

INTERNATIONAL, INTERUNIVERSITY & INTERDISCIPLINAR SEMINAR

CHILD CIRCULATION, MIGRATION NETWORKS & TRANSNATIONAL FAMILIES



Amanda McCavour (*Compound tangle*, 2010)

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1st Session. Child circulation & Transnational Families

Lies Wesseling (Maastricht University, Gender and Diversity Studies)

The Weaving of Family: Narrative Practices and Cultural Remembrance in Transracial Adoption

My research deals with three closely interrelated themes:

- The discourses that supported and legitimized the (forced) migration of children in the British and Dutch colonial empires: circulation between families and children's homes, between children's homes, from the center of empire to the colonies and vice versa.
- The narrative *kinning* practices of adopters and adoptees within the framework of 'modern' transracial adoption.
- The ways in which (a) is remembered and/or forgotten in (b).

Self-styled "pioneers" of transnational and transracial adoption in fifties America and Europe obviously had the feeling that they were promoting a new mode of family-making. From a historical point of view, however, this perception is debatable. The transnational circulation of children was part and parcel of every colonial empire, where lower class children and mixed race children were concerned. There seems to be little to no awareness of this prehistory, however, in the ways in which adoptive parents put themselves into the picture in the abundant life writing practices that accompany

transnational and transracial adoption. Their narrative *kinning* strategies generally serve the purpose of imbuing their adoption of a little stranger from abroad with the aura of fate or destiny: this special child was born to become part of their family. The traces of birth parents, birth countries, and whatever may have come before the act of adoption is thought to be immaterial, an approach that is highly conducive to historical amnesia. The life writing of adoptees is often radically different: it tends to be governed by individual and collective genealogical imperatives. Adoptees are not just keen on reconnecting to their birth parents; they also struggle to reinscribe the practice of transracial adoption into public or collective history. They tend to be haunted by the past and the contingency of history, as becomes manifest in their obsession with parallel lives and parallel identities ('I could have been an altogether different person with an altogether different life ...'). My presentation will discuss some representative examples of adoptive life stories, and the different ways in which they are prone to forgetting and/or remembrance.

Jorge Grau Rebollo (Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona, Department of Social and Cultural Anthropology, getp-GRAFO)

Formal and Informal Circulation of Children. Cross-Cultural issues.

Under the label Adoption it is not uncommon to find cultural practices of child placement that overtly differ in their conception and exercise among each other. A close look into ethnographic production since the 19th Century may help us to understand how formal and informal placements do take place at the bosom of many different societies, as well as between them. Moreover, reasons for placing children out of their birth units do greatly differ and often follow intentional strategies that not only prioritize the interest of the child, but they are also used to strength social relationships, create new ties or alleviate families in situation of social vulnerability, for example. Such practices are also traceable, in its informal form, in some European societies until very recent times.

Irina Casado (Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona, Department of Social and Cultural Anthropology, getp-GRAFO)

Riffian Imazighen extended families in transnational spaces. Preserving a family model through a households' network

My research unveils how socio-cultural changes in the Nador Riffian society (Berbers from Rif Mountains in Morocco) in combination with the migration processes to Europe have transformed certain patterns of the Riffian amazigh traditional family model. The Riffian model of family (familia, sing.) is traditionally composed by an extended family linked through patrilineal filiation and characterized by patrilocal postnuptial residence.

Drawing from more than five years of fieldwork with Riffian migrants living in Catalonia (who mostly come from Nador, the capital that gives name to the region) I will use Hayat's family case study to reveal how certain patterns are modified, especially

patrilocality, while others, such as the organization in extended families and the principle of patrilineal filiation, are maintained or readapted depending on contextual needs.

As societal transformations reshape the extended Riffian *familiat* (plu.) into neolocal households spread over a transnational space (Morocco-Europe), a fluid and dense relational network keeps maintaining the ties between households. Despite the physical distance, these networks help preserve the functions of the family institution and those of its members. Thus, authority and responsible roles, which do not fall onto the same figures, are maintained despite the changes of the local contexts and configurations of the transnational network of the familia, while children, female caregivers and sick people circulate through households depending on their needs, together with other economic, material and emotional resources. Hayat's familia ethnographic account will exemplify more clearly the composition of these households' networks, revealing what and who circulates and in which directions.

2nd Session. Migrant Families and Networks

Valentina Mazzucato (Maastricht University, Professor of Globalization and Development Studies at the Arts and Social Sciences, Technology & Society Studies, MACIMIDE)

Researching transnational families from a multi-actor and multi-sited perspective

Family research and scholarship on immigrant families has evolved in the past decade to include factors such as community context, family environment, and individual attitudes to explain immigrant family formation and functioning. Nevertheless, methodologically and theoretically, families are still predominantly conceived of and studied as nuclear, living together and bounded by the nation-state. Transnational families – conceived of as families with members living in different nation-states – have been treated as temporary phenomenon, with family reunification in the host society as the preferred outcome for all members. In the past two decades the field of transnational family research has emerged and highlighted the importance of such family formations and the effects that they can have on the members involved. They have also shown that such phenomena are not as temporary as once envisaged. Yet studying families across national borders entails some important methodological challenges. This presentation draws on some of the lessons learned from three international projects on transnational families (www.tcra.nl) focusing on migrant parents in Europe, their children in Africa and the people who are entrusted with the care of their children: the caregivers. It expands on how a multi-sited research design was implemented, and the mixed-methods and research practices that it involved.

José Luís Molina (Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona, Director of the Department of Social and Cultural Anthropology, egolab-GRAFO)

Defining and measuring transnational social structures

To describe and analyze emergent structures of cross-border formations, transnational social fields and transnational social spaces are concepts often used interchangeably in literature. In this paper we suggest to measure two key aspects of these social structures: *embeddedness* and span of migrants' personal networks. While clustered graphs allow assessing transnational *embeddedness*, the Standardized Diversity Index (SDI) can be used to show variation in the number of countries reported in personal networks. The measures will be exemplified with the data collected in Barcelona from three groups (Chinese, Sikh and Filipino, N=25 in each group, 30 alters by ego).

Miranda J. Lubbers (Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona, Department of Social and Cultural Anthropology, director of the research group egolab-GRAFO)

Continuity and change in personal positions in transnational social fields

Researchers in the area of transnationalism argue that when migrants participate in transnational activities they create "transnational social fields" that encompass their country of origin and the country of residence. Molina, Petermann and Herz (2012) proposed to operationalize these fields by visualizing the set of personal networks of a community of migrants. I will follow a similar approach to answer the following research questions: Is relational transnationalism a reality for immigrants? What forms does it take and how does it change over time? How do local and transnational relationships jointly affect the negotiation and construction of identity and sense of belonging? We interviewed more than 300 informants (from Argentina, the Dominican Republic, Morocco, Peru, Senegal and Gambia) who had migrated to the province of Barcelona and followed approximately 100 of them over a period of 8 years. We delineated their personal networks and interviewed them about migratory trajectories, processes of identity construction and sense of belonging. Results show that personal positions in transnational fields are intrinsically dynamic. These dynamics covary nevertheless with fluctuations in their sense of belonging. Although relational transnationalism takes different forms across persons and time, for the majority of informants, relational transnationalism is a daily and continuing reality.