UNIVERSIDADE FEDERAL DA PARAÍBA
CENTRO DE CIÊNCIAS HUMANAS, LETRAS E ARTES
COORDENAÇÃO DO CURSO DE LETRAS - INGLÊS
CURSO DE GRADUAÇÃO EM LICENCIATURA EM LETRAS/INGLÊS

TALITA SILVA GARCIA

IDENTITY, EXILE, AND DAUGHTERHOOD IN *THE LANGUAGE OF BLOOD* (2003) BY JANE JEONG TRENKA

JOÃO PESSOA
2023

TALITA SILVA GARCIA

IDENTITY, EXILE, AND DAUGHTERHOOD IN *THE LANGUAGE OF BLOOD* (2003) BY JANE JEONG TRENKA

Trabalho de Conclusão de Curso apresentado ao curso de Licenciatura em Letras – Inglês, da Universidade Federal da Paraíba como parte dos requisitos necessários para a habilitação do grau de Licenciado em Letras – Língua Inglesa.

Orientadora: Profª Drª Danielle de Luna e Silva

JOÃO PESSOA
2023

FICHA CATALOGRÁFICA

AGRADECIMENTOS[1]

Agradeço a YAHWEH, por incentivar uma realidade de dispersão e diversidade desde o Antigo Testamento, tanto preservando quanto dispondo uma nova identidade aos apóstolos, que foram enviados às diferentes nações para anunciarem a Boa Nova. Te dou graças pelos momentos de serendipidade na construção deste trabalho, por me inspirar e me permitir associar a pesquisa científica à minha fé. Sei quem sou, pois sei que Tu és o Grande Eu Sou.

Agradeço à minha mãe, Claudeci, pelo amor e paciência incondicionais, zelando pelo meu bem maior, a educação, desde cedo. Ao meu pai, Joselito, pelo suporte e preocupação a cada passo dessa jornada. À minha irmã, Isabela, pela cumplicidade e companheirismo, apesar das constantes preocupações e adversidades. E à minha avó, Carmelita, por aceitar compartilhar sua história. Esse trabalho não existiria sem vocês como minha base e pilares desde o início.

Melissa와 Patrick Choi 덕분에 자신의 문화 정체성을 보존하는 것이 얼마나 중요한지를 알게되었습니다. 9000 km나 떨어진 머나먼 캐나다 땅에서 저를 잘 보살펴 주고 질. 높은 교육을 받게 해 주셔서 감사합니다. 덕분에 학업에 열정과 동기를 가질 수 있었습니다. 감사합니다. And thanks to Eric Choi for promptly helping me with my poor Korean language skills in this section.

A cada um dos mestres que, mesmo brevemente, contribuíram para a minha formação acadêmica, esportiva, artística e profissional. Em especial à minha orientadora, Danielle de Luna, por despertar em mim de forma tão gentil, o amor pelo belíssimo caminho da literatura. Afirmo com muita alegria que sou um mosaico de todos vocês e os levo no meu coração.

Agradeço aos meus colegas de curso, especialmente Helade, Irys e Patrícia, por todo apoio durante os quatro anos de graduação e uma pandemia. Também às minhas amigas da vida, Isabelly, Jordany, Railma e tantos outros. Como o ferro afia o ferro, assim um amigo afia o outro (Provérbios 27:17 NVT).

Por fim, aos meus filhos de quatro patas, Heros e Apolo, por todo amor e arte que trouxeram para a minha vida, assim como seus nomes indicam, e por estarem comigo nos momentos em que as lágrimas não podiam ser contidas.

[1] The acknowledgements section was written in Portuguese, English and Korean to embrace the ones mentioned in their own native language.

"No matter who you are, where you're from, your skin color, your gender identity, just speak yourself. Find your name and find your voice by speaking yourself."

(Kim Nam-Joon, 2018 United Nations General Assembly Speech)[2]

[2] Citation extracted from the BTS speech at the United Nations | UNICEF. Available from: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oTe4fbBEKg.

RESUMO

Esta pesquisa tem como objetivo analisar a obra literária *The Language of Blood*, da escritora sul-coreana Jane Jeong Trenka (2003a), observando o processo de construção da sua identidade cultural, o exílio e seu papel de filha, enquanto uma adotada transnacional. O livro é um apanhado das memórias de Trenka como uma criança sul-coreana enviada aos Estados Unidos para seus pais adotivos brancos. Este trabalho também busca ampliar a voz de adotados transnacionais, que procuram sua identidade cultural, e o gênero *Memoir*, como um dos canais de exposição da problemática da adoção transnacional. Para tanto, leituras sobre identidade cultural e diferença, exílio, memória e identidade e maternagem foram feitas para entender a jornada de Trenka entre os fragmentos de sua vida. Sendo assim, essa pesquisa segue, principalmente, os caminhos traçados pela autora, desde o encontro do seu lugar de pertencimento, nos laços sanguíneos que possui com sua mãe biológica, até o encontro com sua força feminina interior. Estes se findam na jornada do entrelugar, que passa a ser mais importante do que o seu destino final.

Palavras-chave: adoção; identidade cultural; exílio; filiação; pertencimento.

ABSTRACT

This research aims to analyze the literary work The Language of Blood by South Korean writer Jane Jeong Trenka (2003a), examining the process of constructing cultural identity, exile, and her role as a daughter, being a transnationally adopted individual. The book is a collection of Trenka's memories as a South Korean child sent to the United States to her white adoptive parents. This work also seeks to amplify the voice of transnational adoptees who seek their cultural identity, and the genre Memoir as one of the channels for exposing the issues surrounding transnational adoption. For this, readings were done primarily on cultural identity and difference, exile, memory and identity, and daughterhood in order to understand Trenka's journey through the fragments of her life. Therefore, this research follows the paths traced by the author, from finding her sense of belonging in the blood ties she shares with her biological mother to the discovery of her inner feminine strength. These paths culminate in the journey of the "in-between", which becomes more important than her final destination.

Keywords: adoptee; cultural identity; exile; daughterhood; belonging.

SUMMARY

1 INTRODUCTION

Adoption is a recurrent subject in our society. In Brazil, for example, there are discussions about transracial adoption by celebrities and illegal adoption practiced a few decades ago. Especially in Asia, during historical events like the Korean War (1950-1953) and the one-child policy in China (1980-2015), putting their children up for adoption was the only solution for many families. The United States was the prime destination for transnationally adopted children. Fortunately, these children grew up and are now in their 20s or 30s, looking for their cultural identity and ready to speak up. Especially in the postmodern world, social theory has debated the national cultures we are born into as one of the sources of our cultural identities (HALL, 1992).

An excerpt from *The Language of Blood* stood out for me when talking about the Contemporary Period of American Literature in the North American Literature class. Trenka was one of the writers mentioned in my North American Literature class, along with writers such as Sandra Cisneros and Jhumpa Lahiri. Her text caught my attention for her bold writing and her story as a transnational adoptee. The excerpt began with a fairy tale written by an adoptee, describing exactly what we think adoptees' lives are. In that fairy tale, she portrays how perfect her life would be if the advertisements of adoption practices were factual and how we usually perceive them. However, Trenka warns the reader that this is a plausible but also a completely false story: adoptees are loved by their adoptive parents, their differences are accepted, or at least tolerated by teachers and classmates, they are not ashamed of their heritage, and both birth and adoptive families share moments together and exchange gifts (TRENKA, 2003a).

Another point that caught my attention was Trenka's chaotic writing. She does not hesitate to write a fairy tale only to shatter its perfect image later. She suddenly resorts to a crossword to externalize her feelings of exile as a transnational adoptee. She also recalls the traumatizing moments her stalker had her through and her failed relationships with varied men since him. In her epilogue, Trenka states that she chose not to use the standard sets of Romanization of the Korean language but to romanize the Korean language in a way native English speakers would find easy to read. Composed of a fairy tale, a crossword, letters, and many other literary resources, Trenka creates what she calls her "own personal mythology" borrowing from Eastern and Western sources (TRENKA, 2003a, p. 261).

The transnational adoption process begins when the children are still newborns or toddlers. For adoptees, they have no cultural background to hold on to since they have no

memory of their lives before the adoption. They lost a part of themselves, and this void may affect their identity construction, especially during their teenage years, leading them to an identity crisis. Hall (1992, p. 9) discusses cultural identity and identity crisis in modern society, related to "[...] aspects of belonging to ethnic, racial, linguistic, religious and, above all, national cultures".

While Homi Bhabha (2013) questions how subjects are formed in-between or in excess of the sum of the 'parts' of difference (usually intoned as race/class/gender). The most convenient way for the adoptees to look for their identity is through the official documents before adoption. However, not all of them have the luck to find their official documents with all the malice of the agencies back in the 1970s, possibly trying to keep information from the biological families with the excuse of "non-identifying" information and an alarming number of babies arriving (TRENKA, 2003a). The Netflix documentary *Found* (2021), directed and produced by Amanda Lipitz, portrays three blood-related teenage girls born in China and adopted by American families. They contact a Chinese genealogist to trace their origins and possibly find their history, birth families, and cultural identities.

Cultural identity is a mighty characteristic of Asian families living overseas. I can personally mention the Choi family that humbly embraced me in their home in 2016 as an exchange student. Small habits are, in fact, significant traditions and keep their culture alive inside their home: speaking Korean, eating Korean food, leaving their shoes outside, making kimchi[3] and makgeolli[4], and having samgyeopsal[5] for special occasions make their house in a small city in Canada, more than 8 thousand kilometers away from South Korea, a small and comforting piece of Daehanminguk (Revised Romanization of Korean: 대한민국, the official name for the Republic of Korea). With this, it is noticeable that even for people who decide to leave their home country, leaving their generational culture behind is inconceivable.

Adoption is not far from my reality, as my grandmother was put up for adoption after her parents divorced. They had three daughters, but the middle one sadly passed away when she was still a baby. In 1949, my grandmother was four, and her sister was eight months old.

---

[3] According to Oxford Languages: 김치 (Revised Romanization of Korean: gimchi) a Korean dish of spicy pickled cabbage.

[4] According to Wiktionary: 막걸리 (Revised Romanization of Korean: makgeolli) a traditional alcoholic beverage in Korea, made of rice.

[5] According to the Oxford English Dictionary: 삼겹살 (Revised Romanization of Korean: samgyeopsal) a Korean dish of thinly sliced pork belly, usually served raw to be cooked by the diner on a tabletop grill.

Her father sent them away because her birth mother was having an affair. My grandmother states that a single father taking care of two daughters was not taken kindly by society at the time. She also recounts that her birth mother waved them goodbye smiling brightly. People used to give children away often. That was the Brazil Baby Affair: No official documents, mostly false birth registrations, and increased infant traffic risks. It is now an illegal practice. My grandmother blames her mother for their suffering, even though her father was the one who sent them away. Her father came looking for them years later, but they did not want to bond with him, and she highlights her regret. My grandmother was in the best of care before her adoptive parents passed away. After a while, one of the adoptive family's daughters began to shame her by saying they found her in the trash bin.

Curiously, when my grandmother became pregnant for the first time, many people asked her to give the baby to them, but she did not want my aunt to go through what she did. So she decided to go live elsewhere, got married, and had another baby, but her husband passed away when the little girl was eight months old. Then my grandmother went to live with her birth mother, who offered help. But when she discovered her stepfather mistreated the girls, she got them back and married my grandfather. She did not contact her birth mother after this and had three more children with my grandfather, including my mother. My grandmother and all my aunts and uncles experienced extreme domestic violence, they were threatened daily, but she could not run away with five children, and "giving them away for the world to take over" was not an option for her. My grandmother lives a selfless life and suffered a lot in the past but is now proud of not giving her children away and making them good citizens of the world.

Back to my own exchange period, having those experiences have made me sensitive to the importance of belonging. Aristotle once said a man is, by nature, a social animal[6]. Even though I was not related by blood to the Choi family, having a group of people that set up a safe place I could go back to make an impact on me. I was a 16-year-old living in a foreign country by myself, surrounded by cultures that were not slightly similar to mine. I struggled during the first weeks of my cultural exchange program, and though I was excited, the feeling of exile persistently told me I did not fit in. I am the middle child of loving birth parents in Brazil, and in Canada, I was Choi's youngest child. I could not help but develop emotional strings and feel attached to my Korean host family in Canada. Not did I know that the speech of exile and not belonging was already something my grandmother had experienced within our family. Thanks

[6] ARISTÓTELES. A política. São Paulo: Folha de São Paulo, 2010. (Coleção Livros que Mudaram o Mundo). p. 4.

to our matriarch that did not give us up, we belong. We are now daughters and granddaughters because blood is memory without language (OATES, 2002 apud TRENKA, 2003).

On websites such as JSTOR and Google Scholar, little to no research involving cultural identity in *The Language of Blood* by Jane Jeong Trenka came up when searching for the cultural identity of Korean adoptees. Most research is about the social context of ethnic exploitation, race matching, and the rediscovery of heritage specifically. Consequently, due to a lack of research on the search for cultural identity in Trenka's Memoir, this work aims to highlight the voices that feel the urge to fit in and yet do not belong.

This paper is organized into three parts, all of them mixing theory and analysis due to the complexity of Trenka's writing. The first chapter is mainly about the history of adoption, the adoption process, transnational adoption, and its implications in Brazil and worldwide. For the second chapter, bibliographic research was conducted on cultural identity and exile. In the third chapter, memory and identity, and the genre Memoir are discussed, which was not as mentioned as other genres in my literature classes during my undergraduate program, and how Jane Jeong Trenka's background history reflects on the text. And finally, for the last chapter, motherhood, daughterhood, and women's body were some of the main concepts discussed along with their relation to Trenka's text.

2 A BRIEF SUMMARY ON THE HISTORY OF ADOPTION

According to the Jennifer S. Jones in the Gladney Center for Adoption website, adoption traces back to ancient Rome:

> Under 6th century AD Roman Law, *Codex Justinianeus,* when the family patriarch was poised to die without a male heir, an heir could be provided from another family through adoption. Families with many sons often "adopted" their sons to other noble families in order to forge a coveted family connection. If a family had too many sons, the family's wealth would be spread too thin. Not enough sons and the wealth might revert back to the state. By adopting one another's sons, the Roman nobility ensured the wealth would stay within a few desirable families and each of those families' sons would receive a good inheritance. Because wealth and power passed down through the paternal line, daughters were seldom adopted. (JONES, 2019, p. 1)

Countries such as France, Italy, and England forbid adoption, but the practice of oblation started emerging, in which one assumes the parenting of a child instead of the birth parents. Due to the high number of abandoned children, the Church began regulating this practice, which led to the first official orphanages in Europe. Soon orphanages expanded into the private and public sectors, still overcrowded and with little resources to support them. In the mid-19th century, society began to think more about the collective role in the life of individuals. With that, adoption was presented to promote children's best interests. And in 1851, the Massachusetts Adoption of Children Act became the first adoption law to protect children. Three main historical events worldwide may have contributed to the explosion of children's national and transnational adoption, especially war scenarios, poverty, and alarming natality rates.

