizing love, what is missed? How does violence manifest in adoption and family-making? What can a relational examination of such adoptions tell us about the ways power operates unevenly in the constructions of race, identity, family, and nation? Which families, cultures, and nations are marked as spaces that can offer love, freedom, and better futures? How might a violence of love framework change how U.S. society thinks about and practices adoption? The ultimate question has less to do with what is love in adoption and is it present in a particular adoptive context? Typically love *is* present and sometimes abundantly. Rather, we might focus on what does love do in or through adoption? Exploring these questions, I argue that adoption and statements affirming adoption are forms of love that have operated at the personal and familial, agency and industry, and legal and transnational levels. Love, here, is about the historical and geographical "distribution of life and death" based on notions of lovability and who can love best.[11]

One primary employment of love is to show healthy attachment.[12] Adoptive parents are not only expected to love their adopted children, but the promise of their love (what it does) is that it will be reciprocated by adoptees, who will form healthy attachment (and be rehabilitated from past trauma) and ultimately become successful, well-adjusted adopted persons and adoptive families.[13] The harm adoptees experience preadoption and "overcome" postadoption are proof of adoption exceptionalism, creating what social work scholar JaeRan Kim calls the adoptee poster child, whose success from plucky orphan to poster child is made possible by adoption and love as forms of rescue, rehabilitation, and redemption.[14] Embodying the adoptee poster child is one way for adoptees to guarantee the "promise of unconditional love" and acceptance by the adoptive family. The prominent love through attachment framework erases emotional ambivalence, doubt, and anger by replacing them with certainty and "true love."

In this normative economy of love, love is always idealistic, factual, authentic, and credible, while other affective responses, such as anger, are signifiers of fear or detachment disorder.[15] Expressions of anger or attachment disorder signal pathology, which can be cause for unlivable futures, estrangement, or even familial exile. Going further, adoptees who love their families and still critique adoption as a harmful industry are in an impossible situation. These two perspectives are imagined as mutually exclusive. Thus holding them together cannot easily be comprehended because their existence threatens not just adoption as an institution but the adoptive family and adoptive parents. What becomes clear is that adoption can be loving, and those who are intimately attached to adoption can experience and believe it as such.

Nevertheless, to only focus on adoptive love would be an oversight. As Black feminist scholar bell hooks reminds us: "Everywhere we learn that love is important, and yet we are bombarded by its failure."[16] For this reason I argue that past and present adoptions of Asian, Black, and Native American children are linked to various forms of unmarked or hidden violence. This book primarily investigates three types of violence—structural, symbolic, and traumatic—and how they relate to the history, knowledge production, and experiences of TRNAs. The first form of violence, structural violence, in many cases produces the "need" for adoption. Structural violence consists of economic, political, and cultural conditions, arrangements, and processes that organize social life in often hidden ways (typically unrecognized as structural) that cause injury, injustice, and death to individuals and groups.[17] Contemporary research has shown the ways in which TRNAs of Native American, Black, and Asian children are inextricably tied to histories of settler colonialism, White supremacy, heteropatriarchy, global capitalism, and war. Policies and laws can enact less obvious forms of structural violence by providing material benefit to adoptive families instead of investing to keep families intact.

A second form is symbolic violence, which can be defined as subtle, invisible, and naturalized linguistic and representational strategies to assert power and domination.[18] Symbolic violence applies where adoption discourse and representation attempt to positively define adoption (to the United States and into White homes) and essentialize or fix adoptive meaning. Symbolic violence can occur when, for example, efforts to destigmatize adoptive relations ignores, erases, or delegitimizes biological relations. The same can happen in describing the spaces and communities where adoptees originate vis-à-vis where they get placed. Lastly, traumatic violence can be defined as psychological wounds, pain, or scars that are typically associated with the various forms of adoption loss, especially the initial separation from the birth family, but also the loss of one's history, culture, identity, and language.[19] Traumatic violence can also be defined broadly as "a deeply distressing or disturbing experience" that "forces our brains or bodies to compensate and cope with that experience."[20]

"Adoption is trauma" is a widespread and recurring hashtag on adoptee social media platforms. This type of violence is constantly diminished as something that

can be healed with time or overcome with love. Traumatic violence can appear in other forms beyond loss, such as conditional love, encouraged assimilation, internalized racism, or rejections and dismissals from parents, friends, or even strangers. What exacerbates this type of violence is when adoptees share their trauma in public (such as blogs, panels, conferences, or other forums) or with family or friends, they are often told that the past is not important and the benefits outweigh the losses and that they should be grateful. As political scientist Jenny Edkins notes, when the site of supposed refuge and belonging is violent, this enacts a form of traumatic violence.[21]

These three types of violence are not mutually exclusive, which means they can overlap and inform one another. For example, transracial adoptee and scholar Gina Samuels discusses the trauma of epistemic injustice in relation to specifically transracial adoption—when "groups of people as knowers" are discredited as uncredible and unauthoritative knowledge producers.[22] This can be symbolic, as is the case of everyday people denying or diminishing adoptee experiences of racism or loss as valid forms of trauma, or institutionally in more broad settings, where news media and publishers seek out adoptive parents as "experts" in adoption rather than adoptees themselves. Editors of the recently published special issue of *Child Abuse & Neglect* on trauma and adoption wrote how the field of adoption research needs to contextualize "our understandings of adoption and trauma beyond the level of individual and family, to understand adoption within its colonialist, political, economic, and global contexts."[23] In other words, they are calling to connect structural violence to traumatic violence.