Brazil, for instance, was an important country of origin for transnational adoption a few decades ago. According to the website Brazil Baby Affair, founded by Patrick Noordoven in 2014, intercountry adoption increased in the 1970s, making newborn children from developing countries available in developed countries. Noordoven himself, as an adoptee, has much experience in family tracing cases in Brazil. For him, one of the most important objectives of his job is solving the problems of the consequences of the deprivation of the human right to identity. One of the solved cases displayed on the website is Isabella's case: she grew up in Paris with her upper-class adoptive parents. She was named Charlotte and told how people rescued her from the streets in Brazil. However, it was not enough for her. She was curious about her story before her adoption. After some research, she found out that during her adoption process, her birth certificate was fabricated in Brazil so she could be taken to her adoptive parents in France. Charlotte states that as long as she is searching, she feels like a part of herself

is still missing. This speech is quite frequent among transnational adoptees, the feeling of displacement and exile accompanied by the feeling of missing something they never experienced before.

According to the Encyclopedia Britannica, due to historical events since the late 20th century, the United States has become home for internationally adopted children orphaned in their birth countries, and one of these events was the American Civil War (1861-1865). During these years, immigration increased, and homeless children crowded the streets and orphanages. With this, Charles Loring Brace, the director of the New York Children's Aid Society, decided to move orphaned and abandoned children from urban areas, like New York City, to rural areas. Trains crowded with children traveled back and forth, taking them to a supposedly safe place. Sadly, some adopted children were enslaved by their adoptive parents rather than having a better life (HASSLER; WEBER, 2023).

Another main event still commented on nowadays is the strict one-child policy in China (1980-2015). Many parents had to give away their second or third children, in case of breaking the law, impoverished families could face severe punishment from the Chinese government or pay an expensive fine. The Netflix documentary *Found* (2021), portrays the real-life story of three teenage girls born during the Chinese one-child policy and adopted to the United States. Together they start tracing their origins in hopes of filling the void the three of them have in common. It is mentioned in the documentary that the Chinese government was so strict that women had to visit the doctor every three months to prove they were not pregnant. Some of them could bypass the appointments with the help of nurses or doctors. And the ones involved, not only the parents, were at risk of losing their jobs if ever caught by authorities.

Consequently, it is worth mentioning that according to BBC News and The Guardian News, China had the lowest birth rate on record in 2022. Now, the Chinese government is bringing up some innovations to stimulate an increase in its natality rate, such as reducing the cost of childbirth, childcare, and education to encourage citizens to have children within a safe environment and with the necessary support. During these events, it became a trend in the United States to adopt children from Asia, especially South Korea, which became known as a "catalog of children" for transnational adoption (NG, 2023; DAVIDSON, 2022).

Finally, the Korean War (1950-1953) contributed to the explosion of children's adoption. The U.S. military has been based in South Korea since the Korean War. It is noticeable that the U.S. has had a profound and direct impact on South Korea, both culturally and historically. Unfortunately, prejudice against women who had children with American soldiers was a huge issue. They were labeled as prostitutes since their families, mainstream

society, and Korean nationalism would not accept mixed bloodiness, lack of paternal Korean blood, and ethnic and cultural identities (DOOLAN, 2012). Many Amerasians[7] were born and abandoned at that time. During the Korean War, families were obliged to divide themselves between South and North Korea. However, both countries still maintain their nationalism alive and value their bloodlines. According to the Kaian website (Korean Adoptees in Australia Network[8]), adoption was not common in Korea before the Korean War, and rare instances of adoption were within the same family. In chapter five, Trenka does question why it was not her case since her uncle did treasure her:

> After my mother's death, I learned more about Korean customs, and I wondered why he (her mother's brother) hadn't adopted me. Although the practice was nearly impossible after the devastating Korean War and the period of industrialization that followed, it had not been uncommon at one time for extended family members to adopt children, in order to keep the bloodlines pure. Perhaps Uncle wanted to but couldn't because he feared my father, or his wife didn't want me, or, more likely, he couldn't afford to feed another mouth. (TRENKA, 2003a, p. 126)

Adoption practices continued to increase with time. Later it would also include orphaned Korean children, who were adopted transnationally in large numbers by Americans. Bertha Marian Holt and Harry Holt became a reference in the adoption field for their "Godly mission". They had six children together and claimed God had sent them on a mission to adopt eight South Korean-born Amerasian children. They assumed that American childhood was superior to the one in developing nations. And their values on family-making included faith and altruism, not social work or regulation. As a result, Harry and Bertha Holt created what became the largest agency in the U.S. specializing in Korean children–Holt International Children's Services (THE ADOPTION HISTORY PROJECT, 2012).

The Adoption History Project website explains how their services work:

> Many Americans cheered the Holts and found their promises of speedy and uncomplicated adoptions a refreshing alternative to inspection by choosy agencies with waiting lists that could last for years. The Holts used an inexpensive and efficient procedure called "Adoption by Proxy," which considered (what the Holt's called) a Christian "triumph" against the United States Government. (p.12) The wanting Christian couple would give Harry Power of Attorney. He would then represent their desires and obtain the children under Korean law. The children would finally come to the U.S. as sons and daughters belonging to the wanting couples. (THE ADOPTION HISTORY PROJECT, 2012, p. 1)

[7] Children fathered by American soldiers and Korean women during the Korean War.

[8] Korean Adoptees in Australia Network is a not-for-profit organization run entirely by Australian Korean adoptees that aims to connect adult Korean adoptees in Australia with each other, the international Korean adoptee community, and the larger Korean Australian community.

Of course, people started questioning the Holts, and transnational adoption became a controversial topic. They were portrayed as heroic Biblical Good Samaritans and role models in the press, Congress, and Christian communities. At the same time, professionals and policy-makers in The U.S. Children's Bureau, the Child Welfare League of America, and the International Social Service worked hard to put them out of business, unsuccessfully. Heather, a social worker at Lutheran Social Service whom Trenka called in search of information, is an adoptee herself. Heather explains that she was adopted in that first wave from Holt Agency and seems to have this all figured out for herself and everyone else (THE ADOPTION HISTORY PROJECT, 2012; TRENKA, 2003).

Similarly, the Lutheran congregation got involved in the community and sought working hands and offerings, creating the Lutheran Social Service. That is how Trenka's adoptive parents, alongside their pastor, filled the empty spot in the pew beside the two. Their conversation with the pastor began: "Mr. and Mrs. Brauer, it has come to my attention that there are some children who need you" (TRENKA, 2003a, p. 20). According to Trenka's epilogue (2003a), since the mid-1950s, an estimated 150,000-200,000 Korean children have been internationally adopted.

Although the history of adoption is not widely known, pop culture brings adoption to the entertainment field and seems to gather interested audiences, including adopted characters in sitcoms and movies. More recently, many TV series and documentaries approaching adoption are fairly popular. For instance, American Broadcasting Company's Sitcom *Modern Family* (2009-2020), an 11-season tv show, depicts intercountry adoption. Cameron Tucker and Mitchell Pritchett, first-time fathers, adopt their baby daughter Lily from Vietnam right in the first episode of the first season.

Another example is the movie *Instant Family* (2018), a comedy-drama that portrays the transracial adoption of three Latinos siblings into a white family. When Pete and Ellie decide to start a family, they stumble into the world of foster care adoption. *How I Met Your Father* (2022-) also includes an adopted character. In the Sitcom, Tien Tran plays Ellen, the main male character's sister. She is a Vietnamese lesbian adoptee that deals with abandonment issues with humor and sarcasm. Also, the TLC TV series *7 Little Johnstons* (2015-), which premiered in 2015, is a popular reality show with 12 seasons. Trent and Amber already had Jonah and Elizabeth as their biological kids before adopting three kids who also have dwarfism: Anna from Russia, Alex from South Korea, and Emma from China. All the shows bring the adoptive parents' perspective and concerns about being good parents and not depriving their kids of their

cultures, identity, and biological families. On the other hand, the shows may also perpetuate stereotypes for adoptees, or the positive speech adoption usually has.

3 HOW TO RAISE A MONARCH BUTTERFLY

> *Monarchs migrate. This is different than species that emigrate. Species that emigrate only travel one way. Species that migrate travel back and forth between two different places. They have two homes.*
>
> (TRENKA, 2003a, p. 37)

Once a citizen of the Republic of Korea, a land of pear fields and streams, Jeong Kyeong Ah was born on January 24, 1972, the second youngest daughter of Jeong Ho-Joon and Kang Ahn-Sun. Her ancestors consist of Korean landowners, scholars, and government officials. Halfway around the world, she is someone else: Jane Marie Brauer, created on September 26, 1972. She is the younger daughter of Frederick and Margaret Brauer, living in a small city in Minnesota, United States, where Lutheran churches dot the corn fields, and the sky touches the earth in an uninterrupted horizon. Jane, six months old, and her sister Carol, four years old, were adopted into a white family in a city founded by Scandinavian and German descendants (TRENKA, 2003a). This section approaches Jane Jeong Trenka's life and cultural identity in her Memoir and the coloniality of power between cultures, and decoloniality in adoption.

The Language of Blood is Jane Jeong Trenka's (2003a) first book, a Memoir. The book is often described as chaotic by critics, but for me, the uniqueness of her chaos makes it stand out. Trenka introduces her white adoptive parents, a couple with no children that decided to adopt after talking to their pastor. Strangely, they do not even mention the adoption at home, ignoring Trenka's birth family and ethnicity. Margaret, the adoptive mother, is inflexible and not open to conversations. Frederick, the adoptive father, is calm and usually does not show his emotional side. He would promptly agree with Margaret and not question her motives. In her early twenties, Trenka decided to return to South Korea and meet her birth family to discover more about herself. She brings the reader to her first trip to Korea, where she met her sisters and Umma[9], her birth mother, a petite Korean woman who waited anxiously for her daughter to find her. As Umma gets sick, Trenka has the opportunity to take care of her birth mother with the help of her sisters. She brings the reader to this engaging journey using letters, recipes, a dragon tale, a fairy tale, a crossword, an interrogation, and even a monologue.

Her writing also stands out for challenging the romanticized and dominant narrative of adoption as an altruistic act of love. Her view also highlights how the adoption process can be

[9] 엄마 (umma): mom.

affected by complex power dynamics and cultural assumptions. Trenka also emphasizes the importance of developing a critical perspective on adoption and other forms of cultural identity formation of the ones involved. Now, Trenka is an activist for standard and transparent adoption practices to protect the human rights of adult adoptees, children, and families. Despite harsh criticism for her position regarding transnational adoption, *The Language of Blood* has won numerous awards and fellowships (TRENKA, 2003a).

It received the Minnesota Book Award for Autobiography/Memoir and was also a Barnes & Noble Discover Great New Writers Selection. The book was also praised by the magazine Publishers Weekly:

> Original and beautifully written reflections like these fill Trenka's memoir, a brave exploration of her identity as a Korean adoptee and pensive young woman trying to negotiate between two mothers and two lives. [...] She brazenly dabbles with playwriting, screenwriting, crossword puzzles, myths and dream sequences throughout her account. Her journey, from the conservative Christian roots of rural Minnesota to her cramped and corrupt homeland of Korea, is winding, but it ends at an important place for both reader and writer: transformation. (PUBLISHERS WEEKLY, [2003], p. 1)

Riverwest Currents, a monthly newspaper produced by and for local residents in Riverwest and surrounding Milwaukee neighborhoods, also affirms that:

> The book is a must-read for that soul on a search for identity or birthright, regardless of ethnicity. Whether transracially adopted or born into a long line of blood, the reader finishes the book with a better understanding of the pain of displacement and the internal battle to reclaim self without severing ties to the ones who have loved you. (RIVERWEST CURRENTS, 2003, p. 1)

In an interview for the same newspaper, Riverwest Currents, when Tanya Cromartie-Twaddle asked Trenka (2003b, p. 1) to describe the writing process, she stated that "[...] writing was painful, but concealing her pain was excruciating." Los Angeles Times, a metropolitan daily newspaper, carefully added that "[...] the book addresses the messier aspects of making a family and the shaping of identity. And the ending of the book is bittersweet, maybe because it is the only kind an exile could achieve." (CIURARU, 2003, p. 1).

Trenka's work shed light on transnational adoption and cultural identity research in many areas, such as psychology and politics. Kathryn Woodward (2014) states that identity construction is as symbolic as social, marked by symbols and difference. With that, for us to comprehend what makes identity a central concept, she suggests examining the contemporary preoccupations with identity at different levels. For instance, she mentions our national and

ethnic identities in the global context, and our personal identities, such as personal relationships and sexual politics in the local context.

Transnational adoption is usually regarded as an inoffensive exchange between countries, ethnic groups, and cultures. This exchange is supposed to bring people together in a harmless way as part of globalization. What is concealed in this speech is that the power relations between the countries involved have permeated each and all exchanges through the years:

> The privileged position gained through America's control of gold, silver, and other goods produced through the free labor of Indians, Blacks, and mestizos, and its advantageous location on the Atlantic slope through which the traffic of these goods to the world market necessarily had to be carried out, gave Whites a decisive advantage in competing for control of world trade. The progressive monetization of the world market that the precious metals of America stimulated and allowed, as well as the control of such abundant resources, enabled Whites to control the vast pre-existing network of exchange that included, above all, China, India, Ceylon, Egypt, Syria, and the future Middle and Far East. This also allowed them to concentrate control of commercial capital, labor, and production resources in the entire world market. And all of this was subsequently reinforced and consolidated through the expansion and white colonial domination over diverse world populations. (QUIJANO, 2005, p. 119)

The United States still competes for power in other areas, including culture, military, and economy, which are vital for turning the country into a global power. For instance, the BBC (c2023) website emphasizes the economy and the U.S. military as the world's only superpower. It is also worth mentioning the role the English language plays as a bridge language worldwide, especially for business and scientific purposes. In 2016, during my exchange program in Canada, I could personally notice how the U.S. directly impacts bordering countries in seemingly inoffensive ways. For example, despite being under British rule, Canadians are very engaged in politics. During my Social Studies classes, not only their country's politics but mainly the U.S. Presidential Election was discussed daily, from the rallies of the candidates to the final results. Some experts believe the United States of America will hold the title of world power for the next few decades. The national ethos of the United States, the American dream, is still broadly known, promising democracy, rights, equality, liberty, and of course, prosperity and success.