Another example of the interconnected nature of these forms of violence is that TRNAs are often taken out of their global-historical context (the ways that history and geography and knowledges about the temporal and spatial have shaped TRNA adoption and its subjects) and placed into the "local-present" context. This configuration disregards race as well as gender, class, sexuality, nation, and other categories of difference, presuming them to be insignificant, which hides the ways power operates unevenly across subjects, families, and nations. This spatial-temporal logic attempts to depoliticize TRNAs such that the adoption *happens to be* from China or the child *happens to be* Native American. It privileges love as the guiding principle for successful adoption policy and practice, which enables such adoptions to be individualized (i.e., they do not affect and are not affected by society) and flattened or simplified to the extent that they emerge from and exist in a *local* space (e.g., *from* foster care/orphanages and *in* "my nurturing, loving home" as opposed to in an inherently and fundamentally unequal U.S. society) and a *present* time (e.g., "orphans, children, and birth parents are in need right now" and "the past and future do not matter because we love our child").[24]

In isolation the harms and violence that we might be familiar with seem occasional and incidental, but together they paint a clearer picture. Discourse of adoption as loving forever families misses the myriad of ways through which parents

are unfairly or needlessly separated from their children (safe haven laws, the prison industrial complex, racist social workers, diminished social welfare programs, coercion, trafficking, etc.). Approximately 10 percent of adoptions end in disruption or dissolution, but these typically only capture early failures. There are countless cases of adoption discontinuities, where adult adoptees are estranged from their adoptive parents and families, causing a second set of losses.[25] Worse are scores of cases of adoptees murdered by adoptive parents, thousands who have been rehomed after adoption (a completely unregulated process), dozens who have been deported back to their birth country, and the adoptees who have committed suicide or have suicidal ideation at a rate four times that of nonadopted children.[26] Adoptees may feel racially isolated or even alienated. Despite new trends of "culture keeping" promoted by adoptive parents, adoptees might not be able to express their true feelings about their birth family or wanting to search. They might be dismissed and told that those feelings are unimportant since they already have a "real family." Many adoptees, adoptive parents, and birth parents are unaware of these unmarked and hidden forms of violence because they are not prominent in adoption discourse and representation.

The Violence of Love offers two main arguments: Love is constantly operating within and shaping TRNAs, but also relational formulations of race and the violence of love are integral to how adoption, family, and nation are socially constructed. In this way adoption is not just an event, legal procedure, or descriptor but more broadly an institution, an industry, and a discursive formation. Adoption is temporal and spatial, not just in that it traverses across space and time, which it does to a degree, but that it defines and fixes space (as violent or modern) and time (past, present, and future). Adoption is an inherently violent process, one in which the problem of violence cannot be "solved." This book ventures on the imminent task of acknowledging and confronting this uneasy nature of adoption by rethinking theories of family and kinship that might offer alternative forms of relationality and care.

THE IMPORTANCE OF RACE

This book begins with the premise that race matters, even when we think it does not. It draws on four key concepts to theorize the social construction of race as it pertains to and operates within transracial and transnational adoption. First, race is a social construct, which means there are no biological or genetic markers that clearly define discrete "races." Rather, society has arbitrarily chosen specific physical bodily features to signify racial difference—skin color, eye shape, hair texture, nose size, and so forth—and attached those features to particular spaces (Africa, Asia, Europe, as well as inner city, suburbs, and rural). In fact, there is more genetic variation within a particular racial group "than between racial groups."[27]

Drawing from this fact that most of us intuitively know—that we're all human—there is a common misperception that we should avoid racial talk and thinking altogether.[28] Color-evasiveness ("I don't see color or race") and postraciality ("society is no longer racist and talking about race can be a form of racism") are especially prominent in transracial and transnational adoptions. Both of these examples are driven by representations of adoption as loving. To be sure, race is a social construction, but the idea of race and the embeddedness of racial difference produce material effects that lead to the unequal distribution of benefits, harms, and outcomes. This is no different in TRNAs.

In a global-historical context, race has been used as a marker of not just physical difference but intellectual and moral difference to justify life, liberty, and property on the one hand and exclusion, subjugation, and death on the other (or, as I argue, violent forms of inclusion). Racialized differences and the notion of race are not aberrations of modernity. Indeed, they are fundamental and necessary, not just to contemporary society but to modernity at large. In other words, liberal universality—the idea that we are all equal humans but for unfortunate moments in the past that have, can, and/or will be corrected—is a myth.[29] Societies of all kinds have constructed, depended on, and maintained difference in order to preserve various forms of power.

Three concepts help explain *how* race is socially constructed and clarify how TRNA operates: relational racialization, differential racialization, and intersectionality. Michael Omi and Howard Winant were two of the first scholars to deeply theorize the process in which racial meaning or knowledge is produced. They call this process *racialization*, which they define as extending racial meaning to relationships, social practices, and groups.[30] When we create racial meaning, we attempt to ascribe notions of inferiority or superiority (or some other value judgment) to bodies, behaviors, groups, spaces, or processes, and we often do so in a relational way. This is called *relational racialization*, where groups are racialized in relation to each other, which means that defining one group helps define another group. An example of relational racialization is "model minority" racialization. Asian Americans have been given this racial moniker—that is, racialized as the model minority, where all Asian Americans are assumed to be smart, hardworking, obedient, and therefore successful despite obstacles that they might face. This, of course, relationally constructs Black, Latinx, and Native Americans as "problem minorities" who do not work hard and only complain. Hidden within this relational racialization is how Whiteness is situated as the norm but also the "aggrieved" group that is hurt by unnecessary (as "proven" by Asian Americans) affirmative action policies.[31]

Related to the idea of relational racialization is the concept of *differential racialization*, which signals the ways that groups can be racialized in different ways, at different times, and for different purposes.[32] The ways that Asian immigrants are racialized as culturally backward, always foreign, or as a virus are different from

how Black Americans are racialized as criminals and complainers, which is still different from (and similar to) how Latinx folks are racialized as "illegal" job steal-ers and also foreigners. Lastly, the concept of *intersectionality*, coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw, describes the ways that race, gender, class, sexuality, and other social categories do not exist and operate independently.[33] Rather, they interact to shape multiple and simultaneous dimensions of experience, identity, and inequality. Intersectionality helps us understand that even though we try to place individuals in particular groups, those groups cannot be essentialized or fixed as one thing. People's identities are complex and informed by multiple and sometimes contra-dictory identities. These identities are fluid and can change or become more or less salient over time. This book explores how racial difference is imagined and repro-duced relationally, differentially (in terms of Blackness, Asianness, Native Ameri-canness, and Whiteness), and intersectionally (with gender, class, and sexuality) to construct ideas about better families, nations, and futures in relation to TRNA.

Despite the increasing rise of fascism—the upholding of nation and race through authoritarian suppression—and the return of overt forms of racism sup-ported by the former president Donald Trump and his constituents, racism is still largely covert.[34] This, too, applies to TRNA. When I teach about racism, I use an iceberg as an analogy to discuss four types of racism. The tip of the iceberg above the water is similar to what we typically name as racism—conscious or uncon-scious individual assumptions, beliefs, or actions such as racial slurs, microag-gressions, racist jokes, hate crimes, Swastikas, and neo-Nazis. This is *individual racism* (or interpersonal racism if there is a direct victim). The massive piece of ice that is underneath the water's surface is like structural racism that enables the iceberg to exist in the first place. Two types of racism inform structural racism: *ideological racism* and *institutional racism*. The former includes the larger beliefs, attitudes, language, and imagery (racist and otherwise) that inform our collective knowledge that enables racial and other forms of inequality to exist and operate, such as White supremacy, color-evasiveness, paternalism, settler colonial logic, patriarchy, and heterosexism (because they intersect with race), xenophobia, and tokenism. The latter includes the institutions via policies and practices that cre-ate, uphold, and reproduce racist outcomes, whether intentional or not, such as schools, the law, policing and prisons, churches, medicine, workplaces, child wel-fare, and housing.

Structural or systemic racism is the aggregate effect of ideological and institu-tional racism that reinforces each other and builds up over time and space. The United States was born from White supremacist logic that enabled and fostered the enslavement of men, women, and children; settler colonialism; immigration exclusion; and segregation. Structural racism enables individual racism to exist—the latter is just an effect of the former. While individual (or interpersonal) racism is important to examine, I am more concerned with investigating how adoption is informed by ideological, institutional, and structural racism and other forms of

inequality on these larger scales. This book operates on these widely theorized (in academia) but lesser-known ideas concerning race and racism. Race is constructed but still salient because it informs how racism operates and has material consequences. Racism is normal, ubiquitous, systematic (structural), and foundational in U.S. society, yet how it operates and its wide-ranging effects are largely hidden. This is particularly true for TRNAs, where race is imagined as unimportant or a minor obstacle that can be overpowered by adoptive love.

A GENEALOGY OF VIOLENCE: REGULATING THE FAMILY AND THE NATION

Family is at the crux of adoption—how it is imagined and practiced by individuals, institutions, and the state. You have children without a family, foster families, birth/first families, adoptive families, LGBTQ+ families, and forever families. These experiences, identities, and subjectivities shape adoption. While informal adoption has existed for thousands of years, formal or legal adoption in the United States is a modern institution that began in the mid-nineteenth century. Historically, U.S. society has stigmatized adoption as abnormal, inferior, illegitimate, and second choice—that is, outside of the traditional family ideal.[35] As chapter 1 demonstrates, adoption reshaped ideas of the American family. While U.S. families prior to World War II were mostly heterosexual and racially homogenous, the 1950s and 1960s increasingly engendered family types that included mixed-race parents, transracial and transnational adoption, and by the 1990s families with LGBTQ+ parents.