The United States became the world's power holder with a major role in the adoption field, making women and children victims of the coloniality of power and gender, resulting in domination and forms of exploitation of colonial capitalism used in their favor. Quijano (2005) introduced the notion of the coloniality of power, which pertains to the long-lasting effects of

colonialism that persistently influence societal, political, and economic frameworks in the post-colonial era. Quijano suggests that colonialism established a worldwide network of power dynamics where European nations exercised control over non-European territories, exploiting their resources, enforcing cultural standards, and creating social hierarchies based on racial and ethnic distinctions.

According to Quijano (2005, p. 130), power is organized through relations of domination, exploitation, and conflict among social actors who compete for control over the "[...] four fundamental domains of human life: sex, work, collective authority, and subjectivity/intersubjectivity, along with their resources and products." Then, he brings the Coloniality of Power discussion to prove that the ex-colonies are still submitted to European and non-European countries' cultural domination, reproducing cultural patterns and social hierarchies since the times of colonization (CASTRO, 2020). The capitalist, Eurocentric, and global power operate specifically through two main axes: the coloniality of power and modernity. There is a "power effect" since every identity is founded on the exclusion of another, so there is always something exterior to one's identity (LACLAU; MOUFFE, 1985; BUTLER, 1993 apud HALL, 2003). Masked as globalization or an act of love, adoption takes advantage of vulnerable adoptees when the adopting country imposes a new culture and directly influences the identity construction process.

In her research concerning transnational adoption, Noonan (2007) examines the practice of families from economically privileged nations adopting children from economically disadvantaged countries. She emphasizes that this adoption process is frequently shaped by unequal power dynamics between the countries involved. It is through this process that existing global disparities can be reflected and sustained, as children from marginalized communities are removed from their cultural and social surroundings and placed in unfamiliar settings abroad. Noonan's analysis brings attention to how transnational adoption can be regarded as an expression of power imbalances within the global system. She addressed transnational adoption within a globalized world, including the deliberate use of Western power when negotiating issues such as the meanings of culture and ethnicities of non-Western adoptees:

> Westerners involved with transnational adoption must negotiate the meanings of cultures and ethnicities of the children adopted from non-Western countries and attempt to make sense of the political and social implications inherent in such global interactions. Adoptive parents and adoption agents must also define their own identities in relation to the asymmetrical power relations that exist in transnational adoption process. These negotiations occur in a variety of ways. Parents and agents often minimize the cultural and ethnic differences between themselves and the

> children involved in the interaction in order to make international adoption. (NOONAN, 2007, p. 654)

Noonan's exploration of transnational adoption and Quijano's concept of the coloniality of power share a common thread in their examination of unequal power dynamics among various global regions. The link between them is evident since both authors emphasize how these power dynamics contribute to the perpetuation of inequality and influence the experiences of individuals and communities. While Noonan sheds light to transnational adoption as an embodiment of the coloniality of power, whereby the enduring impact of historical colonial power relations continues to shape present-day global phenomena.

> This minimization can be done by emphasizing the American-ness of the children, by minimizing the degree of difference, by describing their own familiarity (or lack thereof) with the child's birth culture, and through imagery reflecting the multicultural location of the child, rendering cultural differences unimportant. Parents and agents also attempt to deal with cultural difference by marking and fetishizing adoptee children as representations of an entire culture or heritage. The type of discourse is most likely to draw on the child's gender, as well as race and ethnicity, in the negotiation of cultural difference between adopter and adoptee. (NOONAN, 2007, p. 654)

Lugones (2020) builds upon Quijano's concept of the coloniality of power, placing particular emphasis on the intersection of gender and colonialism. She asserts that colonialism not only created hierarchies based on race but also enforced gendered norms and power dynamics. During the process of colonization, European ideas about gender were imposed upon societies being colonized, leading to the marginalization and subjugation of women and non-binary individuals. These power dynamics based on gender have endured in post-colonial settings, shaping the experiences and prospects of individuals belonging to different genders. Lugones claims that characterizing the gender system as colonial/modern, both in a general way and in its specific and lived concreteness, will allow us to see the colonial imposition in its true depth. It will also allow us to extend and historically deepen its destructive scope.

The imposition mentioned by Lugones can be perceived in one of Trenka’s first speeches in the book:

> Real reason: I didn't want to be Korean. Korea was a place that couldn't be talked about at home; It made other children leer at me in school. Korea was the reason my face was mutated, why my glasses wouldn't quite stay on my nose, why it was hard to find clothes that fit. It was the reason some children weren't allowed to play with me, some felt justified in calling me a chink or a rice-picker, and adults didn't feel compelled to defend me. [...] Self deluding reason: What is on the inside is what matters, I checked “white” because I was *culturally* white. (TRENKA, 2003a, p. 129)

With this, the prevailing narrative in international adoption, constructed by American adoptive parents and adoption agencies, frequently involves erasing the child's birth culture while emphasizing the adoptive culture. It typically centers the notion of globalization when it comes to international adoption, when in fact, there is not only imposition but also exclusion. Interestingly, adoption agencies often display photos of adopted children alongside the American Flag and select names that imply international adoptions unite a range of cultures, languages, and ethnicities, highlighting their similarities while downplaying their differences, making them appear insignificant, invisible, and non-threatening (NOONAN, 2007).

Trenka (2003a) narrates a situation in which she had contact with the publicity of transnational adoption for American adopters while trying to find her official documents before being adopted:

> I leaf through the magazines on the side of the table in the waiting room. They are filled with pictures of orphans waiting to be adopted from Romania and China—cute, happy children guaranteed to fall in love with their new parents instantly. One success story (aren't they all success stories?) shows a photo of a beaming brown-haired boy, eager as a squirrel, wearing a T-shirt with an American flag emblazoned across the chest.
>
> Other pictures show happy "motherland" tour groups posing in front of tourist traps and adopted Korean girls dressed in hanboks, happy as pie and obviously American. That shameless American smile gives them away, and the way they make their hanboks look gaudy instead of elegant. Everybody is so fucking happy. (TRENKA, 2003a, p. 198-199)

After being lied to and silenced, Trenka witnessed how agencies advertise transnational adoption as harmless and effortless. According to the magazines, it is always successful as the adoptees brought into the United States become Americans and love their new parents. Adoption is an act of love, a real-life fairy tale, and in the end, they live "happily ever after". Perhaps she was not lucky, and her story was unsuccessful. Trenka knows that many people are involved in this process, and if someone gets damaged, it should be good damage. But she knows this is pure damage, so why do they look so happy?

3.1 "I checked 'white' because I was culturally white"

Identity has become an increasingly prevalent topic in Modern discussions for its implications, adaptations, or even the creation of new identities since globalization. Many authors researched what constitutes an individual's identity, concluding it is shaped by culture, which confers significance to experiences and enables individuals to select from multiple

potential identities in a personal manner (HALL *et al.*, 1997 apud WOODWARD, 2014). It is also composed of distinctions, but in specific locations and contexts, as mentioned before, certain differences, especially between ethnic groups, are regarded as more significant than others (WOODWARD, 2014). This section discusses the influences and the construction process of an adoptee's cultural identity within the Modern Era global context.

Adoption involves social, emotional, and legal processes in which children who will not be with their birth parents become permanent legal members of another family. Then, the preoccupation with identification arises from the significance placed on representation and the role of culture in generating meaning that permeates all social interactions (NIXON, 1997 apud WOODWARD, 2014). If representation influences an individual's identity construction, an adoptee placed in a new environment will naturally perceive and integrate them into their identity.

> The representation, comprehended as a cultural process, establishes individual and collective identities, and the symbolic systems they base possible answers for the questions: who am I? What could I be? Who do I want to be? The discourses and the representation systems build places from which individuals can position themselves and speak up. For instance, the TV shows narratives and the publicity semiotics that help construct certain gender identities. (GLEDHILL, 1997; NIXON, 1997 apud WOODWARD, 2014, p. 18)

Some adoptees may embody the representations they are in touch with in their identities, but at the same time, many feel the lack of historical validation of their individuality. Bhabha (2013) recognizes that tradition provides a partial form of identification, while according to Woodward (2014), the historical truth uncovering is a component of the ongoing process of constructing an identity that resonates at present. Unfortunately, in many cases, the adoption agents and adoptive parents conceal their lives and story before adoption. To clarify, our daily experiences also converge with the economic and political systems of subordination and domination.

As stated by Rutherford (1990 apud WOODWARD, 2014), our personal history and the social, cultural, and economic ties shape our current existence. Trenka confidently claimed to be part of something and belong somewhere for the first time, based on the representations and the political systems presented to her as a U.S. citizen:

> Since I was on my early-twenties self-righteous kick (I am American, liberated, feminist, empowered woman! I am not going to be a sad sack or a victim. I define myself by what I do, not by what I look like, definitely not by what happened to me, and especially not by the fact that I was adopted. I have limitless energy. I am strong, independent, in control.) (TRENKA, 2003a, p. 144)

As human beings looking for stability in a constantly changing world, maintaining national and ethnic identities help us achieve it. It provides a sense of certainty and belonging within an uncertain environment. The world started to change even more rapidly throughout the years, and with this, the question of identity was put at the forefront of public debate taking the transformations in politics and economic structures in the contemporary world into consideration (WOODWARD, 2014).

With this discussion, it became clear that the societal differences experienced by minority groups are a complex, multifaceted, and continuous process of validating the diverse cultural combinations that emerge during times of historical transformation (BHABHA, 2013). To sum up, the environment we are living in has a significant impact on our sense of self, but not only this, we are constantly receiving tons of information that will continuously reflect on it. As TED Talk speaker Mashaal Hijazi (2016), a Pakistani-born American, mentioned while speaking on Cultural Identity:

> There is power in identity. Citizenship aside, we are not defined by one thing. We are not defined by our profession, our sexuality, our ethnicity, or our disability. We are collectively defined. But most importantly, we are defined by our influence, our actions, and our words. So use them wisely. (verbal information)[10]

Usually, identity is regarded as fixed, coherent, and stable. Mercer (1990 apud WOODWARD, 2014) affirms that it only becomes a problem when one experiences doubt and uncertainty, and their sense of self becomes dislocated. According to Ernesto Laclau, modern societies do not have a fixed nucleus or center that produces stable identities. The dispersion of people around the globe produces identities that are molded and located in and by different places. Thus, the concept of diaspora allows us to comprehend more about some identities, those that do not have a homeland and do not have one single resource (GILROY, 1997 apud WOODWARD, 2014). The plurality and dislocation of centers may be one of the leading causes of identity crisis. It becomes difficult to establish a clear sense of self or a coherent understanding of one's place in the world, with a sense of uncertainty, fragmentation, and disorientation.

The crisis makes individuals navigate and struggle among complex and shifting social, cultural, and political forces that shape their identities (WOODWARD, 2014; HALL, 1992):

> Consider it another recipe: Start with a girl girl whose blood has been steeped in Korea for generations. Imprinted with Confucianism and shamanism and war. Extract her

[10] See: Hijazi (2016).

> from the mountains. Plant her in wheat fields between the Red River and the Mississippi. Baptize her. Indoctrinate her. Tell her who she is. Tell her what is real. See what happens. (TRENKA, 2003a, p. 135)

Trenka's writing is very distinctive and characteristic. Her Memoir includes the usage of different text genres to externalize her thoughts. In this part, she appeals to the genre recipe to show the ingredients that compose an adoptee's life. Her blood consists of generations of Koreans, years of linear traditions and beliefs that should be part of her, to make place for indoctrination and a new sense of self. When transnational adoptees encounter doubts and conflicts with the imposed identity, the need to start tracing their origin and learning more about themselves becomes a priority:

> The borderline work of culture demands an encounter with 'newness' that is not part of the continuum of past and present. It creates a sense of the new as an insurgent act of cultural translation. Such art does not merely recall the past as social cause or aesthetic precedent; it renews the past, refiguring it as a contingent 'in-between' space that innovates and interrupts the performance of the present. The 'past- present' becomes part of the necessity, not the nostalgia, of living. (BHABHA, 2013, p. 29)

But what happens when one's identity is simply turned down? Mindy Stern (2020), a writer, storyteller, adoptee, and essayist, wrote that talking about adoption with idealized language creates an unrealistic paradigm, where what they lost is not just diminished, it is denied. Unfortunately, she also states that the dominant cultural narrative of adoption as a noble act suppresses adoptees' ability to speak openly about their distress, accusing them of ungratefulness. Similarly, Pauline Turner Strong (2001) states that adoption across political and cultural borders may be both an act of violence and love, an excruciating rupture and generous incorporation, an appropriation of valued resources, and a constitution of personal ties. Indeed, adoption involves many things, but first of all, loss.

Trenka (2003a, p. 227) tries to find a label for herself: "'Adoptee' never seemed quite right; it didn't address what I had lost, which was an inseparable part of what I had gained". Loss comes in many forms and shapes especially for adoptees and birth families. It could be the loss of a child, a parent, a sibling, a history, a past, a bond, or a memory. Trenka addresses this feeling of loss again a couple pages ahead:

> Would I rather have not been adopted? I don't know. The question demands that I calculate unquantifiables. How can I weigh the loss of my language and culture against the freedom that America has to offer, the opportunity to have the same rights as a man? (TRENKA, 2003a, p. 229)

The search for cultural identity and belonging is a very recurrent theme in the lives of adoptees. Through all they had lost, the feeling of displacement leads adoptees, in most cases, to try to find their biological families. This feeling guides the search to discover where they come from and where they fit. The lack of a backbone, the structure responsible for locomotion, balance, weight support, and nerve protection, affects them profoundly. By not knowing hers, which would be her biological family, Trenka cannot teach her children about who they are or save them from the in-between she finds herself in:

> The backbone is many things: language, food, music, physical characteristics, religion, family. [...] As an adopted Korean, where is my backbone? How separated am I from the more than two hundred thousand Korean adoptees raised in the United States, Europe, Australia, and Canada? What can I salvage from this life, to teach my own children what I was never taught, about themselves and about the world and how to live in it? (TRENKA, 2003a, p. 230)

Hall (2003, p. 29) claims that:

> [...] to have a cultural identity in this sense is to be primarily in contact with an immutable and timeless core, linking the past, present, and future in an uninterrupted line. This umbilical cord is what we call tradition, whose test is its fidelity to its origins, its conscious presence before itself, its 'authenticity'.