Indeed, family is not, despite society's attempt, a fixed category but derived from a set of discourses and imaginaries as well as individual, institutional, and state practices. This book traces how family has been shaped and the ways this has contributed to imagining the nation and vice versa. At a certain level, adoption can be considered a transgressive act and possibility of love because it challenges the definition of the traditional family model. At the same time, adoption's non-normative status that has situated it as unauthentic, "fictive," or less than has meant that adoption laws have attempted to resolve this "symbolic crisis."[36] Many adoptive families have rebuffed the non-normative aspects of adoption and mimicked the nuclear family framework to make their families more legitimate and legible to society.[37]

Even for White middle-class subjects, the position of parent "has become increasingly marked as a measure of value, self-worth, and citizenship," where adoption can be a "'completion' for becoming a fully realized subject in American life."[38] In this way and others, adoption can act as a site of regulation, management, and reinscription of normative ideals, which have privileged biological, nuclear, White heterosexual, and middle-class family structures that exist within imagined homogenous racial and national boundaries. In other words, adoption by straight,

single, and LGBTQ+ parents—the latter who can presently be legally discriminated against in 12 states—has been a pathway to achieve "normative" family status and a sense of belonging that is supported by both the state and nation.[39] Hence the move from "blood" to "choice" in TRNA does not necessarily destabilize hegemonic and normalized notions of family and kinship.

I follow Sandra Patton-Imani's call to think about genealogy not just as roots but "genealogy as routes" because doing so "takes us beyond an exclusive focus on biology and culture as signifiers of racial identity to the metaphor of roads, paths, intersections, borders, bridges, boundaries, and diasporic histories."[40] The concept of routes helps us comprehend how the "numberless beginnings" and various subjectivities have been formed but also how U.S. families and the nation were constructed.[41] Many decried Trump's family separation policy at the U.S.-Mexico border as xenophobic, racist, and un-American. Yet, as scholars have shown, family separation has not only been a recurring phenomenon but integral to the formation, narration, and security of the U.S. nation-state that has been founded on settler colonialism, slavery, capitalism, and heteropatriarchy.[42] The state was invested in family separation and regulation as ways to manage racial, gendered, sexualized, and classed life, which accordingly informed how TRNAs emerged.

Familial rupture in both the institution of enslavement and Native American boarding schools isolated and disciplined individuals, especially children, denying them social and familial relations as well as political power. For slavery, this meant forced family separation, changed names, and fictive kin assimilation to match the enslaver's surname. For boarding schools, Native children were removed from families and Tribes and forced to assimilate into White American cultural practices, including conforming to gender norms, adopting Christianity, wearing Western clothes and hairstyles, and Anglicizing their names. These forms of physical, emotional, cultural, and spiritual domination, paired with the destruction of families, helped enable the transformation of Black people and Native lands into property for the benefit of the United States. In this way family separation assisted racial capitalism's domination of the body and settler colonialism's logic of elimination through not just physical but cultural genocide.

Even though the United States perpetuated and indeed was founded on the violence against the families of Black and Indigenous peoples, the violence enacted did not center on the death of the individual but on the separation of the family. It produced and cultivated a particular type of subjugated life that helped sustain White culture and society. French philosopher Michel Foucault argues that in the eighteenth century, problems of larger populations and the economy shifted how governments interpreted families. State apparatuses and nongovernmental institutions—such as churches, schools, medical institutions, and so forth—worked together to play varying roles in "policing" family development, morality, and sexuality. Thus the family became an "object of direct management," where it was no

longer governing "of the family" but rather "*through* the family."[43] The family was a site of biopolitical policing.

Biopolitics—derived from biopower—differed from sovereign power because the latter enabled the sovereign the "right to *take* life or *let* live" or, more specifically, the "right of seizure: of things, time, bodies, and ultimately life itself," but the former required a new model of power, one with "positive influence on life from the sovereign, that endeavors to administer, optimize, and multiply it [life]."[44] Biopolitics was tied to the power to "'*make*' live and '*let*' die."[45] It was concerned with issues such as reproduction, mortality rate, life expectancy, and birth rate to create security and optimize life for the general population.[46] Biopolitics meant regulations that promoted valued life, while simultaneously allowing less valued life to die—toward the goal to develop, optimize, control, and strengthen the territory.[47]

Thus biopolitics was at play in slavery, settler colonialism, and the making of the United States as a nation. We could say that the enslaver exercised sovereign and disciplinary power—through the right of seizure of bodies, time, and life itself (sovereign power) as well as the punishment and containment of enslaved people (disciplinary power). Yet the institution of slavery, perhaps more important, incorporated biopolitical logics that were connected to the proliferation of enslaved bodies and life through provisions of food and housing, hypodescent laws (the "one-drop rule"), protection of the enslaved mother's unborn baby while whipping her, and the legal doctrine of *partus sequitur ventrem* ("that which follows the womb," in which a child born of rape by the enslaver would be born a slave). These practices, policies, and laws not only helped "make live" enslaved Blacks, but they also enabled White Americans and the United States as a nation to thrive.