The umbilical cord we all once had connected us to a source, to someone. In Brazil, some mothers have the tradition of keeping their children's stump for years after it falls off within a week after birth or burying it somewhere. It shows their bond, how they once were connected physically and still are by other means. Cultural identity brings an individual more than somewhere fit, but a backbone that connects them to the past and the future.

> Some things I will never know; others I am learning gradually, with effort and determination. In the latter category are Korean manners and language, including the names of things with no English equivalents; Korean history; the difference between Eastern and Western dragons; how not to stereotype other Asian people. I am learning to navigate the gap in perception that lies between my view of the world, and the Korean view of the world. (TRENKA, 2003a, p. 148)

For some adoptees, cultural identity is a long and complex topic because there is an absurd amount of dedication and studies required from them. Living in a space between cultures, Trenka realized her Korean side also has a view of the world, and blending it with her own is such a difficult task. She navigates from history to language, from folklore to stereotypes, trying to manage them in her own identity. However, some adoptees will never follow these steps to find an identity, which is Carol's case. Trenka's sister, who was adopted

along with her, did not look for their birth families until she needed help to give birth to a baby. Not for her own sake, but to build her own family, Carol contacted her birth family shortly after Jane came from Korea. For this reason, preserving their individuality should always be a preoccupation in those cases.

The adoption process marks adoptees with ambivalence. That is, by two simultaneous feelings with the same intensity, in this attempt to find somewhere to fit in. In other words, although she has Korean blood, Trenka cannot speak Korean. Even though she is American and grew up in the US, she does not fit there. She has two different "pieces" making up who she is, creating a new sense of identity, as Bhabha (2013) states, it demands an encounter with 'newness' that is not directly related to the past and present. From her perspective, her identity is not defined because she is neither entirely different nor entirely similar to those born and raised within her culture. The protagonist deepens her thoughts on this ambivalence with:

> How do I explain my ambivalence? Yet I do have mixed feelings. I feel ashamed and unworthy of the gifts that have been given me; ashamed for not being a better daughter—both a grateful American one and a forgiving Korean one, guided by filial piety. (TRENKA, 2003a, p. 227)

Referring to adoptees and immigrants, the equation of "American" with "white" can generate feelings of exclusion and unfamiliarity, leaving them with a sense of being abnormal or distinct. This perspective reinforces a narrow conception of American identity that is often linked to a specific racial or ethnic background. When adoptees and immigrants do not align with this limited understanding of being American, they may experience disconnection and a sense of inadequacy. Such experiences can contribute to marginalization and a perception of being deviant in relation to prevailing cultural norms and expectations. Recognizing and challenging this exclusivity is crucial to foster an inclusive and diverse perception of American identity.

As a Pakistani-born American, Hijazi (2016) expresses the feeling of being a mix of the familiar and the unexpected in her Ted Talk. When introducing herself, she is compelled to explain where her family comes from because she does not fit the American term used synonymously with white. As a melting pot of cultures, looks and skin color should not be a defining characteristic of someone's identity in the United States, but that is not the case for immigrants like Hijazi:

> Now, if someone could say what the ideal American citizen looked like, hopefully, most people would identify the things that one cannot physically see. They define

> them as someone involved in civic duties, aware of their rights and liberties, and pledging their allegiance to the United States. There is no physical face on the American citizen because our country was created, built, and has flourished on immigration from around the world as a place of refuge, opportunity, and a second chance. (verbal information)[11]

3.2 "I try on the identity of exile, and it feels good"

The in-between can be defined as the space between two things. It could be the space between two countries, two mothers or two cultures. Many of us go through brief moments that bring us feelings of uncertainty and impotence, but living in the in-between is a constant, exhausting and lonely task. The feeling of not fitting in the U.S. as a part of a white family, but also not being good enough to be in Korea as a culturally Korean citizen generates anxiety for Trenka as an individual that navigates both places in search of her cultural identity as an adoptee. In this case, when fitting in a cultural category, and not being comprehended are a problem, the narrator says that the identity of exile fits better:

> The way I think about myself these days is with the word that best describes me: exile. I hadn't thought of myself as an exile or immigrant before—just a lucky adoptee. But now I see that 'exile' is the word that fits me best. The language of exile is filled with gains and losses, culture and family, memory and imagination. I try on the identity of exile, and it feels good. Not that it feels good to be an exile, but it feels good to have something fit. (TRENKA, 2003a, p. 227)

Exile comes not only in the form of misfit and belonging but in being uncomprehended. There are uncountable forms of exiles, and as people belong to their birth cultures, they may not understand the one Trenka talks about. For example, the situation aggravates when Trenka's adoptive parents refuse to understand why she desperately has to meet her birth family.

> There is the absurdity of the exile poet who writes in his native language and none of his friends in his new country can read it. It's like the terrible absurdity I encounter when I cannot talk to my own family. There is the exile who visits the graves of his Jewish ancestors in Alexandria; he washes the stone lovingly, and I am reminded of my own wish to visit my mother's grave, to touch it and bow before the woman who gave birth to me, who watches over me now from far away. (TRENKA, 2003a, p. 228)

The losses experienced by adoptees will only be understood when the discussion starts by assuming they lost something from the moment they left their birth families. As mentioned previously in this section, the speech adoption is within does not allow society, in general, to admit it is not a win-win situation. There is no value input in a loss., since it is not equal for

[11] See: Hijazi (2016).

everyone. People may lose the same thing and treasure it differently. But denying the void loss caused to someone is one of the most cruel acts of violence.

Trenka considers herself lucky for being adopted by a family that took care of her. She had many things she probably could not have back in Korea. She got a new life at six months old, which would be a win. Though she did not ask for it, there is a loss embedded. Yet, one of her best accomplishments is finding something fit. Being an exile gives her at least a reason to address and mourn what she lost for the first time. Always being grateful is exhausting. Concealing it and denying part of herself is such heavy baggage to carry through life. Exile takes the weight off of her shoulders, and she feels lightweight. A state of suspension in which she can finally navigate with continuous and graceful movements.

> Because when my body's falling it moves faster than when I move myself; Because the state of the exile is suspension, caught in the middle of an arc. Between psyche, body and place (neither, nor, both, between); Because the essence of that which is most present is not visible (like love, like your own eye, like an elusive element leaving only its shadow [evidence of its supposed existence] in a closed laboratory); because life is a ballet of consecutive moments—the grace is in the margins. (TRENKA, 2003a, p. 73)

For Bhabha (2013), in the *fin de siècle*, we find ourselves in a moment of transit, where space and time cross to produce complex figures of difference and identity, past and present, inside or outside, inclusion and exclusion. The sense of disorientation, a disturbance of direction, in the 'beyond' is a restless movement that, according to him, is well caught in the French rendition of the words *au-delà*—here and there, on all sides, *fort/da*, hither and thither, back and forth.

> There is the feeling of displacement, of longing for there when you're here; of creating a world inside that is substitute for the one outside, because the one inside can hold everything tightly in one place, unlike the vast world where so many beloved people and places are scattered beyond reach. There is the willing exile who lives in France, studying the language and blundering through, like me going into a Korean restaurant and saying to the waitress, "Thank you very much. Never mind, Are you full." There is the willing ex-pate who finds a home elsewhere, amongst her grandmother's people, and returns there every year to soak up the beauty of a beaten and glorious old city. [...] These things that other writers ruminate on—the feeling of homesickness, the sense of being at home nowhere but comfortable in many places, the power of memory—are realities, yet luxuries of the intelligentsia. (TRENKA, 2003a, p. 228)

Trenka found some connection with the monarch butterflies in her exile. She learned about this species in Miss Larson's fourth-grade class, and their migration process seems to portray the 'in-between' spaces she finds herself in. It is a miracle she found her way back to

Korea after so many setbacks, just like the monarch butterflies. Being suspended between places may be where relief is found:

> Monarch butterflies migrate south in August. They fly to California or Mexico. A butterfly can fly 3,000 miles. It is a very long journey. Sometimes they have to stop drinking so the water in their bodies won't freeze. They stay together to try to stay warm. After they fly so far, their wings are torn and ragged. It is a miracle that they can fly so far.
>
> It takes generations of butterflies to complete the migration cycle. The butterflies returning to Mexico or California every fall are the great-great-grandchildren of those who left the previous spring. No one knows how they can find their way. (TRENKA, 2003a, p. 37)

For Bhabha (2013), ‘beyond’ signifies spatial distance, it marks progress, and promises the future. The 'beyond' also becomes a space of intervention in the present, allowing for a revision of the current time. As she discovers the beyond space, she knows she will keep coming back, and dislikes the idea of being trapped in the present time:

> I would make this trip many more times in my life. It was a trip I would grow too loathe for its press of bodies and its timeless, placeless quality—the feeling of being physically suspended in the eternal present. (TRENKA, 2003a, p. 106)

This intervention of the ‘beyond’ is similar to a bridge. It captures the sense of being estranged from both home and the world. Being homeless and the feeling of being "unhomely" are very different. They cannot be easily categorized as private or public. It comes unexpectedly and follows you like your own shadow (BHABHA, 2013). On her first trip to South Korea, Trenka (2003a, p. 114) holds on to her comfort zone: “As long as I was surrounded by Americans, everything was safe, scheduled, and predictable, even in Korea”. Then, she tried going into the ‘beyond’ one more time, and surprisingly, it led her to a comfort space in a foreign place:

> I saw my chance to slip away into the throng of black hair. I took careful note of where I was, then chose a straight street and walked quickly away from the tour group, past the orange vendors, the women squatting and sorting squid, the ropes strung high with leather purses. *Walk, walk, walk.* No one noticed. I spoke no words and blended in, undetected for at least an hour, enjoying my experience as a “real” Korean. The shoulder-to-shoulder density of the crowd opened up and swallowed me, welcomed me into the sea of people where I could be lost in the sameness. (TRENKA, 2003a, p. 118-119)

According to Bhabha (2013), the space of intervention, which was once bothersome, turns into a metamorphosis that she longs to experience again:

> But it felt good to be surrounded by Koreans, good to know that I could take care of myself in my country, good to be part of a people, the majority. So I kept looking for opportunities to escape the Americans, my heart beating loud in my ears with the anticipation of metamorphosis: the thrill of becoming Korean again, just like everyone else, alive inside the belly of my motherland. (TRENKA, 2003a, p.119-120)

And finally, she finds a spark of hope about her own life, identity, and individuality in her exile:

> Dear Jane,
>
> You are a brave young woman, keeping me alive. I am like a parasite; I exist only because you do. If you had not been born, I would have died.
>
> People do not see me, although we share a heart, a face, a mind, and a body. You have the benefit of being the twin who is seen. Me—I must hide behind you.
>
> Take care of me. Take care of this body because you know it is really mine. That face you see—mine. The hands you use to eat and work—those too are mine. You are living a borrowed life. Don't forget.
>
> Kyong-Ah (TRENKA, 2003a, p. 139)

The butterfly metamorphosis is the remarkable process through which a butterfly undergoes a profound transformation, starting as an egg and progressing through stages of caterpillar, chrysalis, and ultimately emerging as an adult butterfly. Each stage of this metamorphosis involves distinct physical changes. Symbolically, butterfly metamorphosis represents profound personal transformation, growth, and beauty. It serves as a potent metaphor in various cultural and artistic contexts for individual development and change. The journey of butterfly metamorphosis showcases the marvels of nature and the remarkable adaptations that enable these delicate creatures to undergo such a striking and captivating transformation.

The little girl that was once silenced and kept herself concealed behind an Asian-American adoptee now has a voice and uses it to express her feelings. There is the transformation of Trenka, embracing all her fragments and speaking for each part of them. Kyeong-Ah, once involuntarily lived a borrowed life and urged for recognition, starts to emerge and acknowledges the bravery of Jane as a woman and for having the courage to keep her alive through every situation they went through. Jane starts to acknowledge Kyeong-Ah's presence as part of herself, not a ghost that haunts her. Both transform Trenka into a butterfly that can finally complete her trip back and forth, giving her freedom and a space to intervene as she pleases.

4 WHAT TO DO WITH MEMORIES

> *Spread them across the table. Build a fence to keep some out and others in. Build a tower so high and delicate that the ancestors must answer prayers. Build a small, square house of interlocking words to shelter the unborn, to keep them from the things that frighten and maim.*
>
> (TRENKA, 2003, p. 216)

Although Memoirs are a Canon genre, with many famous works such as *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* by Maya Angelou (1969), *This Boy's Life* by Tobias Wolff (1989), and *I am Malala* by Malala Yousafzai (2013), Trenka was the first memorist that came to my knowledge through my English and North American Literature classes within four years of graduation in Brazil. Couser (2012) argues we do not usually go to the genre for detail or style as for "wisdom and self-knowledge," and for what the main character has learned. It is possible Memoirs are not broadly studied and marginalized because they are not based on historical and literary references as other literary genres and texts. This section approaches the genre Memoir, memory and creation as a voicing channel, as well as the importance of genealogy in the identity construction process in Trenka's book.

According to Jessica Dukes ([2020], p. 1) on Celadon Books website: "A Memoir is a literary form in which the author relates experiences from specific events that impacted their lives in some way." Though similar, we loosen the constraints of an autobiography because Memoirs focus on the author's thoughts and feelings about those events to recreate the event through storytelling. Also, the author has more flexibility because she is telling a story as she remembers it, not as others can prove or disprove it. By sharing their stories, they can give a platform to those often marginalized and unheard in mainstream society.

Memories have an important role as we build our identities and understand our places as citizens of the world. As she was growing up Trenka was not allowed to mention her adoption or Korea at her adoptive parents home. It became more difficult to keep her feelings and opinions to herself as time passed by. The child who was once silenced became a writer that apologizes for exposing memories and stories that are not completely hers but are part of herself. Trenka writes a Memoir that does not follow a chronological order, and is not linear.

Transnational adoptees, for example, are able to express their experience of a "doubled self," which is characterized by a sense of dislocation. It reveals the ways in which adoption can be a deeply personal and emotional experience, but also one that is shaped by broader social

and cultural contexts. Seethaler (2016) argues that adoptees like Trenka are an important voice in challenging the dominant cultural imaginary of the altruistic adoption process. Trenka's mixed feelings on displacement, belonging, memory, identity, and being exiled were turned into a moving Memoir, composed by letters, dialogues, manuals, tales, recipes, a crossword, a fairytale, reflections and monologues.

According to the Berkeley Open Computing Facility (2023) website, the literary genre of Memoir is both very old and very new. Gornick (1996) starts her text *Why Memoir Now?* by stating that thirty years ago, people sat down to write a novel when they had a story to tell, in the mistaken belief that a situation is a story. Nowadays, they sit down to write a memoir because a small fraction of them will discover that the tale is in the telling, and with time, they discover that telling it once is not enough: the tale must be told again, and yet again. She continues by affirming that these people will turn out to be writers. If it further transpires that these writers need to tell the tale again as memoir, then memoir writing will last: become a real way back into narrative. At the moment the returns are not in. Urgency seems to attach itself to the idea of a tale told directly from life, rather than one fashioned by the imagination out of life. All these characteristics make Memoirs complex and rich texts that connect art and life altogether.

Some critics state that the colonial power relationship, where the colonizer gets the advantage in detriment to the colonized people, may date back to when the first colonizer came to our lands. However, power is not only defined by the superiority of strength or capacity of violence and intimidation but also by who gets to tell history (HOLLANDA, 2020). The speakers have the power to tell everyone's story from their perspective, unfortunately, history has always been under the colonizer's control (CASTRO, 2020).

Even more now, in 2023, than when Gornick (1996, p. 5) stated: "[...] the age is characterized by a need to testify". Everywhere in the world, people are rising to tell their stories out of the now commonly held belief that one's own life signifies. There are many tools for testifying on the internet. Social media and video platforms are full of people sharing different life experiences and world views.

Gornick (1996, p. 5) also says that: "[...] millions of people consider themselves possessed of the right to a serious life. A serious life, by definition, is a reflective life; a life to which one pays attention; a life one tries to make sense of and bear witness to." But what makes *The Language of Blood* a Memoir worth reading?

> I wanted my head to be removed, a metaphor so strong that only later did I realize that it was not a death wish at all. I dreamed about it, fantasized about it, imagined the mercy of a guillotine. My body was separated from my mind in a dualism so ridiculous that I almost flew apart at the shoulders.
>
> What I longed for was wholeness, for my body to be as white and northern Minnesotan as my mind. I longed to be normal, to not have to emotionally excavate myself to find my place. I wanted to be like my normal cousins who took after their normal parents or grandparents, who inherited the family colons and noses, whose extended families were asked about at Christmas. (TRENKA, 2003a, p. 237)

The lack of historical and literary references as other literary genres and texts is what makes Trenka dive into her own understanding to write about her life-long experiences. And this is what gets our attention: "So, what remains through the rubble of the years is emotional truth, as fictional as it may seem" (TRENKA, 2003a, p. 233).

The genre Memoir provides a valuable and enriching experience for several reasons. First, Memoirs grant us personal insights into the lives of others, enabling a deeper comprehension of human emotions and relationships. They foster empathy and connection by exposing us to diverse perspectives, broadening our understanding of various issues and experiences. Memoirs also function as a source of knowledge, presenting firsthand accounts of historical events and societal issues. Moreover, memoirs encourage self-reflection, urging readers to examine their own narratives and discover significance in their personal stories. Finally, reading memoirs offers a unique opportunity for personal growth, empathy, and exploration of the human condition.

4.1 "Almost every Korean family has such a story"

This section approaches the relation of historical background, genealogy and identity within Trenka's Memoir. The affirmation of national identities can be historically specific. In this sense, one of the ways in which identities establish their identifications is through historical backgrounds (WOODWARD, 2014). Without transmission, the mobilization of memory that states historical background, there is no longer socialization or education. As E. Leach (apud CANDAU, 2021, p. 105) says, culture is "[...] a transmissible tradition of learned behaviors", that being said, every cultural identity becomes impossible. To have a cultural identity is to be primarily in contact with an immutable and timeless core, linking the past, present, and future in an uninterrupted line, suggesting that having a cultural identity involves being connected to an unchanging and timeless essence (HALL, 2003).

This concept implies that cultural identity is not something that is easily altered or detached from an individual or a community. It emphasizes the significance of cultural heritage and the idea that it serves as a foundation for one's identity throughout time, connecting them to their roots and influencing their experiences in the present and future. It highlights the enduring nature of cultural identity and its role in shaping individuals' sense of self and their relationship to the broader social and historical context.

But if the extent of the memory of past times will have a direct effect on identity representations, what happens when one cannot access their historical backgrounds due to their adoption to a foreign country at 6-months-old?

> "What does it feel like to not know your real mom?"
> My classmates were genuinely puzzled. My answer was meant to be both caustic and self-protective: "What does it feel like to know your real mom?"
>
> I did not know how to explain to them, "It feels awful. Weird. It feels like I was never born. I want to know what you feel like, when you look at your family and people look like you. I want to know what you feel like when you're at your grandparents' house, and they haul out the box of family photos, and all the aunts and uncles talk and laugh about how you're the carrier of the family nose or the family eyes, or how you look just like your aunt when she was your age. What does that feel like? What does it feel like when you hug your mother, and you're just the right size so that your face comes up to her belly, where you came from? What does it feel like to pass a mirror and not be surprised?" (TRENKA, 2003a, p. 38)

In the collective identity construction, transmission safeguards the memory of ancestors and protects our own. Genealogy is one of the most trustworthy transmission sources, giving it a fundamental role in identity construction. Candau says generational memory presents two forms: an Ancient and a Modern. Both of them may extend beyond the familiar framework, but as the Ancient form brings the consciousness of belonging to a chain of successive generations and carries the of being the continuers of our predecessors, the modern one is fundamentally different from the anonymous relationship between contemporaries, predecessors, and successors. The members of a generation who proclaim themselves as guardians and are bound to disappear with the last of them usually characterize the Modern form (CANDAU, 2021).

Adoptees' Memoirs are created in the lack of historical background, a crucial part of their identity. In this exhausting search process, one of the easiest ways for them to find their historical background is through official documents before the adoption. However, not all adoptees have the luck to find or access these documents. In addition to all the malicious intentions of the agencies, it prevents adoptees from finding their biological families and learning about their roots. Most of the time, all they can tell are stories that often have different versions.

> People ask me how I know about my ancestors: "Everybody thinks they're descended from royalty or wealth. Do you have any proof, like documents or something?"
>
> Well, not really. I have part of the family register, but not the whole thing. I have my own memory of visiting a decaying yangban house. But mostly, I have stories: what my Korean mother had told me about her parents, and what my sisters continue to say now that she is dead.
>
> I count myself lucky because I have more stories and more documents than most. It's common for the agencies to tell adoptees that their documents were lost or destroyed or that there were never sufficient papers in the first place. (TRENKA, 2003a, p. 231-232)

After her birth mother's passing, her sense of loss overcame her sadness. Thus, the urge for answers struck her again. Trenka tries to contact the adoption agency to gather official information about her adoption process and her family records, hoping to forgive the agency for their callous actions if their ignorance was beyond their control (TRENKA, 2003a). Some agencies keep the files of the families for years, but some deny giving adoptees access to these records that contain their families' information. After many transferred calls and emails, she finds her file and someone who has access to it:

> [...] "Well, can you tell me what's in it? Can you tell me about the home study or the social worker who conducted it? Can you tell me what classes or information your agency provided for my parents?" I try to control my voice, which careens between shouting and crying.
>
> "No, I'm sorry, we're not able to give that information out."
>
> I swallow hard and take a breath. Don't cry on the phone. Don't scream at her just because she, a perfect stranger with probably minimal qualifications, can sit there and read my file with all my information in it and all my family's information and all the crap that determined my life and I am not allowed. Don't ask her to bend the policy just this one time, because she could get into trouble. This happened a long time before she got involved. (TRENKA, 2003a, p. 197)

One year later, the urge to gather more information about her adoption process struck her again. The narrator gathered patience and confidence to go through all bureaucracy and try to get access to her files again:

> Q: May I see my file?
> A: No. There's a law against that. That's your parents' privacy.
> Q: Okay. I know how to use the law library. May I have the name of that law so I may read it for myself?
> A: I'm sorry, I don't know what that is.
> Q: Is it really a law or is it just a policy of LSS?
> A: That's our policy.
> [...] Q: If I can't see it, what do you use it for?

> A: We don't use it, but by law, we have to keep it. (TRENKA, 2003a, p. 212-213)

Gornick (1996, p. 5) also explains that "[...] as the power of voice alone has been dwindling, an age of mass culture influenced by modernism has emerged on a plane unparalleled in history. In this culture, the idea of the self is vital to the conventional wisdom." Trenka is part of a minority involuntarily included in a narrative they did not expect. The unexpected or unwanted story turns into a new one in the making. In her Memoir, she uses her voice to openly talk about her task of finding herself, her identity, and reconstructing what she did not destroy, all based on broken pieces and fragments of memories for it:

> I have made it my task to reconstruct the text of a family with context clues, and my intent is this: to trust in the mysterious; to juxtapose the known with the unknown; to collect the overlooked, the debris-stones, broken mirrors, and abandoned things. With these I will sew a new quilt of memory and imagination, each stitch a small transformation, each stitch my work of mourning. (TRENKA, 2003a, p. 150)

Our memory is expected to be linear and coherent most of the time, especially if it is the only source we can rely on about ourselves. Carol, Trenka's sister, did not feel the need to find her birth family to find her identity. However, for some reason, she was completely sure she could access her memories from Korea before adoption. In a conversation after Carol came back from visiting Korea for the first time, both of them are stunned:

> "It was like I couldn't breathe, I couldn't catch my breath, Carol said about the moments when she saw Korea again for the first time. "I thought I would remember something when I saw Korea from the plane, but I didn't, it was just that tightness in my chest."
> "Did you remember anything at all?" I asked.
> "No. I thought I would. I thought when I smelled things or when I heard the language, I would have memories, but I didn't. I couldn't believe I didn't remember places or people or anything. You'd think I would; four-and-a-half-year-old kids have memories—Taylor can remember things from when he was that old. And our mother was so mad at me! She couldn't understand why I didn't speak Korean, she was mad because I didn't like the kimchi that she said I used to beg her to make; she had made some especially for me and I didn't remember it. And I didn't know how to use chopsticks, so she took them and flung them across the room." (TRENKA, 2003a, p. 142)

According to Candau (2021), the task of memory is purely individual, and rememory, the act of relating, adjusts to the collective conditions of expression. And each memory is a museum of singular events associated with a certain "level of revocability" or memorability. This museum of memories constantly changes as we learn about ourselves and others, making every visit a surprise. Also according to him, an individual learning to adapt from the present to the future organized from a reiteration of the past will construct their identity.

> When I talk with other adoptees, I begin to appreciate the fragmentation of memory as it is distorted by the child's-eye view and the disruption of language. How are thoughts shaped by language? How do we create memories in Korean one day and memories in English, Swedish, French, Dutch, or Norwegian the next day? What people remember are dreamlike fragments that float in time, that have content but, strangely, no words: a command to look straight ahead as the mother walks away in the opposite direction; a flash of blue coat; a long hallway; (TRENKA, 2003a, p. 149)

To summarize, memory and authorship are interconnected in Memoirs. Memory acts as a source of inspiration, shaping narratives, influencing how identities are portrayed, determining perspectives, and blurring the boundaries between fiction and reality. By drawing on memory, authors forge meaningful connections with readers, shedding light on the intricate nature of human existence.

Interestingly, Morrison (2020) used the method of placing fragments or pieces of memory together to start the creative process in some of her works. She used to put pieces together until they formed a part that would become a character or a situation, and part of her creation. So, she pays respect, attention, and trust to those memories, no matter how small the pieces are. Writers do depend on their memory in the process of discovering the truth about their cultural sources, Morrison says (2020), because they cannot fully rely on literature and sociology for this. With time she realized she preferred that the fragments were related but not connected. She found out that was the narrative she was looking for in *Beloved* by Morrison (1987), for example, a perception of a shattered and scattered story.

Similarly, Trenka comes to appreciate the fragments and embraces them as a part of herself, even though there are many lost parts:

> But I'm here, one small piece of a great family that somehow survived, albeit in fragments. It is unlikely that my own American children when they are born and grow into teenagers will care about a country so far away. About ancestors whose names they cannot pronounce. Their connection to Korea will be even more tenuous than mine, and when I am an old *halmoni*[12] myself, the story of my family will be lost among the stories of all the others whose lives could not be put back into place. (TRENKA, 2003, p. 49)

Trenka chooses to turn the fragments, the absence, and the silence into her Memoir. The lack of linear motion allows her to create and navigate places she thinks are valid for her narrative. Sometimes the paths that are not traced hold much more relevant information than one could ever imagine.

[12] 할머니 (halmoni): grandmother in Korean language.

5 RULES FOR HOME ECONOMICS

> *One: Never waste. Two: Make things that are useful. A skillful wife can do both. A quilt is the perfect thing to make. Scraps of pants, jackets, skirts—old useless abandoned things—transform into starbursts and wedding rings, cabins, checkerboards, geese, baby's feet, or the unplanned plan called crazy.*
>
> (TRENKA, 2003a, p. 103)

When discussing identity and difference, Woodward (2014) implies that maternity is an example of an identity that seems to be biologically based. On the other hand, O'Reilly (2016) considers the patriarchal mandates of essentialization, naturalization, and idealization in motherhood in her text about patriarchal maternity. In this chapter, women's roles as well as motherhood in society will be discussed juxtaposed with Trenka's birth and adoptive mother in two different cultures, as well as her role as their daughter. Firstly, essentialization positions maternity as the basis of female identity. Consequently, it is assumed that all women want to be mothers, directing mothering work and responsibility as a one-person work. Second, naturalization brings the idea that maternal ability and motherlove are innate to all mothers, and the mothering work is an instinct and a habit rather than intelligence and skill. And third, idealization assumes that all mothers find joy and purpose in motherhood.