For settler colonialism, biopolitics appears in the 1831 Supreme Court case *Cherokee Nation v. Georgia*, which ruled that Native American Tribes were not independent sovereigns but domestic dependent nations. Justice Johnson declared that Native Americans were "nothing more than wandering hordes."[48] This ruling established that Native American tribal relationship with the United States was similar to a guardian and ward. The discursive and legal power produced by the Court operationalized biopolitical logic through an early form of the "White man's burden" to sustain and care for "uncivilized" Tribes. Similarly, the racial, gendered, and settler colonial project of boarding schools facilitated the proliferation of a particular type of subject—one who was culturally assimilated. That thousands of Native American children died in boarding schools composed the "let die" component that accompanied the "make live" for the thousands of "culturally assimilated" Native American children who survived the boarding school experience. Boarding schools operated in conjunction with other "logics of elimination," such as the General Allotment Act of 1887 and the tribal Termination Era from 1953 to 1968, which were meant to civilize and assimilate Native Americans.[49] Land dispossession, assaults on self-determination, and family separation were the tactics used in the longer strategy of enabling the settler nation-state and its population to prosper.

The U.S. racial state also affected Asian communities and families through exclusionary immigration laws that protected the biopolitics of Whiteness. The Page Law of 1875 targeted Asian women who were perceived to be morally threatening prostitutes, and the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 was the first U.S. law that explicitly excluded an ethnic and national group from immigration by name. Asian exclusion crescendoed when Congress passed the 1924 Immigration Act, which created a quota system based on "national origins" that favored Northern and Western Europeans the most while restricting immigration from Eastern and Southern Europe. The law also completely excluded all Asian countries from immigration because they were deemed "racially unassimilable."[50] In the two years prior, the Supreme Court, in *Takao Ozawa v. United States* (1922) and *United States v. Bhagat Singh Thind* (1923), had ruled that Japanese and South Asians, and therefore all Asians, were not White and thus racially ineligible for naturalized citizenship. The McCarran-Walter Act of 1952, though still discriminatory toward Asian immigration, finally allowed nominal quotas and naturalized citizenship for individuals from Asian countries.[51]

In addition to racial anxieties, U.S. immigration has been concerned with sexuality and heterosexual reproduction since the late nineteenth century. Sexuality was a site of knowledge and power that was used by the state for biopolitical purposes of managing life through sex.[52] Much of the immigration restrictions and allowances were based on who should reproduce, which was highly influenced by the eugenics movement. Eugenics was coined by British scientist Francis Galton in the 1880s, who was influenced by Charles Darwin's *Origin of Species*, Herbert Spencer's idea of "survival of the fittest," and Mendelian genetics.[53] Eugenicists believed that intelligence and social characteristics such as morality and criminality were genetically "inborn" and attached to racial groups and thus inheritable.[54] The eugenics movement in the United States was a political, educational, scientific, and medical effort to breed "better" human beings so that the ideal nation would be racially pure (as White). Eugenics involved both positive eugenics, such as "fitter family contests" at U.S. county fairs, and negative eugenics, such as sterilization laws, to prevent passing down tainted traits. Indiana was the first state to pass a eugenics-based sterilization law in 1907, and eventually 31 more states followed suit.[55] The Supreme Court in *Buck v. Bell* (1927) ruled the practice to be constitutional, which led to the sterilization of approximately 60,000 to 70,000 people in the United States, most of whom were Black, Native, poor, and disabled women. The eugenics and child welfare reform movements reflected dominant racial, gendered, and class ideology, which shaped early adoption practices, showing how these seemingly distinct histories overlapped.[56]

Predating the eugenics movement by centuries, but relating to it in terms of controlling race and sexuality, was the establishment of antimiscegenation laws. In the 300 years between the 1660s and 1960s, 41 colonies or states passed antimiscegenation laws regulating sex, marriage, and/or cohabitation. Such laws were

enacted to police and protect the supposed racial purity of Whiteness and the "mongrelization" of local states and the nation as a whole. Bans mostly targeted Black Americans from interracial relationships and sex with White Americans, but numerous state statutes targeted "Native Americans, Asiatic Indians, West Indians, Hindus, and people of Chinese, Japanese, Korean, and Filipino ancestry" as threats to White racial purity.[57] Both the courts and state legislatures articulated with great certainty that such unions were unnatural, immoral, and a danger to the nation-state.[58] Mixing of racial groups would result in the reversion to the so-called lower race, therefore leading to eventual race suicide.[59] At the same time, by 1967 transracial and transnational adoptions of Korean, Native American, and Black children had increased substantially. That same year, 17 states still had anti-miscegenation laws on the books that were eventually ruled unconstitutional by the Supreme Court in *Loving v. Virginia*.