> In Harlow, men must be husbands and fathers. If they are not, they are eccentric old bachelor cousins or junior high English teachers.
>
> Likewise, women are wives and mothers. They must be mothers, not just wives, and if the children are not born soon, people talk. They ask nice questions. These in turn became questions my mother asked herself: When are you going to have children? What is a woman without a family? (TRENKA, 2003a, p. 19)

Talking about Homeplace, Bell Hooks (2007) says sexism delegates the task of creating and sustaining a home environment to females. And historically, African-American people needed a homeplace as a space of radical political dimension against racist oppression. It was the only place for black people to restore the dignity denied on the outside in the public world. There they could freely confront the issue of humanization, being subjects, not objects, despite poverty, hardship, and deprivation. It was black women's prime responsibility to construct a domestic household as a space of care and nurturance, the homeplace. For example, the myth of Mammies and black mothers both elevates and imprisons black women. They became the maternal care role model but were trapped in a reproductive role, approaching the femininity

ideal that naturalizes motherhood (COLLINS, 1991 apud SILVA, 2017).

Rothman (2007) discusses three ideologies that shape motherhood, one of them being the ideology of patriarchy. This ideology goes beyond male dominance, it permeates our thinking, and provides us an understanding of the relations between mothers and their children. Here, men use women to have their children, because women are in charge of having a man's child. Motherhood in a patriarchal society means that men's seed is irreplaceable but the nurturance is substitutable, and any woman can fulfill the mothering his child needs, they can even hire a woman for this. This is when the discussion about surrogates begins, and the possibility of paying to use a woman's body to generate and grow a child that will be taken away from her.

As in Sylvia Plath's, *The Munich Mannequins*, the speaker reflects on what forces women into these limited spaces in society while contemplating the quiet domesticity of the sleeping city. Interestingly, motherhood is described as the peak of female power. The poem indirectly challenges societal norms and expectations related to motherhood by contrasting the lifeless nature of mannequins with the intricate and vibrant experience of being a mother. This juxtaposition invites readers to question the rigid ideals imposed on women and the pressure to conform to prescribed notions of maternal perfection. Although the poem does not explicitly address motherhood, this interpretation highlights a possible critique of societal constructs and their impact on women's experiences. The speaker states there is the power to create and destroy within the uterus, which is related to the image of a hydra, the Greek mythology character. It also symbolizes growth and rebirth, true female power, and womanhood. Whatever choice women make, motherhood, physical perfection, or any other role, they are oppressed. And women remain voiceless as the snow that falls on the streets (PLATH, 2007).

Rich (1995) brings the Jewish traditional folklore that says, when a female soul unites with a male sperm, it results in a "man-child". In short, to maintain a patriarchal ideology and society, men must take control of women, as well as their motherhood, which is their unique power. The difference between them is that the maternal tie is based on the growing of children, and the patriarchal tie is based on genetics, the act of impregnating (ROTHMAN, 2007).

Margaret Mead (apud RICH, 1995, p. 226) talks about the "[...] deep biochemical affinities between the mother and the female child", and Rich adds that the annals of patriarchy have minimized this relationship to keep it under their control. Rothman (2007) also agrees with the idea, adding that not only patriarchal ideology, but also liberal feminism as contributors of trivializing this issue:

> Strangely enough, albeit for different reasons, both patriarchal ideology and liberal feminist thinking have come to the same conclusion about what to do with the problem of the uniqueness of pregnancy—devalue it; discount it so deeply that its uniqueness just doesn't matter. In strongly patriarchal systems, as described earlier, the genetic tie for men is the most important parental tie. (ROTHMAN, 2007, p. 402-403)

Also, in a mother-based system, the blood tie is the mingled blood of mothers and their children: children grow out of their mother's blood, bodies, and being. The shared bond of kinship comes through mothers only (ROTHMAN, 2007). And even though men have an element of envy and awe of women's capacity for motherhood, the intense relationships between women in general, and especially the relationship between mother and daughter have always been profoundly threatening to them (HORNEY, 1974 apud JOHNSON, 2007; RICH, 1995).

However, it is important to emphasize that the anthology of writing from the women's liberation movement published in 1971, prefaces made it clear that feminists do not reject motherhood, and they are not against love, against men and women living together, or against having children. In fact, they are against the role women submit themselves to once they become wives and mothers (BABCOX; BELKIN apud HANSEN, 2007). Trenka's blood mother had to put up with many problems in the misogynistic South Korean society, including domestic violence from her husband and mockery for not having a male firstborn. Truly giving up on herself, her biggest concern was to keep an environment where her daughters could thrive. In a letter written for her distant daughters, that live in the United States as adopted children, she explains some of the situations she had to submit herself to and that they were sent away for their own benefit:

> In spite of my efforts, usually he was not satisfied with home and troubled the family members as using violence upon arriving home. Naturally, other family members were afraid of him. The neighbors laughed scornfully regarding him as a patient of morbid suspicion about wife's chastity. The habits was getting worse, as time goes by. Even though many difficulties, I made efforts to manage my home and took care of my daughters to be pretty successful in the society. (TRENKA, 2003a, p. 5-6)

Ruddick (2007) says that maternal thinking is only one aspect of "womanly thinking", and she believes maternal thought exists for all women in a radically different way than for men because as daughters, we are nurtured and trained by women. The maternal love we receive as daughters is tied to the implications for our bodies, passions, and ambitions, alerting us to the values and costs of maternal practices, whether we are determined to engage in them or avoid them.

For women, it has become even more difficult to set their sense of being in nowadays

society, choosing between their own self or their motherhood desire:

> The taboo against wanting to mother operates as a strange new source of inhibition for women. Some try not to think about motherhood while they pursue more immediate professional goals. Others deny the extent of their maternal wishes, which become clear only after hard-won insight in psychotherapy. Still others try to minimize their desire to nurture their child, setting up their lives to return to n is born, never fully cognizant that there n return to. For one woman, wanting to stay at home with her child is an embarrassing reversal of previous priorities. Another can't decide whether caring for children is a choice or a trap. Another feels she needs to maintain earning power and professional status if she wants to safeguard her self-esteem. (MARNEFFE, 2007, p. 669)

Motherhood remains one of the most complex themes in our society, bringing its share of difficulties and demands. Women frequently encounter societal and cultural pressures and expectations of becoming a mother. And regarding their maternal roles, these may involve juggling various responsibilities, such as work and family life, while striving to meet perceived ideals of what constitutes a "good" mother. These expectations can generate feelings of guilt, self-doubt, and a constant need to demonstrate one's worth as a mother, or as a woman.

5.1 “They suspected I might be Korean”

> *I've come to Aaron for comfort because we have so much in common, meaning we're both from the hinterlands of rural Minnesota; our parents are both overly Lutheran (his dad is a pastor); we both have characteristics that would be easier to live without. Meaning he's gay and I'm Korean. Born like that. No choice.*
>
> (TRENKA, 2003a, p. 219)

With transnational adoption in mind, let us look at women's roles and differences in motherhood worldwide. Lugones (2020) added the idea of race and gender to Quijano's (2005) coloniality of power concept. She wrote on the Colonial/Modern Gender System, discussing the relationship between colonizers and “inferior” women of race, who were never respected or accepted. Taking some time to observe the details of the interaction between adoptive parents and birth parents, she describes a similar scene to the coloniality of power, race, and gender:

> I recoiled from the group. Observing them observing the orphans, the word "zoological" came to mind, as it did when we visited the unwed mothers' home. Somehow, I felt that the American adoptive parents didn't quite see the orphans and the mothers as people but rather as interesting specimens, a menagerie of personified sorrow. (TRENKA, 2003a, p. 117-118)

For a long time, Korea was occupied by the Japanese, being subordinated to them until Japan surrendered in World War II. After the Cold War, the Soviet Union and the U.S. each supported a different Korean leader, then the Korean War broke out and killed about 2.8 million Koreans (TRENKA, 2003a). Not to mention the impact of this relationship between countries will continue to damage the families separated and the coloniality of power. In addition, both women playing mothers' roles in Trenka's life faced severe pressure on motherhood in patriarchal societies that permeate both the U.S. and Korea. As a woman not physically able to conceive a child, her adoptive mother was looked down upon and hovered over her, her husband, and her adoptive children as her failure.

> When my mom married my dad at age eighteen, she inherited this ill-fitting, shimmering crown of expectation, perhaps not to wear herself but to pass on to us, her daughters, who would be haunted by the birth child who was never conceived, this pink-skinned boy who had pretty blue eyes like his mother and a funny smile like his father. We would be haunted by this shadow and by the ghosts of our own dead twins, whom we had simply replaced one day by changing clothes: Kyong-Ah, who lived to the age of six months, and Mi-Ja, who died at four years of age when she became Carol. From the photographic evidence, Carol came into this world as a child and was never a baby at all. (TRENKA, 2003a, p. 28-29)

The absence, or even the presence of a birth child who was never conceived, sounds similar to Morrison's *Beloved* (1987), the ghost that constantly reminded Sethe's of her past, of what she did and what she had lost. It is as if Carol and Jane are a constant reminder of their mother's failure as a woman. But not only this, but it also reminds them that they are replacement children:

> Mary and I are last resorts; consolation prizes in the fertility lottery; the children who came into the family to replace the biological child, the child who was really wanted. (TRENKA, 2003a, p. 207)

Adoption was their last resource, but the fact that their children were not blood-related, or physically conceived left a gap in their relationship as a family. Although "[...] the a-word, adoption, was not mentioned in our house. Neither was the K-word, Korea" (TRENKA, 2003a, p. 38). It is possible that banning the words adoption and Korea may have given her adoptive parents some sense of ownership concerning Trenka and her sister as a way to cover the fact that they did not conceive both of them. Then, Trenka found a new perspective when talking to Mary, another adoptee: "Your parents will always hate you on some level because you are not who you are supposed to be" (TRENKA, 2003a, p. 206). "They raised us the way they were supposed to — like we were their own" (TRENKA, 2003a, p. 39).

> You can never be good enough for your parents. You will always have that strange feeling you can't shake even though you corner them and demand to know what they want from you. What they want from you is for you to be someone you're not. They'll never say to your face, "You are not the child we wanted. You were second choice, second best.' But that's the truth. Underneath all the 'adoption is wonderful' rhetoric, the truth is there and they're ashamed to even acknowledge it themselves. They will never say it, but you know it. Because you always have that nagging feeling that you're not good enough." (TRENKA, 2003a, p. 207-208)

The adoption fairy tale suddenly shatters, and the new perspective is rather cruel to the adoptees:

> Of course, none of this is verbalized. But children, keenly sensitive to the unspoken world, feel it. We didn't know that we could never be good enough, so we kept trying to do the impossible. We were like pathetic little dogs. Oh please, love me, pet me, tell me what to do so I can do it for you. Shall I sit? Shall I stay? How long? Do you like me? (TRENKA, 2003a, p. 207)

Trenka hopes to understand her mother as a woman. The gap between them seemed to close, their blood and their physical appearance do not match, but they do have something in common, they are women, and they are daughters:

> We also have this in common: our bodies, which remind each other of what we do not have, of who we are not. Mom, I am not from you; I will never be fully yours. I will never have peachy skin or blonde hair; I will never see the world through blue eyes. Could we accept each other if we were blind? Would we know each other by touch? Touch me here, Mom, in this place where I am sorry, where I love you, where I need to be healed. (TRENKA, 2003a, p. 231)

5.2 “Full of fire and hot red pepper paste”

This section approaches Umma and Trenka’s relationship more deeply, how Trenka perceives Umma once they are reunited, and the effects adoption had on both their lives. On the other side of the world, her mother's life wrapped itself around hers in an echo, the same way a small pebble thrown into the water makes larger and larger ripples around itself. As a ghostly but undeniable presence in her life, her younger sister may have been slightly annoyed, but Korean manners would not allow Myoung-Hee to disrespect her by affirming it. Trenka’s birth mother also did not see her first child with frequency. He was left with her mother-in-law after her first husband passed away during the war. Trenka instantly felt a closeness to him because they both had Umma's absence in common (TRENKA, 2003a). Rich (1995) reminds us of some of the great embodiments of human tragedy: Lear (father-daughter split), Hamlet (son and

mother), and Oedipus (son and mother), but emphasizes the lack of recognition of essential female tragedy: the loss of the daughter to the mother, the mother to the daughter.

The Homeric Hymn to Demeter of the Seventh Century B.C. brings this recognition. Kore, also known as Persephone, was kidnapped by Hades, and Demeter, the goddess of nature, and her mother forbids the grains to grow as revenge. Persephone is then returned to Demeter for nine months each year. She rejoices in her daughter's presence to the point of restoring the fruitfulness and life of the land during this period. But unfortunately, the Homeric Hymn suppresses this story by attributing the return of vegetation to the mysterious rite of Eleusis, not Demeter's delight in having her daughter back. As the patriarchal attitudes have encouraged us to split both the mother and the daughter in ourselves, any radical vision of sisterhood demands that we reintegrate them, which is no easy task (RICH, 1995).

To accept, integrate, and strengthen these relations was extremely important for Trenka's journey:

> The physical similarity is striking. The ironic thing is that it should not be striking: physical similarities, as well as similarities in personality, are normal in most families, where people tend to look and act more or less like each other. But for us, it was a point of amusement and pride. We were amazed at how I fit into the family, and when Carol came to visit a couple of years after I did, it was the same amazement all over. As if our years in America should have watered us down. They didn't. We were still intact, still genetically family. (TRENKA, 2003a, p. 128)

The first time Trenka got in touch with her birth mother was when she discovered a letter she sent her with a phone number on it, and her parents gave her permission to call, but no one else made an event out of this momentous occasion. Her parents were busy doing something else during the brightest moment of her life. She could not blame them because she had never expressed her desire to be in contact with Umma, fearing it would affect her role as a perfect daughter (TRENKA, 2003a).

> My memory of the night I heard my mother's voice is recorded from the vantage point of one who has left the body. It is as if I were pinned to the ceiling of the world, looking down upon myself through the roof of our house. I am in a dark room in a dark corner, but I am radiant. There is nothing in my sight but me, a dim lamp, and a miraculous telephone connecting me to the other side of the world, to my mother, who could say nothing but my name, over and over in her breaking voice, "Kyong-Ah. Kyong Ah." (TRENKA, 2003a, p. 70)

When she arrived in Korea for the first time, the sky did not open up, the angels did not descend, and the theme from Romeo and Juliet did not play as she expected. But she could feel Umma's emotion, despite the chaos of her arrival. "So, this is my mother," was her only

thought. The next thing she knows, they are pushed onto a bus with her family. But in her memory, they are “suspended together in the blackness”, all by themselves, with nothing to say (TRENKA, 2003a, p. 112).