U.S. political, legal, economic, and cultural institutions that managed family-making created the conditions for the emergence of TRNAs. The different yet nearly simultaneous efforts by institutions to promote the adoption of Asian, Black, and Native American children were rooted in racist, settler colonial, and imperialist logics that constructed relational meaning about which families and spaces could provide a better future and home. These forms of adoption were (and still are) narrated as loving acts of White Americans whose selflessness solves the problem of children in need of a family and home. And while many individuals who have been involved in adoption (adoptees and adoptive parents alike) have experienced adoption as such, the reality of TRNAs is that they were and are premised on family separation. Contemporary termination of parental rights (TPR) in domestic U.S. child welfare cases has been called the "civil (or family) death penalty," leading to a familial rupture for both the birth parents and child.[60] Their reemergence from such violence as a "good mother" or a "saved" orphan or child can only happen through adoption, where family separation is still a foundational pillar that is legally ensconced in adoption practice (changed names, sealed birth certificates, and unknown origins). Thus the TRNAs have done little to disrupt and in some cases reinscribed the traditional family ideal instituted by the state that has comprised the elements of Whiteness, middle-class status, heterosexual marriage, biological reproduction, and a patriarchal and (more recently) nuclear familial order.

INTERVENTIONS, METHODS, CHAPTER OUTLINE

Adoption studies, as a multidisciplinary field, has been historically predominated by social work, psychology, and legal studies. I take an interdisciplinary approach that employs theories and methodologies from critical race and ethnic studies (CRES) and critical adoption studies (CAS). These two fields draw from other interdisciplinary fields such as American studies, critical gender and sexuality

studies, Black studies, Indigenous studies, and Asian American studies. While these fields are distinct in many ways, they share many characteristics, one of which is the rejection of objectivity. The production of knowledge is never purely objective, no matter what people say or do. This means that research is in fact much more subjective than researchers ever admit, if they do at all. Instead of trying to "objectively" determine whether adoption is beneficial or harmful, CRES and CAS ask, How do we know what we know, and what are alternative forms of knowledge and practice?

I incorporate social theory with discursive and legal analysis of historical documents and other forms of knowledge. Each chapter operationalizes my violence of love framework to interrogate a different site of knowledge production and/ or practice about TRNA, such as newspaper articles and agency reports, "positive adoption language" and social scientific studies, federal and international laws and policies, and court cases. As an analytical tool, the violence of love framework helps to examine how race, nation (Asian countries, Tribes, and the United States), and subject (adoptees, adoptive parents, and birth parents) formation are inextricably linked to adoptive family formation.

I employ the concept of discourse similar to how it is used in multiple disciplinary and interdisciplinary fields—as a group of statements and system of representation that is historically and culturally specific. Discourse is a collection and circulation of knowledge that stems from a range of texts and institutions that distinguishes and governs how we come to understand meaning relationally and as "truth." Therefore, as a parameter of knowledge, discourse influences how we think and act. Discursive analysis enables me to identify important details such as points where power is located, who is producing knowledge about adoption, and what is at stake. While discourse is an instrument and effect of power, it can also be a site of resistance because power is everywhere, not only in the state, institutions, or the law. In addition, the contestation over meaning within a particular discourse indicates that meaning is never absolutely fixed.[61] Hence, I am interested in how the transracial/transnational adoptive family is discursively made and what the attendant material consequences are.

I understand historical archives in both the "traditional" sense, where the archive is a place of knowledge retrieval, but also in its alternative significance as a site of knowledge production and power relations.[62] When we think of history and the archives, we think of documents with names, dates, locations, and stories. The adoption archive has these things, but they are mostly from the perspective of the institutions, government officials, the media, and most prominently, adoptive parents—all of which produce knowledge about adoption. At the same time, many adoptee records (such as name, date of birth, and social reports) can be fabricated or altered. Adoption, then, exemplifies the ways the archive is not simply a space of "truth" or facts about the past but rather a space that we ascribe as truthful and factual.

Indeed, history is a contention between the master narrative of historicity—that is, history as recorded, factual, linear, and teleological—and what some call a genealogical method that is antihistory. This book is not a historical narrative of the adoption of Black, Asian, and Native American children. The adoption archive is by no means overflowing with documents, and the adoptee archive largely remains hidden, incomplete, and housed in unreliable or inaccessible sites.[63] Pursuing a critical historical (or genealogical) project means attending to what is absent or erased and reading "official" or hegemonic narratives "against the grain" by interrogating their discontinuities, multiple perspectives, incompleteness, multiple beginnings, and various connections.[64] Upon reaching the end of the book, I suspect readers will have more questions than answers. But my hope is that those new questions will lead us elsewhere.