> Sitting here in Minneapolis more than six years later, trying to conjure up the moment of meeting my mother with only words on a computer screen, I can feel my mother's emotions of that day. Having known her, cared for her, heard her voice as she was dying, a voice that would connect me to her in the spirit world—I can feel her emotions now, without language. There are no words for these feelings. But in the moment, I didn't feel anything, not my own emotions, not hers. My mother couldn't stop crying. She shoved a bouquet of red roses into my hands; she appeared frail, smaller than her five-foot frame. (TRENKA, 2003a, p.112)

The chaos slowly turned into a connection, and with time, she also came to understand Umma as a woman:

> I came to understand the beautiful, terrible culture of my mother, learned that her experiences were not so unique in a land where boys are more valuable than girls, where women carry the weight of duty on their backs, as they do their babies, so that by the time they are old they are permanently bent over, eyes to the ground.
>
> I know you now, Mama. (TRENKA, 2003a, p. 117)

However, Rich (1995) affirms that understanding our mothers is not enough. We need them to help us touch our strength as women. Rich saw her mother's menstrual blood before she saw her own. It was the first female body she ever looked at, to know what women were, what she was to be. She also states that:

> [...] mothers and daughters have always exchanged with each other—beyond the verbally transmitted lore of female survival a knowledge that is subliminal, subversive, preverbal: the knowledge flowing between two alike bodies, one of which has spent nine months inside the other. (RICH, 1995, p. 220)

Trenka also came to know her mother's body after she became an adult:

> I came to know your body, each part of it, your nakedness never shocking to me nor embarrassing to you. I saw for the first time what you as a mother already knew: that I am made in the image of you; I am a daughter after your body and after your heart. Even if I fail to create you again with words, I will carry you with me, in the language of blood. (TRENKA, 2003a, p. 160)

This may be explained by Rich:

> Probably there is nothing in human nature more resonant with charges than the flow of energy between two biologically alike bodies, one of which has lain in amniotic bliss inside the other, one of which has labored to give birth to the other. (RICH, 1995, p. 225-227)

Spending time in her mother's small apartment in Korea, they had moments of nurture, tenderness, and even recognition. Required by the girl-child in most of us as women (RICH, 1995):

> She showed me her breasts to tell me that she loved me and had nursed me. I touched her old woman's depleted breasts, as she asked. Touch me here, where I gave myself to you. I made you with my own body, she seemed to say. She showed me her thick scars, where my father had beaten her, and told me how her once beautiful face had become disfigured: my father bit off her nose. (TRENKA, 2003, p. 116)

Jjimjilbang[13] is common in Korean culture, elderly women and young couples would spend some time there and call it a spa day. Some Korean movies also portray the scene of a younger person scrubbing an older person's back, connecting them for a short period. Here, the act of preparing and giving a bath to her daughter deepens their bond and recreates a long-lost moment for both of them:

> The water is warm as birthwater. Umma squats, her legs turned out like a patient onion picker reaching through dust to find the smooth, satisfying fruit of labor, the daughter she believed lost. She washes me hard and quickly, with so much ardor it hurts, and I become a child again. I release my American shame of the body, let her lift my arms and scrub underneath and on my back and my legs, as she wanted to so long ago. as she had done the day she brought me home from the orphanage, starving and dirty. She needs to see that my body is well, that I have eaten good food and have grown healthy and strong. (TRENKA, 2003a, p. 122-123)

Trenka starts to realize how everything seems to be a part of hers. It may come from her time in her mother’s womb, so she could probably have absorbed more than oxygen and nutrients. She experienced the environment and even the culture, and even if she does not remember those times, her body does:

> What did I hear, Umma, when I was in your womb? I heard the Korean language, and maybe this is why my tongue wraps around the words so easily, although I cannot understand what I say. I am babbling in Korean, like I did as a baby. My words are frozen in that place, an infant's language, an infant's comprehension.
>
> But even without language, through the amniotic fluid and the faint light coming through the walls of your belly, I understood the brute emotions of fear and hunger. I absorbed them, made them part of my body, made them part of my life's fabric, so that

[13] 찜질방 (Jjimjilbang): Traditional Korean bath houses.

> I would go out and find men like my father, so that fear and intimidation and love became the same experience for me. (TRENKA, 2003a, p. 188)

Trenka begins to understand her mother's motives and the environment she lived in. The Korean culture, which was not part of her life according to her knowledge until now, was her birth mother's culture, directly linking and influencing all of her existence. Not only culturally, but the environment her father provided was not healthy for the family, and she wonders what effect it may have on her current life. Perhaps, her ability to pronounce some syllables in Korean effortlessly is linked to the time she spent in Umma's womb. On the other hand, it may also be the reason why she had so many names in her string of broken romances to count up due to her experience of her parents' abusive relationship through her mother's womb. She obsessed over her responsibility in each failure with men who were like her dad and men who were the opposite of her dad (TRENKA, 2003a).

5.3 "She was a real person all along"

Now, let us look at Umma and Trenka's bond as they recognize each other as mother and daughter who longed for each other since they were separated. When Umma fell sick and had some delirious moments, Trenka's wish was to join her in her mind. As they lay on the floor, Umma strokes her hair saying "*ipun eggi*"[14]. This time the delusion seems to take place in 1972, when Umma had just given birth to her, and she is not a shame or a disappointment, nor an investment or an expense, but a source of love (TRENKA, 2003a).

> I wish I could join Umma in her mind, so I could give voice to that tiny baby, tell her how much I love her. I want to enter the sad story that she remembered for so long and change its ending to something happy, change it into the fairy-tale life she dreamed of when she was only a girl herself, when she still had a mother. Most of all, I want to tell her that with her two words—*ipun eggi*—she has changed the rest of my story: I have never felt so wanted or loved, and this will be my deep well of strength, beginning at this moment—here, now, with her. (TRENKA, 2003a, p. 172-173)

Even though she was in Korea and she found a connection with her mother that she had never felt before, being a daughter demanded her to help during her Umma's sickness. However, the cultural and language barriers were still present each step of the way. It makes her feel helpless, affirming that the distinction of being a daughter did not necessarily help her take better care of her than a stranger would have. A Korean stranger would have been able to

[14] 예쁜 아기 (ipun eggi): pretty baby.

understand the procedures in the hospital and understand Umma's needs right away, but not her. She helped to take care of Umma at the hospital and at home, the body that conceived and nurtured for nine months, and it also sparks a new doubt, would she be able to physically help her adoptive parents the same way in the future?

> The body of my mother—which I could carry on my back, lift to the toilet, dress, and roll over because it was so much like my own—was a stark contrast to my American parents' stature big-boned Americans, both of them, my father more than two hundred pounds, my mother probably in the one-sixty range. How would I ever take care of them if they became ill? I joked with them when I got back from Korea, admonishing them never to get sick. I said it lightheartedly, but inside I worried, as I still do, about how I will care for someone twice my size and how I will integrate the American way of caring for the elderly and sick with my Korean experience, which seemed so much more honorable than shutting the ailing away in a nursing home or paying a stranger to do the work. (TRENKA, 2003a, p. 165)

As a daughter she tried to comfort Umma by asking translators to express her feelings, but she was unable to make herself understood:

> I tried to find words for all the things I had ever wanted to say to her. Here was my last chance, and I knew it. But words failed me; how could I express the weight of my sorrow, give her the forgiveness she craved but didn't need, and say goodbye, granting her freedom-all through a stranger, all at that moment?
>
> Please tell her, "Don't feel guilty. You are a good mother. You made the right choice." (TRENKA, 2003a, p. 179)

Trenka grieved Umma's death, and in her memoir, she apologizes to Umma for writing about their story and explains it was not her intention to bring shame upon their family. It is noticed she intends to remain Umma's memory alive but is still afraid she will lose what she just found: "Umma, I am afraid that if I write about you dying, someday I will finish, and then you will be gone from me, forever" (TRENKA, 2003a, p. 163).

> Can you see me now, Umma? Can you see that I want to live in double happiness, once for you and once for me? This happiness is my grown-up magic dust; I hold it to my face and breathe my message into it. I toss my hands into the air, and my happiness rises aloft on the wind like a beautiful, golden angel. My heart is clear and bright, and I know that somewhere you feel my happiness, too, and I am finally home. (TRENKA, 2003a, p. 239)

Their encounter and the moments they shared brought Trenka a sense of belonging. She came from Umma, and their bodies shared an undeniable connection both longed for. Although Trenka feels like she was not able to fulfill her duty as a daughter on Umma's final days, she was able to care for the body of the woman who was her home for nine months and nurtured

her to become both a woman and a daughter. As she found home and love, Umma found her long-lost baby.

> She extends her hand for me to hold, disregarding all the tubes trailing behind. I lean close. In a weak voice, she says the only thing in English she ever learned: "I love you, Kyong-Ah. I love you." (TRENKA, 2003a, p. 158)

The stories went a long way from Umma's memory, through multiple translators and finally reaching Trenka's blood. Umma was a terrible mother and asked for forgiveness, but would her daughter understand she did not have a choice and forgive her when the language barrier seems unbreakable? Yes, she would. "Umma, Mama, I understand why you had to give us away. It was the right choice. You are a good mother. You do not need to ask forgiveness." (TRENKA, 2003a, p.115) Here, the language of blood represents a profound and innate bond between individuals who are linked by familial relationships or a shared lineage. A connection both longed for. It signifies a form of communication or comprehension that transcends verbal expression and is deeply rooted in common heritage, ancestry, and genetic connections. This understanding underscores the importance of biological ties and highlights how they can shape and impact relationships and interactions between people.

6 CONCLUSION

> *Suddenly, everything seemed more real: edges were sharper, more in focus; colors brighter; sounds cleaner; odors more pungent. The third-person, waterproof luster that blanketed me in the tour group fell away: no longer miguk saram but hanguk saram: not an American but a Korean.*
>
> (TRENKA, 2003a, p. 119)

This work sought to analyze the main concepts of cultural identity, coloniality of power, exile, memory, motherhood and daughterhood, and women's body related to transnational adoption within Jane Jeong Trenka's *The Language of Blood* (2003). The choice of Trenka's memoir as the central subject for this research was due to the problematization of a widely known term such as adoption. Also, Trenka's writing with vast literary resources of tales, a crossword, recipes, monologues, and a fairy tale, and linguistic choices, for instance, to adapt the Reviewed Romanization of the Korean language for native English speakers, plus its criticism of the transnational adoption field.

The concept of cultural identity became the starting point for this research. Some of the main writers in the cultural studies field were gathered for this research. Analyzing the concept of cultural identity was crucial for the development of this work, especially in the context of a transnational adoptee that struggles with belonging and finding an identity. In the first chapter, the main concepts of identity construction in modern society and the fragmentation these identities suffered over the years, and the identity crisis is a result of those changes over the years. Some of Hall's most relevant texts on Cultural Identity and Diaspora were part of this research. Woodward (2014) was also a huge contributor as a female writer on identity in the global context, also contributing to the concept of representation and its influences on identity construction.

When it comes to countries' relationships, Aníbal Quijano (2005) is one of the most important names, bringing the concept of coloniality of power. Globalization is understood as straightening the gap between cultures, but Noonan (2007) brings the concealed side of it: using globalization as the unharmful narrative for transnational adoption. It directly brings us to the influence the new country has on the adoptee's cultural identities, leading to an erasure of their birth culture. In Trenka's case, as a Korean adopted to the United States, she felt like she owed so much of her being to the host country. The country with the most influential power gets to tell the story and submit all to their ruling.

As adoptees go through a different path to construct, or find their identity, it leads them to the feeling of exile that is better explained by Homi Bhabha (2013). The exile of the in-between, is usually mentioned by poets when writing in a language nobody can understand, and the people who lost a loved one. But an adoptee's exile is as cruel as the ones mentioned above, it has to do with an immeasurable loss that is not comprehended by the ones around you. The exile leads Trenka to denying she had lost something in detriment of what she has gained in her new country, and this is a much more common speech within this context than we can imagine. Fortunately, the exile brings the beyond: a restless place in which one starts producing complex figures of difference and identity to fit in.

In the second chapter it was possible to verify that the genre Memoir enables writers to construct their narratives using a vast repertoire of resources, to externalize the lack of linear memories which we, born and raised by our biological families, can easily access. Trenka navigates her memory hoping it would trace a linear timeline that would finally bring her a final result, her identity. For this reason, genealogy is highlighted as one of the most important memories for a culture, a family, or an individual to belong to a group (CANDAU, 2021). For adoptees, if they wish to contact what they had lost, they must excavate to find out about themselves and their birth families. Thus, the writer's fragments, later turned into a memoir, helped in the journey of finding herself, and telling a story she would soon embrace.

For the third and last chapter of this work, motherhood and daughterhood were the main concepts (RICH, 1995). Focusing on motherhood in a patriarchal society, Trenka (the daughter), Umma (the birth mother), her North American (adoptive) mother, and their role as women (O'REILLY, 2016). Adding the idea of race and gender to Quijano's coloniality of power concept (2005), Lugones (2020) discusses the relationship between colonizers and "inferior" women of race. The birth mothers are usually regarded as "[...] interesting specimens, or a menagerie of personified sorrow" (TRENKA, 2003a, p. 117-118).

Johnson (2007) discusses Women's Mothering and Male Misogyny, and how relationships between women, especially between mother and daughter have always been profoundly threatening to them. It is valid to point once again the Homeric Hymn to Demeter. To this day, the patriarchal attitudes encourage the attribution of the land's of fruitfulness and life to the rite of Eleusis, and not Demeter's happiness in finding her daughter (RICH, 1995).

The next important concept is women's body, and it becomes an important part of this work because it is something women share. It also becomes a place of belonging and inner strength, as it was once conceived and nurtured inside other similar bodies (RICH, 1995). In

this case, the relationship between mother and daughter is a unique bond that never breaks and finds its way back to each other.