In addition, I use a comparative and relational approach to examine the adoption of Asian, Black, and Native American children by White families in the United States. These three types of adoptions are important because they—with a few exceptions—have typically been narrated and analyzed along separate historical timelines even though they share similar and interconnected stories of building loving, transgressive, and non-normative families.[65] At the same time, these three types of adoptions share related forms of violence enacted on adoptees, birth families, and birth communities. In short, a comparative and relational framework enables me to analyze how subjects, families, and nations (including Tribes) are racialized in relation to each other.

One of the key struggles I had in writing this book was contending with the absent presence of the birth parents, especially the birth mother. None of my research materials contained birth parent voices, where they are agents and subjects who love and have desires. To an extent, I am able to explore the matter through their ghostly presence or present absence (rather than absent presence). A present absence approach discloses and acknowledges the beings who cannot be materially present but who often visit or haunt our daily lives, thoughts, desires, and dreams. Their actual voices and experiences would have certainly added another layer of complexity to my analysis of adoption and family-making. This book has been more than 18 years in the making, and I unfortunately was not able to do what needs to be done in this area. I am grateful to others who have done, are doing, and will do this work because birth parent voices and experiences are vital to our reimagining of adoption, family, and kinship.[66]

Chapter 1 explores—through a genealogical rather than solely historical tracing—how newspaper and adoption agency accounts of Black, Native American, and Asian children went from inferior and unadoptable to adoptable.[67] TRNAs represented liberal ideals of inclusion that could combat the negative image of America as a racist country, even while they in essence maintained normative family structures. Although these three types of adoptions appear to have divergent trajectories, they carried and continue to make relational racial meaning

among White families and the U.S. nation vis-à-vis non-White families and sending nations. This chapter illuminates how the structures of racism, settler colonialism, and the U.S. empire were linked to adoption, family-making, and discourses of love. It shows the types of structural and symbolic violence that helped produce such adoptions, the traumatic violence engendered by them, and how different groups pushed back.

Chapter 2 offers a historical and discursive analysis of social work and social scientific knowledge that attempted to "positively" reshape the way America imagined, discussed, and practiced adoption. Positive Adoption Language (PAL), promoted by social workers, attempted to destigmatize adoption and adoptive motherhood through "universal" and loving terminology, but instead, it enacted symbolic racial violence by instituting White adoptive mothers as a new norm over and against Asian, Native American, and Black birth mothers. Likewise, social scientific studies produced "positive"—both "objective" and affirming—knowledge about the outcomes of TRNAs. From this social work and psychological research, love emerged as a reason for the success of these adoptions. Both the statements of love along with the research methodology ultimately ignored the structural-historical and symbolic violence of adoption. Together, PAL and scientific studies ignored or misinterpreted the significance of race, which shaped subject and family formations in uneven ways.

I also situate the law as a generative site of inquiry. As a fundamental institution, law influences various aspects of social, economic, and political life—in particular, the family. Moreover, law is important because it is actively made and remade, producing mechanisms of regulation and management as well as reinscribing or creating new meaning. Chapter 3 examines congressional hearings and federal adoption laws, considering how lawmakers and transracial adoption supporters employed love within liberal and neoliberal color-evasive adoption discourse and adoption laws to configure transracial adoption as a form of freedom from violence. Despite race-neutral language surrounding the best interest of the child, liberal and neoliberal laws both ignored structural and symbolic forms of violence against Black families that were the conditions creating the "need" for transracial adoption while simultaneously enacting additional institutional and symbolic harm to further justify such adoptions.

Chapter 4 examines adoption discourse and the law in the context of transnational adoption from Asia. While the Hague Adoption Convention states that every adoption case must consider the "best interest of the child," this decision has already been predetermined based on racialized accounts of each family (birth and adoptive) and nation ("sending" and "receiving"), which are socially constructed in distinct relation to each other as "opposite futures" for the "orphan." Through this imagined opposite spatial and temporal path (life versus death), adoption and love transform the orphan into the adoptee, who receives permanency, parental love, and a future that promotes life—all of which birth and/or adoptive Asian

parents in the space of Asia cannot provide. In the context of scandals and other forms of violence, such as rehoming and deportation of transnational adoptees, adoption discourse, law, and practice have too often protected adoptive parents rather than adoptees and birth parents.

Continuing with a legal and discursive analysis, chapter 5 examines the U.S. Supreme Court case *Adoptive Couple v. Baby Girl* (2013), which awarded the custody of four-year-old "Baby Veronica" to a White adoptive couple in South Carolina instead of her Cherokee father, Dusten Brown. This occurred despite the existence of the Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA) of 1978, a law meant to protect Native American children, families, and Tribes from transracial and transnational adoptions. While the case seemingly revolved around Brown's parent and custody status, I argue that Brown and Veronica's "Indianness" as well as "White rights" were at the heart of the legal dispute. This case illustrates how the confluence of racial difference, settler colonialism, and liberalism worked in concert to privilege White adoptive parents and White space over Indigenous parents, Tribes, and reservations. In a lengthy postscript I analyze the *Haaland v. Brackeen* (2023) case that also challenged ICWA.