As a final result of this research, identity, exile and daughterhood are some of the main concepts inside Trenka's memoir. The chaos of the book is extremely engaging, her sudden choices of adding a monologue or a crossword to externalize her feelings bring the reader to a journey with a rush of emotions that cannot be concealed. In short, the book does not fit the category of autobiography. It is also important to emphasize that adoption involves many issues that may become problematic if disregarded during the adoption process. I could notice it was easier to understand the problems in transnational adoption due to Trenka's deliberated use of literary resources. Her mix of delicate and brutal thoughts to the expense of herself, were turned into a massive and creative narrative that Trenka calls her "personal mythology." When it comes to belonging and finding herself, she found her identity among the fragments that would not connect, and through the stories that were not hers to tell.

The journey of butterfly metamorphosis highlights the wonders of nature and the incredible adaptations that enable these delicate creatures to undergo such a captivating transformation. In her Memoir, Trenka experiences her own transformation: from a silenced and concealed Asian-American adoptee, she finds her voice and expresses her emotions. The once-silenced caterpillar was not even allowed to say the word "adoption" at home. But the butterfly she became now apologizes for exposing her own story. The caterpillar gathered her fragments, putting them together, going from denial and silence to subversion and resistance. Writing an entire book that externalizes her memories and embracing every piece of herself through the process provides Trenka with a transformation and autonomy to complete her voyage.

In the end, as described in chapter 2, monarch butterflies still migrate even though the cost may be high. It takes many generations of butterflies to complete the trip, their wings are torn, and they will not see the final destination. But in the same way, acquiring experiences and learning about themselves is a part of the journey, and so is being torn and wounded. As Trenka chooses to find her way back, her wings are restored, and hope of healing the open wounds between two cultures and two mothers start showing. She realizes the journey is more important than the final destination and embraces it as part of her life. The in-between turns into a place she can patiently wait for what will come next, and both Umma and Trenka can feel their bond through the language of blood. Umma fulfilled her task of bringing her baby daughter back home. Trenka found a place she will always belong to. She is home now.

BIBLIOGRAPHIC REFERENCES

7 Little Johnstons. Direção: Matt Hightower. Produção: Greg Cole, Britany Simonton. Intérpretes: Elizabeth Johnston, Jonah Johnston, Amber Johnston *et al*. Roteiro: Lauren Friedman, Mary Wilcher. [*S. l.*]: TLC, 2015-. 13 temporadas, son., color.

ANGELOU, M. **I know why the caged bird sings**. New York: Random House, 1969.

ARISTÓTELES. **A política**. São Paulo: Folha de São Paulo, 2010. (Coleção Livros que Mudaram o Mundo).

BBC. **The role of the US as a world power**. [*S. l.*], c2023. Disponível em: https://www.bbc.co.uk/bitesize/guides/z6frqp3/revision/2. Acesso em: 1 abr. 2023.

BERKELEY OPEN COMPUTING FACILITY. **Memoir**. [*S. l.*, 2023]. Disponível em: https://www.ocf.berkeley.edu/~jfkihlstrom/memoir. Acesso em: 1 abr. 2023.

BHABHA, H. K. **O local da cultura**. Tradução: Myriam Ávila, Eliana Lourenço de Lima Reis, Gláucia Renate Gonçalves. 2. ed. Belo Horizonte: Editora UFMG, 2013.

CANDAU, J. O jogo da memória e da identidade (2): fundar, construir. *In*: CANDAU, J. (org.). **Memória e identidade**. Tradução: Maria Letícia Ferreira. São Paulo, Contexto, 2021. p. 137-170.

CASTRO, S. Condescendência: estratégia pater-colonial de poder. *In:* HOLLANDA, H. B. *et al.* (org.). **Pensamento feminista hoje**: perspectivas decoloniais. Rio de Janeiro: Bazar do Tempo, 2020. p. 163-177.

CIURARU, C. The search for a heritage ignored. **Los Angeles Times**. Los Angeles, 26 Nov. 2003. Disponível em: https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-2003-nov-26-et-book26-story.html. Acesso em: 1 abr. 2023.

COUSER, G. T. **Memoir**: an introduction. New York: Oxford University Press, 2012. Disponível em: https://academic.oup.com/book/12076?login=false. Acesso em: 7 jun. 2023.

DAVIDSON, H. Chinese government attempts to boost birth rate with new policies. **The Guardian**. Taipei, 17 Aug. 2022. Disponível em: https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/aug/17/chinese-government-birth-rate-policies-abortions-population. Acesso em: 5 mar. 2023.

DOOLAN, Y. W. **Being amerasian in South Korea**: purebloodness, multiculturalism, and living alongside the U.S. military empire. 2012. Honors Research Thesis (Graduation with Honors Research Distinction in History) – The Ohio State University, Columbus, 2012. Disponível em: https://kb.osu.edu/bitstream/handle/1811/52015/DOOLAN_YURI_Being_Amerasian_in_South_Korea.pdf?sequence=1. Acesso em: 10 abr. 2023.

DUKES, J. What is a memoir? **Celadon Books**. [*S. l.*, 2020]. Disponível em: https://celadonbooks.com/what-is-a-memoir/. Acesso em: 23 abr. 2023.

FOUND. Direção: Amanda Lipitz. Produção: Caroline Clark, Liesl Copland, Barbara Dobkin. Intérpretes: Lily Bolka, Chloe Liptz, Sadie Mangelsdorf, Liu Hao. [*S. l.*]: Netflix, 2021. 1 documentário (97 min), son., color.

GORNICK, V. Why memoir now? **The Women's Review of Books**, [*s. l.*], v. 13, n. 10-11, p. 5, July 1996. Disponível em: https://www.jstor.org/stable/4022461. Acesso em: 23 abr. 2023.

HALL, S. Quem precisa de identidade? *In:* SILVA, T. T. (org.). **Identidade e diferença**. 15. ed. Petrópolis, RJ: Editora Vozes, 2014. p. 103-133.

HALL, S. Da diáspora: identidades e mediações culturais. *In*: SOVIK, L. (org.). **Da diáspora**: identidades e mediações culturais. Tradução: Adelaine La Guardia Resende *et al*. Belo Horizonte: Editora UFMG, 2003. p. 25-50.

HANSEN, E. T. A sketch in progress: introducing the mother without child. *In*: O'REILLY, A. (org.). **Maternal theory**: essential readings. Ontário: Demeter Press, 2007. p. 431-459.

HASSLER, W. W.; WEBER, J. L. American civil war. **Britannica**. [*S. l.*], 9 June 2023. Disponível em: https://www.britannica.com/event/American-Civil-War/The-war-in-1862. Acesso em: 28 fev. 2023.

HIJAZI, M. The modern maze of cultural identity. [*S. l.*: *s. n.*], 26 Apr. 2016. 1 vídeo (14 min). Publicado pelo canal TDEx Talks. Disponível em: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-1dFU4ktNfg&t=2s. Acesso em: 10 jun. 2023.

HOLLANDA, H. B. Introdução. *In*: HOLLANDA, H. B. *et al.* (org.). **Pensamento feminista hoje**: perspectivas decoloniais. Rio de Janeiro: Bazar do Tempo, 2020. p. 11-37.

HOOKS, B. Homeplace: a site of resistance. *In*: O'REILLY, A. (org.). **Maternal theory**: essential readings. Ontário: Demeter Press, 2007. p. 266-273.

HOW I Met Your Father. Direção: Pamela Fryman, Phil Lewis, Morenike Joela Evans *et al*. Produção: Adam Londy, Isaac Aptaker, Carter Bays, Elizabeth Berger *et al*. Intérpretes: Hilary Duff, Christopher Lowell, Francia Raisa, Tien Tran *et al*. Criação e Roteiro: Isaac Aptaker. [*S. l.*]: Disney+; Hulu, 2022-. 2 temporadas, son., color.

INSTANT Family. Direção: San Anders. Produção: Sean Anders, Marc Evans, Stephen Levinson *et al*. Intérpretes: Mark Wahlberg, Rose Byrne, Isabela Merced *et al*. Roteiro: Sean Anders, John Morris. [*S. l.*]: Paramount Pictures, 2018. 1 filme (118 min), son., color.

JOHNSON, M. M. Women's mothering and male misogyny. *In*: O'REILLY, A. (org.). **Maternal theory**: essential readings. Ontário: Demeter Press, 2007. p. 201-223.

JONES, J. S. What is the history of adoption? **Adoption.org**. Forth Worth, 29 May 2019. Disponível em: https://adoption.org/what-is-the-history-of-adoption. Acesso em: 28 fev. 2023.

LUGONES, M. Colonialidade e gênero. *In*: HOLLANDA, H. B. *et al.* (org.). **Pensamento feminista hoje**: perspectivas decoloniais. Rio de Janeiro: Bazar do Tempo, 2020. p. 58-92.

MODERN Family. Direção: Gail Mancuso, Steven Levitan, Beth McCarthy-Miller *et al*. Produção: Steven Levitan, Jeff Morton, Paul Corrigan *et al*. Intérpretes: Ed O'Neil, Sofía Vergara, Julie Bowen *et al*. Criação: Steven Levitan, Christopher Lloyd. [*S. l.*]: 20th Century Fox Television, 2009-2020. 11 temporadas, son., color.

MARNEFFE, D. The 'problem' of maternal desire. *In*: O'REILLY, A. (org.). **Maternal theory**: essential readings. Ontário: Demeter Press, 2007. p. 668-682.

MORRISON, T. **Beloved**. New York: Plume, 1987.

MORRISON, T. **A fonte da autoestima**: ensaios, discursos e reflexões. Tradução: Odorico Leal. São Paulo: Companhia das Letras, 2020.

NG, K. China's population falls for first time since 1961. **BBC NEWS**. [*S. l.*], 17 Jan. 2023. Disponível em: https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-china-64300190. Acesso em: 5 mar. 2023.

NOONAN, E. J. The globalization of love: transnational adoption and engagement with the globalized world. *In*: O'REILLY, A. (org.). **Maternal theory**: essential readings. Ontário: Demeter Press, 2007. p. 649-659.

O'REILLY, A. We need to talk about patriarchal motherhood: essentialization, naturalization and idealization in Lionel Shriver's We Need to Talk about Kevin. **Journal of the Motherhood Initiative for Research and Community Involvement**, [*s. l.*], v. 7, n. 1, p. 64-81, 2016. Disponível em: https://jarm.journals.yorku.ca/index.php/jarm/article/view/40323/36502. Acesso em: 1 abr. 2023.

PLATH, S. **Ariel**. Tradução: Rodrigo Garcia Lopes, Maria Cristina Lenz de Machado. Rio de Janeiro: Verus Editora, 2007.

QUIJANO, A. Colonialidade do poder, eurocentrismo e América Latina. *In*: CONSELHO LATINO-AMERICANO DE CIÊNCIAS SOCIAIS. **A colonialidade do saber**: eurococentrismo e ciências sociais. Perspectivas latino-americanas. Buenos Aires: CLACSO, 2005. p. 117-142.

PUBLISHERS WEEKLY. **The language of blood**: a memoir. [*S. l.*, 2003]. Disponível em: https://www.publishersweekly.com/9780873514668. Acesso em: 1 abr. 2023.

RICH, A. Motherhood and daughterhood. *In*: RICH, A. (org.). **Of woman born**: motherhood as experience and institution. New York: WW Norton & Company, 1995. p. 218-255.

RIVERWEST CURRENTS. **Bloodlines and belonging**: a book review. [*S. l.*], Nov. 2003. Disponível em: https://riverwestcurrents.org/2003/11/bloodlines-and-belonging-a-book-review.html. Acesso em: 1 abr. 2023.

ROTHMAN, B. K. Beyond mothers and fathers: ideology in a patriarchal society. *In*: O'REILLY, A. (org.). **Maternal theory**: essential readings. Ontário: Demeter Press, 2007. p. 390-407.

RUDDICK, S. Maternal Thinking. *In*: O'REILLY, A. (org.). **Maternal theory**: essential readings. Ontário: Demeter Press, 2007. p. 96-113.

SEETHALER, I. C. Transnational adoption and life-writing: oppressed voices in Jane Jeong Trenka's The Language of Blood. **Meridians**, [*s. l.*], v. 13, n. 2, p. 79-98, 2016. Disponível em: https://read.dukeupress.edu/meridians/article-abstract/13/2/79/138838/Transnational-Adoption-and-Life-Writing-Oppressed. Acesso em: 23 abr. 2023.

SILVA, D. L. **Maternagens na diáspora amefricana**: resistência e liminaridade em Amada, Compaixão e Um Defeito de Cor. 2017. Tese (Doutorado em Literatura) – Programa de Pós-graduação em Letras, Universidade Federal da Paraíba, João Pessoa, 2017.

STERN, M. What the 'better life' narrative takes from adoptees: every adoption story is different. **Human Parts**. [*S. l.*], 14 Aug. 2020. Disponível em: https://humanparts.medium.com/deconstructing-the-better-life-myth-of-adoption-555409ce9e25. Acesso em: 10 abr. 2023.

STRONG, P. T. To forget their tongue, their name, and their whole relation: captivity, extra-tribal adoption, and the indian child welfare act. *In*: FRANKLIN, S.; MCKINNON, S. (ed.). **Relative values**: reconfiguring kinship studies. Durham: Duke University Press, 2001. p. 468-494.

THE ADOPTION HISTORY PROJECT. **Bertha and Harry Holt**. Eugene, Oregon, USA, 24 Feb. 2012. Disponível em: https://darkwing.uoregon.edu/~adoption/people/holt.htm. Acesso em: 3 mar. 2023.

TRENKA, J. J. **The language of blood**. Minneapolis, Minnesota: Graywolf Press, 2003a.

TRENKA, J. J. Dealing with the aftermath. [Entrevista cedida a] Tanya Cromartie-Twaddle. **Riverwest Currents**. [*S. l.*], Nov. 2003b. Disponível em: https://riverwestcurrents.org/2003/11/bloodlines-and-belonging-a-book-review.html. Acesso em: 1 abr. 2023.

WOLFF, T. **This boy's life**. Nova York: Grove Press, 1989.

WOODWARD, K. Identidade e diferença: uma introdução teórica e conceitual. *In*: SILVA, T. T. (org.). **Identidade e diferença**: a perspectiva dos estudos culturais. 15. ed. Petrópolis, RJ: Editora Vozes, 2014. p. 7-72.

YOUSAFZAI, M. **I am malala**: the girl who stood up for education and was shot by the taliban. New York: Little, Brown and Company, 2013.