The conclusion returns to the concept of love, drawing from many thinkers to consider who gets to love and how love can be a source of power and harm. What would it mean to interrogate love and think beyond it? How does revolutionary love require us to commit to being in relation differently? With broader foundations of love, I explore alternative adoptee and ghostly forms of kinship, the limits of open adoption, and ways to love, care, and imagine otherwise by looking to Native knowledge and kinship, reproductive justice, and abolition. What would it mean to envision alternative forms of kinship, care, and relationality?

HOW TO READ THIS BOOK (AND WHAT IT IS NOT)

The Violence of Love is an academic book, but my hope is that it is useful for all people connected to adoption—whether they are in academia or not. It is for adoptees, birth parents, adoptive parents, adoption agencies, social workers, therapists, lawmakers, and those connected to adoption who wonder, who feel, who hurt, who love, who want more, and who imagine otherwise. It is a search for a deeper understanding of adoption, not a positivistic claim to truth. In other words, it is not research or knowledge that comes from "objective" observation and experimentation that attempts to provide a level of certainty in the knowledge produced. This book is not claiming or ascribing singular/universal truths about specific experiences and identities—adoptee, adoptive parent, birth parent, or otherwise. Rather, it's an invitation to interrogate our ideas about these identities and experiences. As a reader, it is unnecessary to respond with "not all adoptees/adoptive parents/birth parents" because this project is not looking solely at individual

experience. Rather it is concerned with longer histories, entrenched industries, widespread discourse, and deep systems.

For readers who are newer to the critiques of adoption, I ask for your patience and curiosity. It might be tempting to quickly reject the concepts and arguments herein. Historically, when minoritized groups have raised grievances, the majority has often claimed that the complaints are overreactions. Yet history has shown that most of those grievances are in fact valid. What does it mean when a significant group of adoptees, former foster youth, social workers, and even adoptive parents have agreed that the current system is not just unfair but harmful and violent? In a compilation of common sayings, we could think, *Everyone faces challenges. Nobody has a perfect life. It's how you respond to obstacles and learn to overcome them that matters.* These platitudes can be useful in certain individual circumstances, but *The Violence of Love* attempts to show how the harm attached to transracial and transnational adoption is multiple, repeating, long-lasting, and, most important, structural (ideologically and institutionally enacted over space and time). It does not mean that adoptees cannot be happy or have had fulfilling lives. It just means that historically and structurally, society has not been honest about the violence connected to adoption and has not been imaginative when thinking about how kinship, relationality, and care might be practiced differently to mitigate that harm.

Again, the goal is not to only name everything as violent and negate anything that claims to be loving. To speak about the violence of love is not to disavow love or the positive experiences of other adopted individuals and adoptive parents. Through my own experience (which despite some challenges was loving) and working at summer camps for adoptees, where I interacted with hundreds of transnational and transracial adoptees and adoptive families, I know that the vast majority of adoptive parents love their children and vice versa. This book is not an attempt to negate or diminish that love and those relationships. The purpose of this project is to tackle the issues that have been exposed but remain rooted in the adoption industry, child welfare system, and settler colonial interpretations of the law. I am more concerned about the part of the iceberg beneath the water. Even in positive experiences, violence exists and should be acknowledged because it has shaped everyone in the adoption constellation.

The goal is to think broadly and deeply about adoption discourse and practice. This is an onto-epistemological project, which means that I'm interested in ways of being and knowing. Or, more specifically, how do we come to be orphans, adoptees, adoptive parents, and birth parents? How do we know what we know about race, love, violence, adoption, and family? The goal is to acknowledge the violence, acknowledge the love, and then dig deeper to understand how they both relate to adoption and family-making. I must be explicit—the goal is not to resolve violence but to note the impossibility of detaching violence from adoption. I cannot

demand an outcome from those who read this book, but at the very least I hope adoption becomes more complex so that it can hold ambivalence. As Eleana Kim writes: "This is an ambivalence that allows one to say with confidence and without contradiction that one is happy to have been adopted and that one cannot imagine a different or more loving family, but also that these joys coexist with a sense of loss and sadness for people, places, and experiences barely remembered or never known. It also allows for the adoptees who were raised in abusive or dysfunctional homes to be able to express their rage and their desire to find better, less drastic, solutions for the children in need."[68]

At the most I hope the book moves readers to think, act, and be differently. It is just a small portion of the larger political project that is needed to do the more important work of reimaging adoption, family, and kinship. This requires critical thinking, challenging ourselves, and reflecting on our discomfort. It requires understanding, patience, and grace. Finally, this book is not the last word. There is more out there, especially alternative perspectives, truths, and expertise by adult adoptees and birth/first parents. The scope of adoption inquiry, experience, knowledge, and practice is ever-expanding. The adoption community is brimming with writers, artists, and poets who have produced trenchant narratives and imagery, helping us understand the pain, happiness, complexity, and alternative futures of adoption in new ways.